

Indonesia

At a glance



National civil war
Absent



Communal/ideological conflict
Shifted from high to medium low



National political conflict
Low



Local political and electoral conflict
Medium low



Transnational terrorism
Medium



Local resource conflict
Medium



Separatism and autonomy
Shifted from high to low



Urban crime and violence
Low

** Rankings are based on the last 15 years and are relative to other Asian countries.*

Overview

Indonesia is regarded as a rare Asian example of a successful and enduring multicultural democracy. Yet today's relatively peaceful Indonesia is the product of a history of periodic violence. Following independence from the Dutch, political forces engaged in a struggle to define Indonesia's political and national identity, leading to the anticommunist massacres of 1965–66. The 1998 collapse of the New Order regime led to another period of violence, including large-scale ethnoreligious conflicts in several provinces and a surge in the civil war with separatist insurgents in Aceh. Democratization, decentralization, and a dynamic economy helped Indonesia overcome these challenges. Large-scale conflict has largely disappeared since 2005, but sporadic and localized forms of violence betray persistent issues with justice and governance, land, and natural resources management. The country's tradition of religious pluralism is also under stress, as fringe Islamic groups and ideas have gained a growing influence over mainstream politics.

National level



National civil war

Indonesia has not experienced national civil war since the 1960s. The only current armed challenges to the authority of the state come from radical Islamist militants and a low-level separatist movement in Papua. Neither have the means to escalate violence beyond sporadic attacks.

Following independence in 1945, Indonesia experienced two decades of instability as the state struggled to extend its authority across the archipelago. The Netherlands, the colonial power, tried to regain Indonesia by force following the Japanese withdrawal after World War II. Under international pressure, the Dutch relented in 1949 and negotiated the transfer of the former Dutch East Indies to an independent Indonesia.

The main internal drivers of conflict in Indonesia's early years were ideology and regionalism. The most violent challenge came from Soekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwiryo, an Islamic mystic from Central Java, who aimed to establish an Islamic state. In 1948, President Sukarno's government had in effect surrendered West Java to the Dutch by agreeing to withdraw the Indonesian army. In response, Kartosuwiryo established the Darul Islam movement. The revolt spread to Central Java, South Sulawesi, South Kalimantan, and Aceh, and lasted until Kartosuwiryo was captured and executed in 1962. The vision of an Indonesia founded on Islamic principles, and networks associated with Darul Islam, have had a long afterlife and remain crucial to understanding Indonesian Islamic extremism today.¹

Another threat came from the left. An attempt to form an Indonesian Soviet Republic by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) at Madiun was violently suppressed in September 1948. The PKI returned to mainstream politics in the 1950s. Sukarno used them as a foil for the military, whose leaders doubted civilian rule even as they shared the vision of a secular, modern Indonesia.² A violent challenge to Sukarno's government emerged from within the army's ranks in 1956–1957. Commanders in Sumatra, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Nusa Tenggara wrested power from governors in bloodless coups, accusing Sukarno of excessive bureaucracy, neglecting outlying regions, and being too close to the PKI. The rebels declared a revolutionary government in 1958. Sukarno eventually suppressed the rebellion.³

500

Indonesians

fighting in **Iraq** and **Syria**
in 2015



National political conflict

Under Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, relative peace was achieved by top-down means. He began to dismantle Indonesia's fledgling democracy in 1957, declaring martial law and replacing the parliamentary system with his authoritarian Guided Democracy. Parties were pushed to the margins, with the exception of the PKI, which remained allied with Sukarno. The only other major political force was the military, whose leadership was anticommunist. National politics were intensely polarized between the right and the left.

Stability crumbled as the contradictions in Sukarno's coalition unraveled. On September 30, 1965, six generals were killed in an apparent putsch by members of the military, seemingly in concert with the PKI. The following day, a group called the September 30th Movement announced that it had taken action to prevent a coup. By evening the mutiny had been crushed, and General Suharto, a high ranking officer who headed the army's strategic command, was in full control of the army.

Suharto whipped up anticommunist fervor in late 1965. A campaign of mass killing ensued, targeting PKI members and supporters, with the worst violence in Central and East Java, Bali, and North Sumatra. An estimated 500,000 people were killed.⁴ By March 1966, Suharto had dismissed Sukarno's cabinet; he became president the following year.

National political competition was limited during Suharto's tenure. He stayed in power until 1998 by skillfully and selectively deploying violence against opponents, banning most political parties, and stage-managing elections. His New Order regime brought together military elites, technocrats, and civilian politicians in support of policies that stimulated foreign investment and kept growth rates high. However, Indonesia was severely affected by the 1997 Asian financial crisis, contributing to Suharto's downfall.

Suharto was forced to resign on May 21, 1998, handing over power to Vice President Habibie. His resignation was precipitated by three months of student protests, which garnered support from the middle class. Violence spiked following the killing of four students by the security forces during a protest in Jakarta. Over the next three days, widespread rioting in Jakarta and other cities targeted ethnic Chinese Indonesians and their businesses. An estimated 1,200 people were killed, and over 50 women were raped.⁵

Indonesia is now politically stable. Four peaceful presidential transitions have occurred since the 1998 fall of the authoritarian President Suharto. Dealmaking between elites has sometimes led to corruption and nepotism, but has also served to limit extreme or violent contestation.

National-level legislative and presidential elections in 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014 have regularly been accompanied by shows of force and occasional incidents—usually involving youth fronts or thugs affiliated with political parties and candidates—but they have not led to significant violence.



Transnational terrorism

The New Order did not stamp out Islamist radicalism. Violent militants have extensive and longstanding ties with radical networks outside the country. Ties were forged during the New Order era when, due to repression by Suharto, extremists went abroad, to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and to Malaysia, where exiled jihadis founded Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in the early 1990s. The skills and networks forged abroad injected capacity into Indonesian extremist organizations, which perpetrated a series of lethal, high-profile attacks on Western targets beginning in the early 2000s, including the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people, 164 of them foreigners, and further bombings in Jakarta and Bali.

Since then, the jihadi scene has evolved, with key personalities jailed or killed and alignments shifting due to theological and strategic disputes. With extensive foreign assistance, the government has been able to reduce the threat. The police counterterrorism unit Densus 88 has achieved considerable success in dismantling terrorist cells.⁶ This led to a shift in homegrown Islamic terrorism: since 2010, most attacks have been small and poorly planned and executed, often by small groups with limited training and funding.⁷

The Syrian civil war and the declaration of the Islamic State (IS) in 2013 provided fresh momentum to Indonesian jihadi networks. In 2015, 500 Indonesians were fighting with IS in Iraq and Syria⁸ with a special military unit, Katibah Nusantara, established for Malay Indonesian speakers. Back home, jihadi clerics such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Aman Abdurrahman have sworn allegiance to IS from their prison cells, with both involved in the creation of Jamaah Anshar Khilafah (JAK). JAK was responsible for a suicide bombing and shooting at a Starbucks cafe and a police station in Jakarta on January 14, 2016. Another group affiliated with IS, Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), has carried out numerous attacks on the police since 2012 from its hideout in Central Sulawesi. The Jakarta attack was a failure (it resulted in four deaths), and MIT's leader, Santoso, was killed by security forces on July 18, 2016. But observers fear that the return of IS-trained Indonesians may lead to better-organized attacks in the future.⁹ Major weaknesses also remain in Indonesia's counterterrorism response. These include a lax and corrupt prison system that allows convicted jihadis to continue recruiting and plotting from their cells; poor monitoring of former convicts and Syria returnees; a lack of effective action against the spread of jihadi ideology via radical Islamic schools, websites, publications, and lectures; and outdated antiterrorism laws.¹⁰

Subnational level



Separatism and autonomy

Preserving the integrity of Indonesia has been a major concern of the state. Separatist movements developed in Aceh, Maluku, East Timor, and Papua. Sukarno and Suharto managed to control the centrifugal forces of separatism through military action, special autonomy arrangements, political patronage, and economic development. After the collapse of the New Order, decentralization reforms and special autonomy arrangements helped address regional calls for greater representation and inclusive growth.

Aceh. The Acehnese played an important role in the anticolonialist struggle, but discontent grew when promises that Aceh would become its own province were broken, leading many to join Darul Islam. The conflict was largely resolved in 1959, with Aceh given special territorial status. As the Indonesian central state gained strength, however, this became meaningless. In 1976, Hasan di Tiro declared the formation of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and independence. The insurgency was largely wiped out by 1979, but grew again after fighters trained in Libya returned in the late 1980s. In response, the military launched a decade-long campaign that killed thousands.¹¹ Following the New Order's demise, the conflict escalated into subnational war. The new political environment, and East Timor's independence referendum, led to calls for an independence plebiscite. GAM grew, gaining presence across the province. Two attempts at restoring peace—the Humanitarian Pause of September 2000, and the Cessation of Hostilities Agreements (CoHA) of December 2002—failed. The government declared martial law in 2003. Tens of thousands of additional troops were deployed.

