

## Country summary: Indonesia

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### Introduction

In the early pandemic years, Indonesia implemented “large-scale social restrictions” (“PSBB”), later replaced by “community activities restrictions enforcement” (“PPKM”) (CNN Indonesia, [2021](#)). Only individuals meeting essential needs criteria or employed in specified sectors were permitted to leave their residences, with a mandatory requirement to wear face masks (Kompas, [2020](#)). The following brief explores other policies that Indonesia implemented throughout the pandemic, with a specific focus on policies that impacted civic freedoms in the country.

#### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

##### Suppression of criticism of government’s pandemic measures

Authorities used the Criminal Code to curb criticism of the government’s handling of the pandemic. The Central Investigative Agency issued a directive warning that individuals who criticize the President or other high-ranking officials could face legal repercussions under the Criminal Code (LaporCovid19, [2021](#)). The code criminalizes defamation. Indeed, in early 2020, the National Police charged 51 individuals for allegedly spreading fake information about COVID-19 and blocked 38 social media accounts on the same grounds (Detik News, [2020](#), Human Rights Watch, [2020](#)).

Police officers also removed murals criticizing the pandemic response, hunted down anonymous street artists, and cracked down on people selling merchandise with related images, claiming that the murals were insulting to a state symbol (the President) (The Jakarta Post, [2021](#)).

##### Access to information

The government did not provide consistent and transparent information regarding the pandemic, with discrepancies between national and sub-national government reporting. For example, On April 7, 2020, the Health Ministry reported 2,491 cases and 209 deaths, with 13,186 tests conducted. However, Jakarta’s Department of Parks and Cemeteries recorded 639 COVID-19 protocol burials by April 6, 2020 (Human Rights Watch, [2020](#)). The Governor of Jakarta, whose city and surrounding suburbs represented half of all infections in Indonesia, expressed concerns over the significant underreporting of infections and deaths due to low COVID-19 testing rates (Reuters, [2020](#)).

##### Attacks against the media

Media organizations and journalists also faced attacks after their critical coverage of the government's handling of the pandemic. For example, between January and July 2020, the Alliance of Independent Journalists documented 13 instances of violence against journalists due to criticism of government COVID-19 policies. Accusers included government officials, law enforcement, members of mass organizations, and the public (US Department of State, [2020](#)). Also in 2020, four media organizations experienced digital assaults, including the hacking of the Tempo.co website to display a message advocating against misinformation and urging adherence to journalist ethics (Tempo.Co, [2020](#)). The Platform Tirto.id also experienced an attack after it published pieces criticizing the State Intelligence Agency and military's involvement in the formulation of COVID-19 treatment: the hackers removed articles from Tirto.id's platform (VoANews [2020](#)).

#### FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Law enforcement often cited COVID-19 prevention as grounds for restricting assemblies, dispersing a wide range of protests from demonstrations regarding Papua's Special Autonomy and the Omnibus Law, to workers' rights. For example, in Papua, police denied permits for assemblies due to rising COVID-19 infections (RNZ, [2021](#)). In Jakarta, law enforcement detained 30 student demonstrators because they did not follow health protocols (CNN Indonesia, [2021](#)).

Additionally, Indonesian authorities violently suppressed student-led protests in the country throughout the pandemic. Notably, in 2022, labor activists, workers, and students gathered to protest the government's economic policy. In response, law enforcement deployed water cannons and tear gas on the protestors (New York Times, [2022](#)); they also detained several individuals participating in peaceful protests (U.S. Department of State, [2022](#)).

#### RIGHT TO PRIVACY

During the pandemic, the Indonesian government introduced the Peduli Lindungi (Care Protect) app to track COVID-19 cases and issued regulations requiring individuals who visit public areas to "check in" using the app. Because there were no clear limitations on how authorities would use the sensitive information gathered and gaps in existing laws to protect data privacy, civil society worried about abuse of the data gathered through the app (APC, [2022](#)). Indeed, the data of around 1.3 million citizens stored in the government's tracing app was reportedly exposed and leaked following a suspected security flaw (Reuters, [2021](#)).

## Conclusion

Measures aimed to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia unduly restricted civic freedoms when authorities applied them broadly to curb dissent. Authorities and civil society must work together to protect civic freedoms in times of emergencies.