

Indonesia: Security threats to a stable democracy

Indonesia is a stable country which has undergone a successful transition to civilian democracy. However, there are still concerns about the military's continuing strong influence. There are also a number of internal and external threats to stability, although these remain fairly low-level, for now.

Indonesian armed forces

Indonesia's defence budget is just [0.9 % of GDP](#), much less than in Southeast Asian neighbours such as Malaysia (1.5 %) or Thailand (1.6 %). However, actual military spending is more than this, as the budget does not include all government spending on the armed forces or the military's own revenues (see below).

The Indonesian military has [395 000 personnel](#) (0.15 % of population) — mostly in the army (300 000), with the navy in second place (65 000). Again, this is relatively small — 0.53 % of This serve in the armed forces.

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have [highlighted the need](#) for Indonesia to have a strong military, and military expenditure is gradually increasing. President Jokowi aims to raise the defence budget to [1.5 % of GDP](#), provided that economic growth exceeds 6 %, [which is questionable](#).

Armed forces retain substantial political and economic influence

Indonesia's military was at its most powerful under former dictator General Suharto, who ruled the country from 1967 to 1998. During that time, [one fifth of parliamentary seats](#) were held by unelected military representatives, and active military officers headed numerous ministries and provinces. Since then, democratic reforms have curbed the military's political role – military representatives no longer sit in the parliament, and active military personnel are [barred](#) from standing in elections.

Nevertheless, the military remains enormously influential. President Jokowi himself (unlike his predecessor) has a civilian background, but three of his ministers, including the defence minister, are former senior military officers. Moreover, the army – being more [centralised and efficient](#) than many government bodies – continues to participate in the government's civilian tasks, for example, by [clearing land](#) for a new highway in Papua. It also provides military training to civilians through the [Bela Negara](#) (Defend the Nation) movement, which has [1.6 million](#) members following a recent surge in popularity.

To compensate it for low levels of defence spending, the military is partially self-financing. It was supposed to have [dismantled](#) its formerly vast business empire by 2009, but still has substantial [indirect holdings](#). It also earns money by providing security services (for example to mining company [Freeport](#)) and is accused of involvement in illegal [logging and mining](#). In 2007 the armed forces' own revenues were nearly equal to official government defence spending but are probably much less now.

This continuing strong influence of the Indonesian armed forces over non-military sectors raises numerous concerns. There is a general lack of transparency surrounding their activities and they are not always held to account for past and present [human rights abuses](#). The former include the [1965-1966 massacre](#) of half a million communists, who – according to current defence minister and former general Ryamizard Ryacudu – ['deserved to die'](#). For more recent offences, armed forces personnel are tried in relatively lenient [military courts](#). Finally, some military leaders remain [sceptical](#) about the merits of civilian democracy, and the threat of a Thai-style military coup in the event of a political crisis cannot be completely excluded.

Internal security threats: separatism; ethnic and religious tensions; terrorism

A separatist insurgency has ended in Aceh, but violence continues in Papua

Despite Indonesia's great ethnic and religious diversity, the threat of separatism remains limited. A 2005 peace agreement ended a decades-long [insurgency in Aceh](#). Both Aceh and Papua (like the rest of Indonesia it was a former Dutch colony, but was not transferred to Indonesian administration until 1962) enjoy 'special



autonomy', but [unlike Aceh](#), Papua does not have its own police force, and local political parties are not allowed. [Resentment](#) in Papua is fuelled among other things by migration into the region, [unequal treatment](#) of indigenous Papuans, widespread poverty despite Papua's mineral wealth, and heavy-handed repression of independence movements (for example, imprisonment and even [extrajudicial killings](#) of separatists).

President Jokowi has called for a [softer approach](#), and has taken some [specific steps](#) – such as launching investigations into past human rights abuses and allocating (in 2015) US\$460 million to Papuan infrastructure projects. Nevertheless, progress on all these has been slow, and the violence and repression continue. For example, in May 2016 alone, nearly 2 000 pro-independence [demonstrators](#) were arrested, and 38 Papuan [political prisoners](#) remain behind bars. Security forces are alleged to have shot [Papuan civilians](#), and separatists have retaliated by [killing](#) police and soldiers. In spite of this, the independence movement is [fragmented](#), and Papua is unlikely to break away from Indonesia in the foreseeable future.

Ethnic and religious conflicts have subsided since the early 2000s

Ethnic and religious [conflicts](#) claimed thousands of lives in the early 2000s (for example, [fighting between Christians and Muslims](#) in the Maluku islands), but have mostly subsided since then. President Jokowi has repeatedly [called](#) for greater tolerance, and his government has made encouraging gestures – for example, a proposal to add Baha'i to the list of official religions, and a [new law](#) to protect persecuted religious minorities such as Shiites and Ahmadis. However, neither of these has been implemented yet, and occasional outbursts of violence continue; since 2015, mobs have destroyed [churches in Aceh](#), a [mosque in Papua](#) and a [settlement of the Gafatar sect](#) in Borneo.

Terrorism has been successfully contained, but remains a threat

In January 2016, militants set off a series of [explosions](#) in Jakarta, killing themselves and four civilians. A few months later, a [suicide bomber](#) outside a police station in Solo (Central Java) only succeeded in blowing himself up. Both attacks have been linked to ISIL/Da'esh. Also active is Al Qaeda offshoot Jemaah Islamiyah, perpetrator of the [2002 Bali bombing](#), Indonesia's deadliest terrorist attack which claimed 202 lives; newly resurgent, the organisation is now believed to have [2 000 members](#).

Worrying though this is, the scale of recent attacks suggests that for now, Indonesian jihadists lack the organisational capacity and weapons to inflict a major bloodbath. Detachment 88, Indonesia's counter-terrorist force, was set up in 2003 in response to the Bali bombing. It has proved [effective](#): for example, it shot dead one of the country's most-wanted [jihadists](#) in July 2016, just weeks before uncovering a [plot](#) to set off bombs in neighbouring Singapore. A January 2016 [bill](#) proposes to give security forces greater powers, such as holding suspected terrorists in preventive custody for up to six months.

Piracy: Indonesia is by far the world's worst affected country

With thousands of uninhabited islands, Indonesia is highly vulnerable to piracy: in 2015 it accounted for [108 incidents](#), nearly as much as the rest of the world combined. Admittedly, most of these were minor, involving only small vessels and no firearms. Coordinated [patrols](#) with neighbouring states in the Malacca Straits, used by one third of the world's [shipping](#), have reduced but not eliminated piracy there.

External threats: Chinese expansion in the South China Sea

China is only one of several countries whose fleet regularly [fishes illegally](#) in Indonesian waters, but its trawlers are sometimes accompanied by Chinese coastguards in the waters surrounding Indonesia's Natuna Islands, parts of which are [claimed](#) by China. In March 2016, a Chinese coastguard vessel [intervened](#) to free a fishing boat that had been seized by an Indonesian patrol. Jakarta protested, but still [denies](#) that it has a territorial dispute with China. Such restraint may have to do with Indonesia's need for continued Chinese investment, and its desire to act as a south-east Asian regional leader, [mediating](#) between China and neighbouring countries such as the Philippines.



Nevertheless, Indonesia continues to assert its sovereignty over the Natunas; in June 2016, Jokowi held a cabinet meeting on a warship off the islands, and his government decided to upgrade a [military base](#) there.

European Parliament views. The [resolution](#) of 26 February 2014 on the EU-Indonesia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement expresses concerns about incidents of violence against religious minorities and military impunity for human rights abuses, and calls on the military to withdraw from economic activities.