On August 15, 2005—less than nine months after the December 2004 tsunami, which killed 167,000 people in Aceh—a peace deal (the MoU) was signed in Helsinki. The tsunami played a role: with tens of thousands of aid workers pouring in, offensives could not take place. Other

factors were also important. GAM had been decimated by martial law, and its leaders understood that international support for the independence of a small Muslim state on the Straits of Malacca was unlikely post-9/11. New Indonesian president Yudhoyono favored a political approach to Aceh. The MoU devolved considerable power to Aceh, granted the province a larger share of oil and gas revenues, and enabled former rebels to form a political party and run for local elections. It included provisions to disarm and reintegrate rebel forces. Over 30,000 Indonesian military and police left the province. An unarmed peace mission, the Aceh Monitoring Mission, was deployed by the EU and ASEAN to oversee the peace process. The impact of the conflict had been deep. From 1998 until the signing of the peace accord, an estimated 10,613 people lost their lives. Damages and losses from the conflict exceeded USD 10.7 billion, double the economic cost of the tsunami.¹²

Aceh is now at peace, and few predict that large-scale violence will reemerge. Former rebels have moved into governing roles, securing landslide victories in post-MoU local elections. Deaths dropped drastically after the accord, but the end of the war did not mean the end of all violence (figure 1). Crime increased sharply after the MoU. This was partly a result of leftover weapons from the conflict and the disappointment of former combatants at postwar economic opportunities. Elections have been marked by significant political violence. The 2009 legislative elections were the first in which Partai Aceh, the political party formed by GAM, fielded candidates for provincial and district parliaments. The 2012 election, for provincial governor and district heads, was marked by divisions between two GAM factions. Both elections saw widespread intimidation and violent incidents such as attacks—sometimes deadly—on party cadres: since 2005, 465 incidents of election-related violence have been recorded in Aceh, which led to 13 deaths.¹³ However, the latest round of elections for governor and district heads, in October 2016, was peaceful.

Papua. Since integration into Indonesia in 1969, Papua¹⁵ has seen a low-intensity but sustained separatist insurrection by the armed wing of the Free Papua Organization (TPN-OPM). Counterinsurgency campaigns by Indonesian armed forces led to severe human rights violations, including mass killings of civilians, with hundreds of thousands of deaths and displaced people.¹⁶

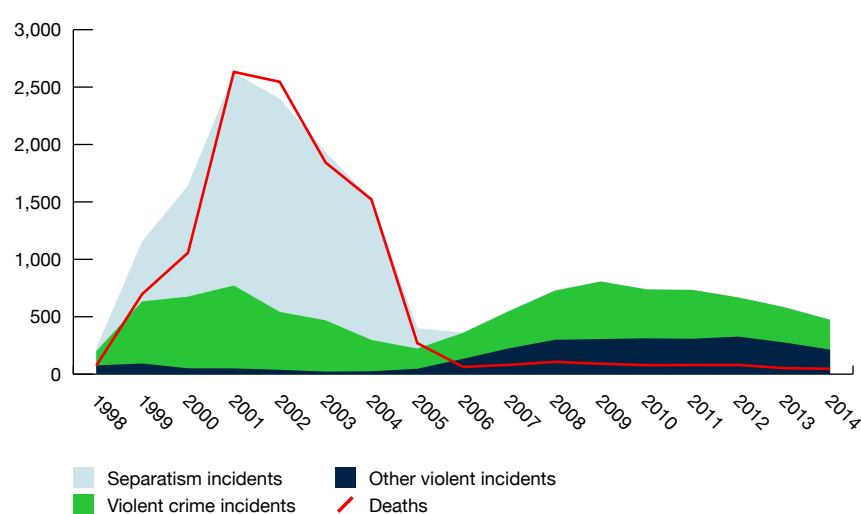


Figure 1. Violent deaths and incidents, by type, Aceh

Source: Indonesia's National Violence Monitoring System (NVMS),¹⁴
Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, and World Bank

Economic impact of Aceh conflict **double** that of **the tsunami**

Since the end of the New Order, the intensity of the conflict has dramatically decreased, and it now involves only sporadic shootings between rebels and security forces. The frequency of incidents surged again sharply in recent years, however, leading to an average of 31 fatalities per year from 2011 to 2014 (figure 2).

Pro-independence sentiment is widespread among Papuans, rooted in historic political and socioeconomic grievances including the contested transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch to Indonesia via the 1969 Act of Free Choice. The Act was meant to meet Papuan demands for a plebiscite on independence. Although the vote's outcome was endorsed by the UN, it is broadly regarded as illegitimate by most Papuans.

Other grievances include a sense of marginalization and disenfranchisement of indigenous Papuans, the perception that the exploitation of Papua's natural resources does not benefit locals, and the presence and poor track record of security forces. Papua has seen a steady influx of migrants from other parts of Indonesia, as a result of both transmigration programs and spontaneous migration.¹⁷ The proportion of nonindigenous people in Papua's population was 53.5 percent in 2009, and many Papuans fear becoming "a minority in their own land."¹⁸ Extractive industries drive tensions. The Grasberg mine, the richest gold and copper deposit in the world, has been the target of frequent ambushes attributed to separatist groups, and is associated with other tensions and violence related to labor issues, environmental damage, and rivalries between security forces over protection rent. Investments have been made in natural gas (the BP plant in Bintuni Bay), forest exploitation, and oil palm. While these create revenues and jobs, they also frequently lead to conflict. Tensions over customary land rights and resettlement have pitted communities against companies, and have exacerbated tribal disputes over land borders and the distribution of benefits.¹⁹ Finally, the police and military often use excessive force in response to peaceful demonstrations of support for independence. Human rights abuses go largely unpunished.²⁰

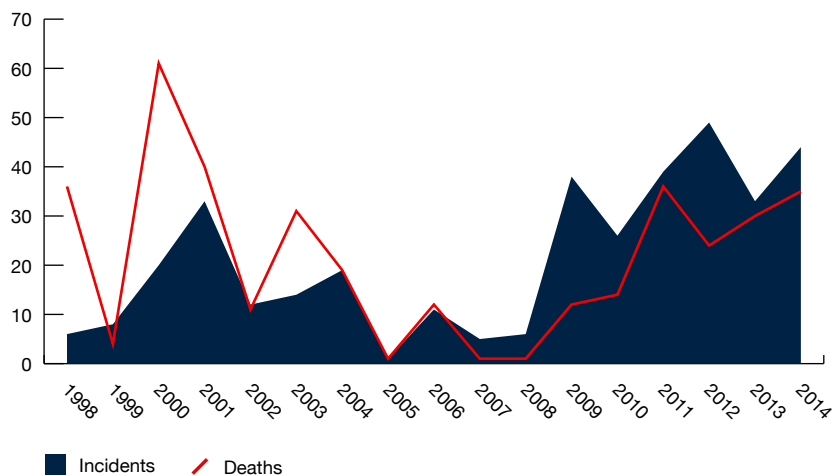


Figure 2. Separatism-related incidents and deaths, Papua and Papua Barat provinces

Source: NVMS, Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, and World Bank

Jakarta's response to the "Papua problem" has combined ramped-up military action with efforts to accelerate the region's development. Papua was designated a special autonomous region in 1999, and Law 21/2001 on Special Autonomy (OTSUS) devolved considerable political and fiscal authority to local government, along with preferential access to civil service jobs for indigenous Papuans. However, OTSUS is broadly regarded in Jakarta and Papua as a failure. Over USD 5 billion in special autonomy funding flowed into Papua and West Papua provinces between 2002 and 2017, with little effect on development. The largest share of funds has been spent on a growing number of civil servants and government facilities resulting from the proliferation of new districts.²¹ In 2016, Papua and West Papua provinces still ranked as the worst and second-worst Indonesian provinces on the Human Development Index.²²

Under the Joko Widodo presidency, efforts have been made to improve development and provide the local population with a sense of justice. For example, fuel prices—historically very high in Papua because of the region's remoteness and difficult terrain—were brought down to levels more comparable with the rest of the archipelago; the price differential between urban and rural areas within Papua decreased. Fuel prices affect the price of other commodities, and high prices have been a major obstacle to Papua's economic development, especially in rural areas. Joko Widodo also ended state-sponsored transmigration, and he visits Papua and West Papua regularly.

Nonetheless, Papua remains the most violent region of Indonesia. In 2014, Papua's homicide rate was five per 100,000 people, five times the national Indonesian average. While separatist conflict accounted for 22.5 percent of fatalities that year, other violence, such as resource-related and identity-based conflict, is frequent.



