

Fact Sheet: Militarisation and Human Rights in Indonesia (July 2025)

Democratic Reform Undermined

After the fall of General Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, Indonesia's *Reformasi* movement ushered in a new era of democratic and civil-military reform. A key aim was to professionalise the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and remove them from political life. Yet, over two decades later, military reform remains deeply incomplete. Rather than returning to the barracks, the TNI is reasserting its influence in civilian governance and public policy.

According to the Civil Society Coalition to Reform the Security Sector, by 2023, 2,569 active-duty TNI personnel occupied civilian posts—ranging from cabinet secretaries to directors of ministries and state institutions. This violates the spirit of reform and erodes civilian supremacy.

Revised TNI Law (2025): Entrenching Military Power

On 20th March 2025, President Prabowo Subianto—former general and son-in-law of Suharto—pushed through a controversial revision to the TNI Law. The amendment retroactively legalises the appointment of active military personnel to civilian positions such as The State Intelligence Agency, National Cyber and Encryption Agency, National Narcotics Agency to the Supreme Court and Attorney General's Office.

This haste legal revision reflects the government's reluctance to fulfil its international human rights obligations. Indonesia has yet to ratify key treaties, including:

- The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED)
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OP-CAT)
- The Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OP-ICCPR)
- The Genocide Convention
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

The revised law blurs the lines between civilian and military authority. It grants the military access to policymaking processes, strategic intelligence, and public finances without proportional oversight. This structural shift threatens democratic accountability and risks entrenching the military as a political actor. It should also be worth noting that the revision process went through secretive meetings such as the one held in Fairmont Hotel Jakarta on 15 March 2025 with the swift adoption on 20th March 2025. Whereas all matters related to policy formulation require meaningful public participation.

President Prabowo's actions reinforce a broader militaristic narrative. His ministers were required to attend a military-style retreat to instill "discipline and loyalty," and similar orientations were imposed on over 500 regional leaders following the 2024 local elections.

While not an overt return to authoritarianism, the legal formalisation of military roles in civilian life marks a significant departure from democratic norms. It signals a long-term reconfiguration of the state's security architecture—quiet, legalistic, and potentially more enduring than past crises.

Spotlight on West Papua: A Protracted Crisis

The conflict in West Papua, stemming from Indonesia's annexation in 1963, remains unresolved. A controversial 1969 plebiscite integrated the region into Indonesia, but armed resistance and civil unrest continued. The consequences include:

- **Armed conflict:** Low-intensity warfare between Indonesian forces and pro-independence groups such as the Free Papua Movement (OPM). In 2025, an extra 2,488 units were deployed in Papua, comprising 107 units from the National Police (Polri) and 2,381 units from TNI.
- **Widespread human rights abuses:** Torture, extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and displacement. Based on KontraS' monitoring data, from January to June 2025, there were 26 incidents involving Papuan communities, including 14 shootings, 7 acts of torture, 1 incident of ill-treatment, 4 assaults, 2 cases of intimidation, 5 arbitrary arrests, and 3 instances of forced dispersal. These incidents resulted in 18 civilians being injured, 36 killed, and 127 arrested.
- **Suppression of culture and speech:** Indigenous identities and languages are under pressure; media access remains restricted. In early 2025, widespread student protests against the rejection of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) policy in Papua were met with harsh responses, including tear gas shootings and intimidation by security forces.
- **Resource exploitation:** The region's wealth fuels economic inequality and local marginalisation.

UN Special Rapporteurs have repeatedly raised alarms over gross human rights violations, including child killings and mass displacements. They continue to call for immediate humanitarian access and independent investigations.

LGBTQ+ Rights: Growing Criminalisation

Indonesia's legal environment is increasingly hostile to LGBTQ+ communities. Despite national laws not criminalising same-sex relations, local governments—especially those adopting Sharia-inspired regulations—are creating legal grey zones that allow repression to flourish.

In 2025, police arrested dozens at private gatherings on "pornography" charges. In Aceh, public floggings for consensual same-sex relations continue. The upcoming Civil Code (effective 2026) is expected to worsen the situation by granting provincial authorities wider powers under vaguely defined moral laws.

Human Rights Defenders Under Attack

Human rights and environmental defenders face an escalating campaign of criminalisation, particularly in regions designated as part of Indonesia's *Strategic National Projects* (PSN). Between 2017 and 2023:

- 35 PSN-related agrarian conflicts were recorded
- 85 individuals were criminalised
- A total of 497 defenders faced legal action in 212 land dispute cases

State actors, including police forces, are implicated in nearly half of these cases, often under the pretext of “securing investments.” Corporations and unidentified actors are also involved, indicating both direct and proxy repression.

The legal instruments used include the ITE (Electronic Information and Transactions) Law, defamation laws, and new provisions under the criminal code. These are systematically employed to silence dissent and discourage civic participation.

Activists face surveillance, SLAPP lawsuits, and harassment. In one high-profile case, environmentalist Daniel Tangkilisan was charged under the ITE Law in 2024 for opposing shrimp farming practices—underscoring the chilling effect of digital repression.

Despite calls from civil society and international organisations, the government has failed to introduce protective legislation or implement non-repressive safeguards for civic actors. For worse, The administration of President Prabowo Subianto has designated 77 national strategic projects (PSN) as part of the 2025-2029 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). Hence, further potential acts of intimidation and violence will be anticipated.

Recommendations for European Policymakers

1. **Reinforce Democratic Norms:** Press for the repeal of the 2025 TNI Law revision and support initiatives that strengthen civilian oversight over security institutions such as the efforts to [judicial review](#) by civil society elements in Indonesia which started late June and will continue for the next 60 days.
2. **Condition Engagement:** Tie bilateral and multilateral cooperation to human rights benchmarks, particularly ratification of core treaties (ICPPED, OPCAT, OP-ICCPR, Rome Statute).
3. **Support Human Rights Defenders:** Provide direct support and protection mechanisms for Indonesian HRDs, especially in PSN zones.
4. **Increase Monitoring of Papua:** Push for unfettered access to West Papua for humanitarian actors, journalists, and UN bodies.
5. **Defend LGBTQ+ Rights:** Oppose legal developments that criminalise LGBTQ+ individuals and support civil society groups working on equality and non-discrimination.