Large-scale communal and ideological conflicts

The five years following the collapse of the New Order regime were a period of major political and socioeconomic change. The years 1998–2004 saw the highest levels of violence since the 1965 anticommunist killings, with communal conflicts erupting in five Indonesian provinces.

In West and Central Kalimantan, the violence pitted indigenous Dayak and ethnic Malays against migrant Madurese populations; in Central Sulawesi and Maluku, the cleavage was primarily religious (Muslims versus Christians); in North Maluku, ethnic violence morphed into interconfessional battles. Violence in each place started with small-scale clashes between community groups, but then escalated into much larger armed confrontations. Fatalities were high (table 1), violence was organized, government services halted, and clashes spread over large geographic areas.²³

Table 1. Extended intercommunal violence, by province, in transitioning Indonesia

Province	Period of extended violence	Deaths	Injuries	Buildings damaged
North Maluku	August '99 through June '00	3,257	2,635	15,004
Maluku	January '99 through February '02	2,793	5,057	13,843
West Kalimantan	January '97 through February '97 February '99 through April '99	1,103	646	3,830
Central Kalimantan	February '01 through April '01	1,031	77	1,998
Central Sulawesi	April '00 through December '01	517	579	6,004

Source: NVMS, Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, and World Bank



By 2002, these episodes had ended, in part as a result of local peace deals such as the 2001 Malino Declaration for Central Sulawesi and the 2002 Malino II agreement for Maluku. Communal violence dropped sharply in Indonesia: related deaths in the five most affected provinces fell from 3,624 in 1999 to an average of 17 per year from 2003–2014. However, in Maluku, segregation along communal lines remains, and tensions continue to lead to regular violence. Central Sulawesi continues to serve as a base for violent Islamist militants, such as Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT). Data for 16 provinces²⁴ shows a significant increase in incidents related to identity since 2010 (figure 3): incidents were more than three times more frequent during the 2010–2014 period than during 2005–2009, and fatalities were 67 percent higher (65 identity-related deaths per year in 2010–2014, compared with 39 in 2005–2009). A quarter of these deaths resulted from attacks on minority Muslim sects and minority religions by Sunni militant groups.

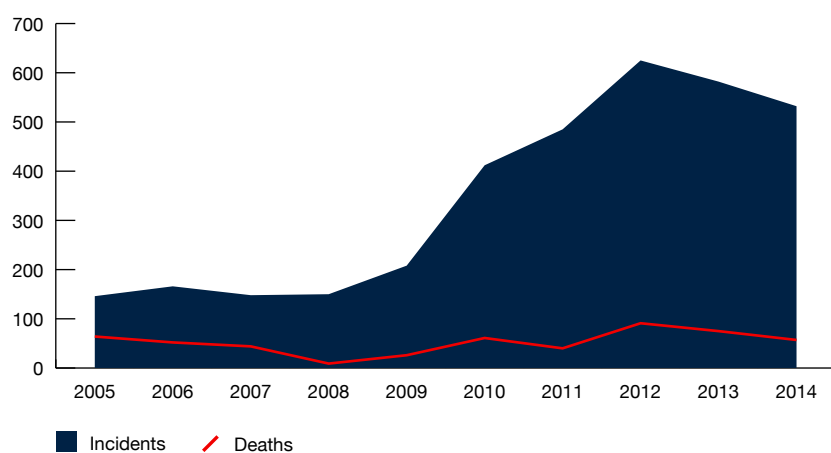


Figure 3. Identity-related incidents and deaths per year, 16 Indonesian provinces (2005–2014)

Source: NVMS, Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, and World Bank

Over the past few years, fringe radical Islamic groups have also acquired a growing influence over mainstream politics, using shows of force and blasphemy accusations to capture the attention of the media and shape public debate. A recent example was the 2017 election for the governor of Jakarta, where the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), a vigilante group mainly known for using violence to extort payments from nightclubs and gambling dens, spearheaded mobilization against the incumbent governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (“Ahok”), an ethnic Chinese, over allegations of insulting the Quran. With the support of opposing political forces, FPI’s agitation led to massive street protests and likely played a crucial role in Ahok’s defeat in the second round of the elections in April.

Local level

The large-scale conflicts that followed the collapse of the New Order were largely over by mid-2005. Democratic reforms and decentralization were starting to show benefits, while the economy was rapidly recovering. Violence has dropped, and its nature has shifted to more sporadic, localized incidents (figure 4). While violence is now far less deadly, it shows persistent issues related to law enforcement, community access to justice, land and natural resources management, political representation, and minority rights.²⁵

There has been a dramatic drop in fatalities since 2002 (red line in figure 4). As deaths dropped, the nature of violence changed. From 1999 to 2001, identity-related violence accounted for up to 80 percent of all reported deaths in the nine provinces. From 2002 to 2004, as communal conflicts receded and civil war escalated in Aceh, separatism became the main driver of deadly violence. After 2005, the violence assumed a more typical, peace-time model, with crime the main issue (on average accounting for 60 percent of deaths annually from 2005 to 2014). The second main driver of fatalities was domestic violence (15 percent of deaths in the period). Focusing on collective violence, mob justice—in reaction to criminal, moral, or personal offenses—was the deadliest type.

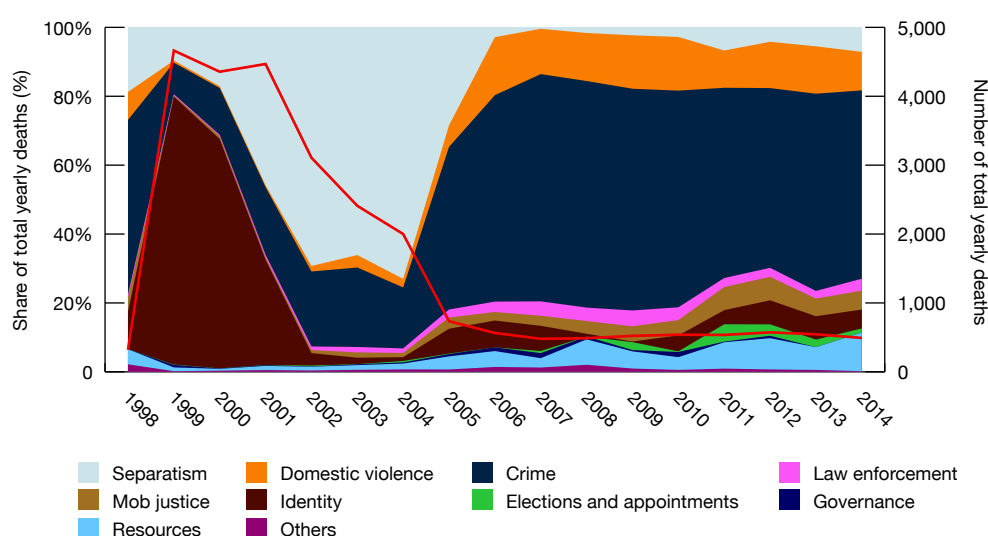


Figure 4. Share of yearly deaths, by type of violence, for nine provinces (1998–2014)

Source: NVMS, Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, and World Bank

Papua's homicide rate

5 times
higher than the national
average in 2014



Local political conflict and electoral violence

A large democracy with nearly 200 million registered voters, Indonesia has 34 governors and 514 district heads and mayors, all of whom are elected directly, and as many provincial and district parliaments. Local political competition sometimes plays out violently: contenders mobilize thugs for shows of force that occasionally lead to clashes and street violence. This has led to calls to cancel direct local elections and revert to the previous system where governors and district heads were chosen by parliaments. However, subnational elections have not led to major unrest. From 2005 to 2014, just 98 of a total of nearly 2,500 violent deaths were related to elections or other forms of political competition. Violence has mainly been concentrated in remote regions such as Papua's highlands (where district politics often map onto clan-based tensions), or in regions formerly affected by large-scale conflict, such as Aceh.



Local conflict over resources and community rights

Land and natural resources conflicts lead to more deaths. Annual violent incidents have increased steadily during the past five years. Between 2010 and 2014, incidents increased by 40 percent, and deaths more than doubled, from 34 to 72. Resource-related violence represents only a small share of all violence in Indonesia (2–3 percent), but it is comparatively more likely to lead to fatalities than other types of violence.²⁶

The vast majority of these incidents result from contestation over land. These typically pit local communities against agribusiness companies or extractive industries granted concessions by the state, but they also map onto communal lines of opposition between different ethnic groups, or between indigenous populations and migrants. Many large cases, such as the Mesuji and Jambi land disputes, defy simple narratives. They involve overlapping claims by customary (*adat*) communities, migrants, and private interests, and are further complicated by the intervention of political actors and land speculators trying to take advantage of the dispute.²⁷

Multiple factors explain the prevalence of land conflicts in Indonesia, many of which can be traced back to the colonial era and policies under the authoritarian New Order regime. These include the 1967 Forestry Law, which placed the state in control of 70 percent of Indonesia's land.²⁸ This opened the way for the massive conversion of rainforest into timber and plantation agriculture concessions, with little regard for customary rights, environmental damage, or sustainability.²⁹ Contradictory laws and regulations, and overlapping lines of bureaucratic authority across ministries and between central and local government, have led to a lack of clarity in land classification and ownership rights. Other factors include the excessive application of the state's power of eminent domain; the lack of safeguards to enforce the right of local communities to free,

prior, and informed consent; poor maps and cadastral records; and corrupt courts.³⁰ Claimants, and civil society organizations acting on their behalf, often have little choice but to use shows of force to secure public attention and pressure government into addressing their grievances. On the other side, heavy-handed responses by police and private security forces contribute to the escalation of disputes into lethal violence. In 2014, institutional mechanisms for the adjudication of land disputes were established from national to district level. Whether they will be effective remains to be seen.



Urban crime and violence

Violent crime is the main source of violent deaths today, with 1,744 deaths in 2014, or 58 percent of all homicides that year. Since the 1970s, Indonesia has undergone rapid urbanization. Fifty-three percent of the population, 134 million Indonesians, lived in cities in 2014. One-fifth were poor or close to the poverty line. The third main cause of deadly violence in Indonesia—mob justice—is also related to crime, as it is in large part a response to it. Lynchings killed over 300 people in 2014; two-thirds were petty thieves. The prevalence of mob justice incidents in Indonesia reflects a pervasive lack of trust in the police and the justice system, especially among poor and rural Indonesians.



Domestic and gender-based violence

Domestic violence is currently the second-highest cause of violent death in Indonesia. It killed 449 persons in 2014, or 15 percent of all violent deaths. However, the number of reported domestic violence incidents, as well as the number of female homicide and sexual assault victims, has been declining over the past decade (figure 5).

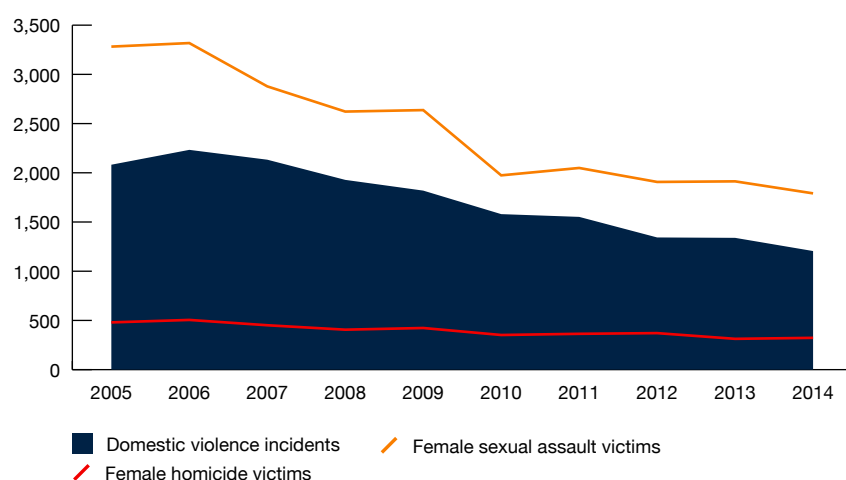


Figure 5. Domestic violence incidents and female victims of sexual assault and homicide, 16 provinces

Source: NVMS, Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, and World Bank

Notes

- 1 Quinton Temby, "Imagining an Islamic state in Indonesia: From Darul Islam to Jemaah Islamiyah," *Indonesia* 89 (April 2010).
- 2 Ruth McVey, "The Post-Revolutionary Transformation of the Indonesian Army," *Indonesia* 11 (April 1971).
- 3 Herbert Feith and Daniel S. Lev, "The End of the Indonesian Rebellion," *Pacific Affairs* 36, no. 1 (1963): 32–46.
- 4 Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali* (Clayton, Australia: Monash University, 1990).
- 5 The Habibie government convened a commission that concluded that 300–1,200 people were killed and 52 women were raped. See International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia: Impunity versus Accountability*, Asia Report No. 12 (Jakarta and Brussels: ICG, 2001), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/indonesia-impunity-versus-accountability>.
- 6 Densus 88 has a reputation for abusive force: many suspects were killed during arrest, and at least 121 died in custody, 2007–2016. See Eko Prasetyo, "Police Negligence Admission only Tip of the Iceberg: Amnesty International," *Jakarta Globe*, April 22, 2016, <http://jakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/police-negligence-admission-tip-iceberg-amnesty-international/>.
- 7 Since the Bali bombing, 120 have been killed in terror attacks, but the 2009 bomb attacks on the JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton hotels in Jakarta were the last to kill more than five.
- 8 The Soufan Group (TSG), *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq* (TSG, December 2015), http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf.
- 9 See Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), *Disunity Among Indonesian ISIS Supporters and the Risk of More Violence*, IPAC Report No. 25 (IPAC, February 1, 2016), http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2016/02/IPAC_25.pdf.
- 10 For example, joining a foreign terrorist organization such as ISIS is not considered a crime in Indonesia. See IPAC, *Disunity Among Indonesian ISIS Supporters*.
- 11 Edward Aspinall, *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).
- 12 World Bank, *Multi-Stakeholder Review of Post-Conflict Programming in Aceh: Identifying the Foundations for Sustainable Peace and Development in Aceh* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2009), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/716601468259763959/Full-report>.
- 13 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Aceh: Post-Conflict Complications*, Asia Report No. 139 (ICG, 2007); ICG, *Indonesia: Pre-Election Anxieties in Aceh*, Asia Briefing No. 81 (ICG, 2008); ICG, *Indonesia: Deep Distrust in Aceh as Elections Approach*, Asia Briefing No. 90 (ICG, 2009); ICG, *Indonesia: Averting Election Violence in Aceh*, Asia Briefing No. 135 (ICG, 2012).
- 14 NVMS was implemented by the World Bank on behalf of the Government of Indonesia, and in partnership with The Habibie Center, a think tank. It contains data on every violent incident reported by local newspapers in Indonesia from 1998 to 2014. Data can be accessed via <http://snpk.kemerkopmk.go.id>.
- 15 Throughout this chapter, unless specified otherwise, *Papua* is used to refer to both Papua and West Papua province.
- 16 Estimates of fatalities range from 100,000 to 500,000. See the government-issued report, Muridan S. Widjojo et al., *Papua Road Map: Negotiating the Past, Improving the Present and Securing the Future*, (Jakarta: The Indonesian Institute of Science, 2008).
- 17 The transmigration program (*transmigrasi*) was an initiative of the Dutch colonial government, later continued by the Indonesian government, to move landless people from Java and other densely populated areas of Indonesia to less populous areas of the country. President Joko Widodo ended transmigration to Papua in 2015.
- 18 Estimates from Widjojo et al., *Papua Road Map*.
- 19 For a case study on local disputes related to resource extraction in Boven Digoel, see International Crisis Group (ICG) *Papua: A Local Perspective on the Conflict*, Asia Briefing No. 66 (ICG, 2007).
- 20 Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2016: Indonesia," Human Rights Watch website, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/indonesia>.
- 21 In 1999, Papua was a single province with ten districts. By 2013, it had become two provinces with 42 districts, and proposals for 33 more divisions awaited parliamentary consideration. See Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), *Carving up Papua: More Districts, More Problems*, IPAC Report No. 3 (Jakarta: IPAC, 2013), <http://www.understandingconflict.org/en/conflict/read/8/Carving-Up-Papua-More-Districts-More-Problems>.
- 22 "Indonesia Database for Policy and Economic Research (INDO-DAPOER)," World Bank DataBank, accessed October 2016, [http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=indo~dapoer-\(indonesia-data-base-for-policy-and-economic-research\)](http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=indo~dapoer-(indonesia-data-base-for-policy-and-economic-research)).
- 23 Gerry van Klinken, *Communal Violence and Democratization in Indonesia: Small Town Wars* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); John T. Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006); Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Violence in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Dave McRae, "The Escalation and Decline of Violent Conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi, 1998–2007" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2008); Chris Wilson, *Ethno-Religious Violence in Indonesia: From Soil to God* (Routledge, 2008).
- 24 These 16 provinces represent all major island groups and account for about 53 percent of the country's population.
- 25 The figure is based on NVMS data for a sample of nine provinces that includes all six provinces most affected by these conflicts: Aceh, Maluku, North Maluku, Central Sulawesi, Central Kalimantan, and West Kalimantan (see note 14).
- 26 In 2014, the NVMS dataset counted one death for every five resource-related incidents; the average ratio for all violence types recorded by NVMS is one death for every ten incidents (see note 14).

- 27 Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), *Mesuji: Anatomy of an Indonesian Land Conflict*, IPAC Report No. 1 (Jakarta: IPAV, 2013), http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2013/09/Mesuji_FINAL.pdf; and IPAC, *Indigenous Rights vs. Agrarian Reform in Indonesia: A Case Study from Jambi*, IPAC Report No. 9 (IPAC, 2014), http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2014/04/IPAC_Report_9_Case_Study_from_Jambi_web.pdf.
- 28 A 2013 Constitutional Court decision to remove customary forests from state control was an important victory for indigenous rights activists, but implementation remains a long way off. See IPAC, *Indigenous Rights*.
- 29 For example, Indonesia had 120,000 ha of land under oil palm cultivation in 1968; in 2014, it had over 10 million ha, with more than 600,000 ha added each year. See IPAC, *Indigenous Rights*.
- 30 Shivakumar Srinivas et al., *Towards Indonesian Land Reforms: Challenges and Opportunities* (Jakarta: World Bank, 2014).

1870

1870

British colonial government begins bringing Chinese and Tamil laborers to the Malay peninsula to work in mines and rubber plantations.

1946

The Malayan Union, established by the British, grants citizenship to the country's Chinese and Indians. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO), founded that year, opposes it.

1955

The Alliance, an intercommunal coalition composed of the UMNO and Chinese and Indian parties, wins an election landslide. Later known as Barisan Nasional, the coalition has dominated Malaysian politics since.

1963

The Federation of Malaysia is formed with Singapore and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak.

1965

Singapore exits the Federation of Malaysia.

1969

Following historic opposition electoral gains, the May 13 riots between ethnic Chinese and ethnic Malays kill at least 196.

1981

Amid growing Malay nationalism, Mahathir Mohamad becomes prime minister, bringing rapid economic growth, but also authoritarianism.

1987

Operation Lalang jails 106 opposition politicians and activists under the Internal Security Act.

1998

Anwar, then deputy prime minister, is sacked over economic policy and put on trial for sodomy and corruption. Public outrage gives birth to the Reformasi movement.

2007

The Bersih ("Clean") movement demands free and fair elections.

2016

The fifth iteration of the Bersih protests, "Bersih 5.0," calls for the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Razak over the 1MDB corruption case.

1945

Sino-Malay race riots lead to an estimated 2,000 deaths.

1948

The Federation of Malaya replaces the Malayan Union.

1957

The Federation of Malaya achieves independence from the UK.

1964

Tensions between the UMNO and Singapore's ethnic-Chinese-dominated People's Action Party (PAP) spark communal riots.

1971

The New Economic Policy (NEP) is launched. It will succeed in reducing poverty, but entrench Malays' preferential status.

1982

Young Islamic leader Anwar Ibrahim joins UMNO amid conflict between Mahathir and the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS).

1997

The Asian financial crisis.

2003

His coalition weakened by the Asian financial crisis and mounting opposition, Mahathir steps down.

2013

200 armed Filipinos from the Royal Sulu Sultanate Army invade a coastal village in Sabah.

2017

Malaysia

At a glance



National civil war
Absent



Communal/ideological conflict
Medium



National political conflict
Medium



Local political and electoral conflict
Low



Transnational terrorism
Medium



Local resource conflict
Low



Separatism and autonomy
Low



Urban crime and violence
Low

** Rankings are based on the last 15 years and are relative to other Asian countries.*

Overview

Politics in Malaysia have been shaped by ethnic and religious dynamics. In the years leading to independence and the decade that followed, growing economic disparities between ethnic Malays and the Chinese and Indian communities led to the emergence of political formations organized along communal lines. Simmering tensions culminated in race riots in May 1969, a watershed event that left a lasting mark on Malaysian politics. Barisan Nasional (National Front), a broad, intercommunal political coalition, remained continuously in power by safeguarding Malay political supremacy while at the same time introducing economic policies that benefited all. Under its rule, Malaysia experienced rapid growth and kept racial tensions in check. This, however, came at the cost of civic freedoms, as the Barisan Nasional government took a semiauthoritarian turn, using latent racial tensions to legitimate restrictions on democratic expression. The aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis altered the political landscape. Divisions appeared within the ruling coalition over the sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, making room for an emboldened civil society to assert itself and demand civic freedoms, electoral reform and transparency. As the hegemony of the ruling coalition has increasingly been challenged, protests have often been met with arrests and police brutality. The continued use of communalism for political advantage raises the risk of violence in the future. Terrorist attacks on Malaysian soil have been relatively rare, but Malaysians have been involved in attacks elsewhere, and extremist views appear to be widespread in the country. Rates of local electoral violence, resource conflict, and criminal violence, however, are low compared to many countries in the region.

National level



National civil war

National civil war has not been present in Malaysia since independence.



National political conflict

Ethnic and religious communalism in large part define the Malaysian political landscape. Policies favoring ethnic Malays and other indigenous people, collectively known as *Bumiputera* (68.6 percent of the population¹), are by and large accepted by the large Chinese and Indian communities (respectively 23.4 percent and 7 percent) as a trade-off for broad-based economic growth and stability. While these tensions have rarely escalated into violence since the 1969 riots, the threat of social unrest has been used to secure the support of minorities for the multiethnic Barisan Nasional political coalition, which has ruled Malaysia without interruption since independence. Since the 2000s, however, an emboldened civil society has increasingly challenged the status quo, as evidenced by the success of the *Bersih* movement. Demands for electoral reform and an end to corruption have mobilized citizens across communal divides.

Between 1870 and 1930, Chinese and Tamils were brought to the Malay peninsula in large numbers by the British colonial government to work as laborers in the mining industry and on rubber plantations. The British ruled through the feudal Malay Sultanate system. A minority of better-educated urban Malays were employed in the colonial administration, while rural Malays continued to live by subsistence farming. While Malays were subjects of the British Malaya state and benefited from customary land rights, free education, and other advantages, Chinese and Indians were considered temporary foreign residents. Nevertheless, exposure to the new economy of mining and large-scale planting improved the economic welfare of the Chinese and Indian populations. The former became dominant in trade, while Indians continued to work in plantations. The growing urban working class became largely composed of such “foreigners,” with Malays increasingly lagging behind, leading to an increase in racial tensions. These erupted into violence during the Japanese occupation, when Malay anticolonial forces, trained and armed by the Japanese, fought antifascist forces armed by the British and composed mainly of Chinese. In 1945, Sino-Malay race riots led to an estimated 2,000 deaths.²

Following World War II, the short-lived Malayan Union, established by the British to prepare for independence, considerably reduced the power of the Sultans and granted citizenship and access to the civil service to Chinese and Indians. These provisions were met with vocal opposition from the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which was established in 1946. This led to the replacement of the Malayan Union by the Federation of Malaya in 1948, which restored the authority of the Sultans under the British high commissioner.

Chinese and Indian demands for equal citizenship and educational and employment opportunities continued, however. The Chinese and Indian communities formed political parties—the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) in 1946, and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in 1949—to gain political leverage to bargain for better status. At the same time, an insurgency, led by the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), which was dominated by ethnic Chinese, erupted in 1948 (see the section on large-scale communal and ideological conflicts, below).

The MIC and MCA eventually rallied around the UMNO to form the Alliance (the forerunner of Barisan Nasional). The MIC and MCA’s support for UMNO was based on a compromise

whereby minorities would support Malay preferential status in exchange for security and a tacit understanding that the government would not interfere in their economic affairs. The Alliance went on to win the 1955 elections by a landslide. The same coalition has dominated Malaysian politics without interruption to this day.

The Federation of Malaya achieved independence in 1957, and in 1963 became the Federation of Malaysia after integrating Singapore and the states of Sabah and Sarawak in northern Borneo. Lee Kuan Yew's People's Action Party (PAP) dominated Singapore, where Chinese are a large majority, from the 1959 elections onward, posing a political threat to UMNO at the federal level. Tensions between the two parties culminated in the 1964 communal riots, during which at least 22 people were killed and 454 injured.³ Singapore was expelled from the Federation in 1965. In the rest of Malaysia, competition between the Alliance and a developing political opposition also resulted in racial violence. UMNO's control over the ethnic-Malay constituency was challenged by the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS), founded in 1951 by Muslim clerics in the rural and conservative north. Meanwhile, Chinese frustration over the MCA's performance led to the formation of the Democratic Action Party (DAP) in 1965, and the Malaysian People's Movement (Gerakan) in 1968, both of which campaigned for the abolition of Malay privileges.⁴ Opposition parties made historic gains in the 1969 elections, inflicting a major setback on the Alliance, which failed for the first time to achieve the crucial two-thirds majority needed to pass constitutional amendments in the federal parliament. Following incidents during celebrations by DAP and Gerakan supporters, riots broke out on May 13, three days after the election. Chinese properties were looted, and at least 196 people, most of them Chinese, were killed.⁵

The riots led to a major shift in Malaysian politics, marked by the consolidation of Malay power and a long-lasting authoritarian turn. A state of national emergency was declared on May 14, and the parliament was suspended for two years. When it reconvened in 1971, it amended the 1948 Sedition Act to further suppress contestation of the preferential status of Bumiputera. The Alliance reformed as Barisan Nasional, integrating opposition parties such as PAS and Gerakan. The 1969 riots were also used to justify the launch of a New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP was meant to foster interracial harmony by reducing poverty and eliminating the association of ethnic groups with specific economic activities. In practice, it included many affirmative action provisions to decrease the dependence of Bumiputera on subsistence agriculture and increase their representation in business, commerce, and salaried professions. Implemented from 1971 to 1990, the NEP achieved significant success, reducing the share of Malaysians living under the poverty line from 49.3 percent in 1970 to 16.3 percent in 1990.⁶ It also resulted in greater representation of ethnic Malays in nonagricultural sectors, tertiary education, and the country's growing middle class. The NEP's effects on interracial harmony are more debatable, however, as it entrenched the preferential status of Bumiputera and fed resentment among ethnic minorities. Another effect of the 1969 riots was the growing influence of ultra-Malay nationalism, especially within the UMNO. This enabled the rise to power of the conservative politician Mahathir Mohamad, who became prime minister in 1981 and remained in that office for the next 22 years.

Under Mahathir rule, Malaysia became a relatively successful developmental state,⁷ with state-led macroeconomic planning leading to rapid economic growth. This came at a cost, however. Democratic freedoms were curbed, and racial issues were frequently manipulated to mobilize the Malay vote, keep minorities in line, and suppress dissent. In a major crackdown, Operation Lalang, in 1987, 106 opposition politicians and civil society activists were arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for allegedly inciting racial tensions.⁸ The 1980s and '90s also witnessed the Islamization of the state in response to the political challenge posed by the Islamic PAS party, which had left the Barisan Nasional to return to the opposition in 1977.⁹ Benefiting from a religious revival, fueled by global events such as the Arab-Israeli wars and the Iranian revolution, PAS challenged UMNO dominance within the ethnic-Malay community.¹⁰ To undercut PAS, Mahathir groomed his own Islamic leader, the charismatic Anwar Ibrahim, and championed

policies supporting the establishment of Islamic courts, banks, universities, and medical centers and the progressive Islamization of the bureaucracy. In the 1990s, Mahathir took advantage of PAS's support for Sharia-inspired criminal punishments (*hudud* ordinances), and alleged links to local and Indonesian terror groups, to brand the political party as extremist.

The first decade of the 21st century was marked by the growth of a more vocal civil society and reform movement cutting across communal lines. During the Asian financial crisis (1997–1998), Anwar Ibrahim, then finance minister, was sacked over disagreements on economic recovery measures.¹¹ His subsequent trial for alleged sodomy and corruption was met with public outrage, transforming Mahathir's former protégé into the leader of a movement (Reformasi) that channeled the discontent of Malaysia's growing middle class. The Reformasi activists demanded genuine democratic representation, social justice, and an end to corruption. The movement's initial success was, however, short lived. A coalition formed by PAS, DAP, and Anwar Ibrahim's new party (later known as the People's Justice Party, PKR), collapsed amid disagreements between PAS and DAP about state-level Islamist policies implemented by PAS and demands from the Chinese community relayed by DAP. Only in 2007, four years after Mahathir stepped down, did the reform movement regain momentum with the establishment of the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (Bersih, or "Clean"). Focusing on a practical set of simple demands regarding elections,¹² Bersih drew between 10,000 and 30,000 protestors into the streets in November 2007. During the following year's general election, Barisan Nasional lost its two-thirds majority for the first time since 1969. Anwar Ibrahim's PKR won five states out of 13 and formed the People's Alliance (Pakatan Rakyat) with PAS and DAP. Four more Bersih protests, in 2011, 2012, 2015, and 2016, attracted large multiracial crowds. Protests were often met with police brutality and arrests. In the 2013 general election, Barisan Nasional's majority in the federal parliament continued to shrink.¹³ The 2016 "Bersih 5.0" protestors called for the resignation of current prime minister Najib Razak over his alleged involvement in the 1MDB corruption case.¹⁴ To bolster support in the lead-up to the 2018 general election, Najib has allegedly been resorting to old communal tactics: he proposed to further Islamicize Malaysian law by adopting the same *hudud* punishments once promoted by PAS.¹⁵ Within the opposition, communal divides also persist. Common demands regarding electoral reform and good governance bring together different constituencies. But fundamental differences over the preferential status of Bumiputera and the role of Islam in the state are bound to resurface.



Transnational terrorism

Malaysian volunteers have gone abroad to wage jihad, first with the Afghan mujahedeen and more recently with the Islamic State. Jihad returnees have contributed to the spread of extremist views within Malaysia.¹⁶

Although no precise number of Malaysians joining the Afghan jihad in the 1980s was documented, a USAID report estimated that around 300–400 fighters from Malaysia and Indonesia together were trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan as anti-Soviet mujahedeen.¹⁷ In 1986, Malaysians returning from the jihad formed a clandestine "prayer group," Halaqah Pakindo, bringing together graduates of religious institutions in India, Pakistan, and Indonesia. The group was allegedly sponsored by PAS, and gave birth to other Malaysian radical organizations.¹⁸ In 1995, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (the Malaysian Mujahideen Movement, KMM) was established by Zainon Ismail, an Afghan jihad veteran and a member of the PAS State Youth Committee in Kedah state.¹⁹ KMM's goal was to overthrow Mahathir's government and create a regional Islamic state comprising Malaysia, Indonesia, and the southern parts of Thailand and the Philippines. The group was responsible for robberies, bombings, and the murder of government officials. High-profile incidents included the bombing of a Hindu temple in Kuala Lumpur in 2000 and the assassination of a state assemblyman in Penang who was believed to have persuaded Malay Muslim women to convert to Christianity.²⁰ KMM was closely linked with the Indonesian terror

group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which shares the same goal of a pan-Malay Islamic state, and which helped KMM reach out to militant groups in the Philippines as well as to al-Qaeda.²¹ In 2001 and 2002, 14 members were arrested, and KMM was disbanded. However, some former KMM members were later found joining the Islamic State (IS).²²

A Malaysian national, Noordin Mohammad Top, was the mastermind of some of the most high-profile JI attacks in Indonesia in the 2000s, such as the 2005 Bali attacks and the bombings in Jakarta of the JW Marriott Hotel (2003), the Australian Embassy (2004), and the JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton Hotels (2009).²³ Noordin was killed by Densus 88, the counterterrorism unit of the Indonesian police, during a raid in Central Java in 2009.

Following the rise of IS in Syria beginning in 2013, some Malaysians went abroad to join the jihad. The government's official count was 100 in 2015. A Malay-speaking IS combat unit, Katibah Nusantara, was formed in Syria, although a large majority of its members were Indonesian. The Soufan Group noted that the Malaysian state was more efficient at preventing the departure of combatants than neighboring Indonesia.²⁴ Between 2014 and 2016, the Malaysian police carried out multiple arrests of suspected militants preparing attacks in the country, and claimed to have foiled several plots.²⁵ A grenade attack on a bar frequented by expatriates in Puchong, Selangor, which injured eight people in June 2016, was the first claimed by IS in Malaysia. Fifteen suspects were arrested, two of whom were police officers. The perpetrators allegedly reported to Muhammad Wannady Mohamed Jedi, a Syria-based IS leader and Malaysian national, who also ordered attacks on prominent Malaysians including Prime Minister Najib Razak.²⁶ Wannady was killed in Syria in April 2017. The Soufan Group found that Malaysians arrested while trying to join IS tend to be less hardened and committed militants than their Indonesian counterparts.²⁷ However, the Pew Research Center found that 11 percent of Malaysians view IS favorably, the second-highest score globally (figure 1).

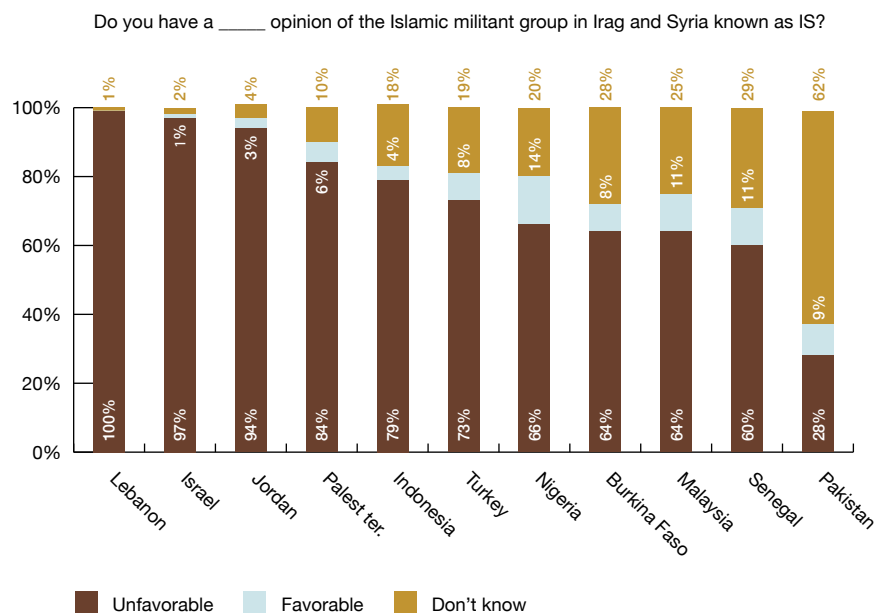


Figure 1. Views toward IS
Source: Pew Research Center²⁸



Separatism and autonomy

The borders of Sabah, one of the two Malaysian states situated on the island of Borneo, have long been a bone of contention between Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In 2002, the International Court of Justice settled a territorial dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia over the Ligitan and Sipadan islands in favor of Malaysia. Both countries continue to claim sovereignty over the Ambalat continental shelf. Another dispute, with the Philippines, over northern Sabah has led to several eruptions of violence. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the region of Sabah was under the influence of the Sultanate of Sulu, based in the archipelago of the same name in the southern Philippines. It became a British protectorate in the 19th century and, after the Japanese occupation during World War II, a British colony and a founding member of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. The Philippines claim Sabah on the basis that the sultan of Sulu only leased the territory to the British in 1878, while Malaysia considers that the people of Sabah exercised their right to self-determination in joining the Federation in 1963.

The Philippines at times has used military means to try to gain control of Sabah. In 1968, the government of President Ferdinand Marcos trained a special commando team of Muslim combatants, the Jabidah, to infiltrate Sabah, recruiting among the local Tausug²⁹ population and carrying out sabotage operations to destabilize the region and strengthen the Philippines' territorial claims. However, the operation failed and ended in tragedy, with the massacre of dozens of Jabidah trainees by the Philippine army on Corregidor Island.³⁰

The dispute remained dormant until 2013, when over 200 armed men, identifying themselves as the Royal Sulu Sultanate Army, invaded the coastal village of Lahad Datu in Sabah by motorboat. The men were followers of Jamalul Kiram III, one of the claimants to the title of sultan of Sulu. The ensuing stand-off lasted over a month and escalated into military confrontation.³¹ A total of 56 militants were killed, along with six civilians and 10 members of the Malaysian security forces.

In Sabah and in Sarawak, the other North Borneo Malaysian state, there have also been indigenous calls to separate from peninsular Malaysia. In 2014, a group called Sabah Sarawak Keluar Malaysia (Sabah Sarawak Leave Malaysia, SSKM) appeared on social media to demand independence for the two states. At the same time, a coalition of NGOs, politicians, and activists addressed a petition to the United Nations secretary general on the issue of self-determination.³² Malaysian authorities declared the initiative unlawful, and charged SSKM members under the Sedition Act.³³



Large-scale communal and ideological conflicts

Communal tensions have shaped Malaysian politics and society since independence (on this, refer to the national political conflict section, above).

Malaysia fought a domestic communist insurgency from 1948 to 1960—a first phase known as the Malayan Emergency—and then again from 1967 to 1989. The Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) was formed in 1930 to oppose colonial rule. It briefly received British support to fight the Japanese occupation during World War II, but started fighting the British after the war. Besides independence, the CPM also demanded equal rights for all inhabitants of Malaysia regardless of ethnicity. While the party was a multiethnic organization, its membership was predominantly Chinese. Its armed wing, the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), recruited among ethnic Chinese “squatters,” landless farmers in rural Malaysia.³⁴ In 1948, the colonial administration declared a state of emergency after the assassination of three European planters by the

11% of Malaysians view IS favorably, the 2nd highest score globally

communists in Perak. The ensuing guerilla war was characterized by acts of sabotage and attacks on rubber plantations, to which the British responded by relocating half a million rural Chinese into camps. In 1952, the MNLA assassinated the British high commissioner. Peace talks began in 1955 after Malaysia's first general election, along with an offer of amnesty for surrendering combatants. Although the talks were not successful, the liberation war waged by the CPM lost steam after Malaysia gained independence in 1957; the MNLA retreated to the Thai border, and the emergency was declared over in 1960.

The conflict killed an estimated 10,533 people, including 6,710 MNLA fighters and approximately 2,500 civilians.³⁵ It also served to justify repressive legislation that would be used to suppress peacetime contestation in the following decades, such as the Sedition Act and emergency regulations that formed the basis of the Internal Security Act of 1960.³⁶

A second phase of the insurgency started in 1968, in parallel with the intensification of the Vietnam War and the 1969 ethnic riots in Kuala Lumpur. The MNLA launched attacks from their stronghold along the Thailand-Malaysia border. But insufficient foreign support, internal factionalism, and the insurgents' failure to mobilize national support beyond their ethnic-Chinese base led them to enter peace talks and eventually end the war in 1989, as the USSR collapsed.

Local level



Local political conflict and electoral violence

Election-related violence has not been as prevalent in Malaysia as in many other Southeast Asian countries. However, increased political competition between the ruling BN and the opposition Pakatan Rakyat, which made large gains in the 2008 election, resulted in frequent incidents prior to the 2013 general election.

Violent acts prior to the campaign period were limited to blocking access to meetings, stone and egg throwing, and destruction of property. However, when the official, two-week campaign period started in April, incidents became more violent. These included physical harassment of two men in Georgetown who held the opposition party flags, a bomb at a BN rally in northern Penang that injured a security guard, two petrol bombs at a BN office in Kuala Lumpur, and the

torching of two vehicles that belonged to the daughter of a candidate from the opposition Pakatan Rakyat in Klang.³⁷ Police reported 1,166 cases of election-related violence and intimidation in the first week of the campaign, and 43 arrests.³⁸



Local conflict over resources and community rights

The land-development policy implemented in the 1970s as part of the NEP provided over one million acres of land on the peninsula to the poor and resettled more than 76,200 families from 1970 to 1980.³⁹ The program also contributed to economic development by increasing Malaysia's production of rubber and especially palm oil, of which it is now a major exporter. Over 200 plantations had opened as of 2014, with 103,156 registered settlers and more than 477,000 hectares of developed land.⁴⁰

Land use for oil palm plantations, however, has been associated with environmental issues such as deforestation and biodiversity loss and the violation of customary indigenous land rights. In Sarawak, for example, the area planted with oil palm rose from 23,000 hectares in 1980 to more than one million hectares in 2013.⁴¹ The Sarawak state government in the 1980s believed that poverty could be eradicated by providing both public lands and customary lands belonging to the indigenous Dayak population to outsiders and private companies for large-scale plantations.⁴² Unsurprisingly, this led to land conflicts between oil palm companies and local communities. Cases of physical violence have included the shooting of a village headman in 1997,⁴³ a clash between villagers and gangsters hired by an oil palm company in 1999 that resulted in the deaths of seven gangsters, a clash between 200 natives and 100 armed men from an oil palm company in 2011,⁴⁴ and the 2016 murder of an indigenous and land rights activist, Bill Kayong, who had actively assisted communities in Sarawak to mobilize against logging by big oil palm and timber companies.⁴⁵

Land conflict related to plantation development is also prevalent in peninsular Malaysia. Indigenous people (*orang asli*) have been vulnerable during land development, in part due to inconsistencies in the laws governing indigenous land ownership. Many do not possess legal documents that prove their ownership of the land, and are involuntarily relocated when the area they occupy is slated for development.⁴⁶ Deforestation resulting from land development also damages indigenous livelihoods. In 2016, an indigenous community set up blockades against developers in Balah Forest, which they claim as their customary land. Blockades were later taken down and dozens of locals detained by the police.⁴⁷



Urban crimes and violence

Malaysia's criminal homicide rate was 1.9 deaths per 100,000 people in 2010, the latest year for which UNODC data is available.⁴⁸ Since then, the Malaysian government has released data showing its success in reducing the Crime Index under the Government Transformation Program (GTP), launched in January of that year. According to GTP data, there has been an average annual decline of 9 percent in the Crime Index, with a total reduction of 47 percent from 2010 to 2016. The Perception of Crime Indicator (PCI) showed that 61 percent of people in Kuala Lumpur in 2015 feared becoming victims of crime, a reduction from 80 percent in 2010.⁴⁹

Despite relatively low homicide rates, gang violence in Malaysia is common. In 2013, the police published a list of 49 gangs, with around 40,000 members involved. Gangsters take part in many criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, armed robberies, loan-sharking, and contract killings. Gang recruitment targets schoolchildren and is generally carried out along ethnic lines,⁵⁰ with 70 percent of gang members reportedly ethnic Indians.⁵¹ Twelve percent of members of these gangs are girls and women.⁵²

1.9
deaths / **100,000**
One of **the lowest**
homicide rates in Asia



Domestic and gender-based violence

Gender-based violence in Malaysia is underreported, and few studies have been conducted. Baseline research in 2013, which used WHO questionnaires to study women's health and domestic violence against women across 13 states in western Malaysia, found that 8 percent of women had suffered violence by intimate partners.⁵³ Police records show a steady, recent increase in domestic violence cases: 3,173 cases were recorded in 2010, while 4,807 cases were recorded in 2014 (figure 2).

Transgender people are stigmatized by their families, communities, and government officials. They face employment discrimination and are vulnerable to violence, particularly due to the enactment of the Sharia Criminal Law, which penalizes same-sex conduct with sentences of up to three years imprisonment, although the law has rarely been enforced.⁵⁴ A report by Human Rights Watch addressed several cases related to sexual assault of transgender people by state authorities and discrimination related to cross-dressing. It cited an incident in 2014 in which at least 16 adult transwomen were arrested at a wedding and sentenced to seven days imprisonment. It also reported abuse by the state during arrest, custody, and imprisonment.⁵⁵

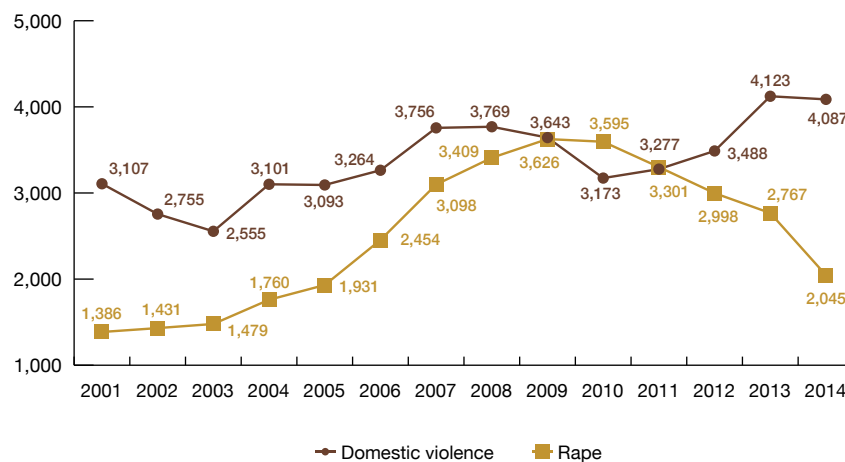


Figure 2. Domestic violence and rape cases (2001–2014)

Source: Royal Malaysia Police and Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development⁵⁶

Notes

- 1 "Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2014–2016," Malaysia Department of Statistics website, https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthem&menu_id=LopheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09&bul_id=OWLxdEV0YlJCSohUZzJyRUcvZEYxZz09.
- 2 Martin Vengadesan, "May 13, 1969: Truth and Reconciliation," *Sunday Star*, May 11, 2008, as reproduced on the Malaysian Bar website, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/news_features/may_13_1969_truth_and_reconciliation.html.
- 3 Adeline Low Hwee Cheng, "The Past in the Present: Memories of the 1964 'Racial Riots' in Singapore," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 29, no. 3 (2001): 431–455.
- 4 Both parties were multiethnic, but ethnic Chinese were dominant among members and cadres.
- 5 Unofficial sources provide much higher estimates, up to 800–1,000. See Vengadesan, "Truth and Reconciliation."
- 6 The measures and statistics used by the Malaysian government have been disputed, but few commentators deny that the policy had a significant effect on poverty. International Crisis Group (ICG), *Malaysia's Coming Election: Beyond Communalism?* Asia Report no. 235 (ICG, 2012), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/malaysia/malaysia-s-coming-election-beyond-communalism>.
- 7 Michael T. Rock, "Southeast Asia's Democratic Developmental States and Economic Growth," *Institutions and Economies* 7, no. 1, (2015): 29–34, http://ijie.um.edu.my/filebank/published_article/7498/IE15April3.pdf.
- 8 The pretext for the arrests was protests by Chinese politicians and activists over the hiring of non-Chinese-speakers as staff in Chinese-language schools. During Operation Lalang, the government also revoked the licenses of several opposition newspapers. Diane K. Mauzy and R. S. Milne, *Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir* (London: Routledge, 1999).
- 9 PAS fell out with UMNO over a political dispute in Kelantan, the home state of PAS president Asri Muda, where UMNO refused to back PAS in a motion of no confidence against the state's chief minister.
- 10 Jason P. Abbott and Sophie Gregorios-Pippas, "Islamization in Malaysia: Processes and Dynamics," *Contemporary Politics* 16, no. 2 (2010): 135–151.
- 11 Anwar and the central bank preferred high interest rates and austerity measures to control Malaysia's currency, while Mahathir preferred to increase government spending and lower rates. "Malaysia's deputy prime minister fired," *BBC News*, September 2, 1998, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/163200.stm>.
- 12 These demands were: (a) clean-up of the electoral rolls, (b) use of indelible ink, (c) abolition of postal voting for the police and military, and (d) free and fair access to the media for all parties. Bersih 2.0 website, www.bersih.org.
- 13 Barisan Nasional's majority was secured with just 49 percent of the vote. See "Ruling coalition wins Malaysian election amid fraud allegations," *ABC News*, May 6, 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-05-06/an-barisan-wins-malaysia-election/4670904>.
- 14 It was alleged that at least USD 700 million was siphoned from the 1Malaysia Development Berhad, a state-owned development fund, to accounts and foundations linked to Najib Razak. See, for example, Tom Wright, "Fund Controversy Threatens Malaysia's Leader," *Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fund-controversy-threatens-malaysias-leader-1434681241?mod=e2fb>.
- 15 Joseph Sipalan, "Malaysian PM voices support for Islamic laws as he seeks to bolster support," *Reuters*, November 29, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-politics-idUSKBN13OoLO>.
- 16 USAID, *Indonesian and Malaysian Support for the Islamic State* (South Arlington: USAID, 2016), <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2016/PBAD863.pdf>.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Mohd Kamarulnizam Abdullah, "Limiting The Threats of Ideological-Based Terror Groups: Lessons to be Learned from Malaysia?" in *International Seminar on Nuclear War and Planetary Emergencies—31st Session: The Cultural Planetary Emergency; Focus on Terrorism*, ed. Antonino Zichichi and Richard Ragaini (Singapore: World Scientific, 2004).
- 19 Most members of the group were also veterans of the Afghan war, and some were also PAS members. Kamarulnizam Abdullah, "Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI): The Links," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 4, no. 1 (2009): 29–46, <http://www.platformpk.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/mujahidin1.pdf>.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Prior to the first successful attack on Malaysia's soil in 2016, a former KMM member, Abu Thalma, appeared in videos released by IS warning of an attack against Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. "Chilling ISIS videos precede first strike on Malaysia," *Straits Times*, July 5, 2016, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/chilling-isis-videos-precede-first-strike-on-malaysia>. A USAID report also identified Murad Halimuddin, a member of KMM and a returnee from Syria, who, along with other Malaysian returnees, planned to launch attacks and create an IS-like Islamic State in Malaysia. USAID, *Indonesian and Malaysian Support*.
- 23 The combined attacks killed 48 and injured hundreds. Noordin Top may also have been involved in the preparation of the 2002 Bali bombing that killed 202 people. He was also a representative of al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia. See "Who was Noordin Mohammed Top? Suspected planner of deadly bomb attacks dies in house raid," *Al Jazeera*, September 18, 2009, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2009/08/2009885495465108.html>.
- 24 The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq* (New York: The Soufan Group, 2015), http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf.
- 25 USAID, *Indonesian and Malaysian Support*.
- 26 Marc Lourdes, "Islamic State launches first successful attack in Malaysia," *CNN*, July 4, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/04/homepage2/islamic-state-at-tack-malaysia/>.
- 27 Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters*.