

Protecting forests takes political and moral courage

By Rachael Garrett, Joss Lyons-White and Matthew Spencer

The Conversation

Rachael Garret is Moran Professor of Conservation and Development, Joss Lyons-White is a postdoctoral research associate on conservation science and Matthew Spencer is a visiting fellow on conservation, all at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. The article is republished under a Creative Commons license.

The vast tropical forest nations of Indonesia and Brazil are both home to millions of people, including indigenous communities. They store enormous amounts of carbon to protect our climate and are home to staggering numbers of species found nowhere else in the world.

How are their forests still standing while other forests have fallen? Answering this question is critical in the current global moment. As people gear up for the 30th United Nations climate summit (COP30) in Belém, Brazil, in November, this “Amazon Cop” could help galvanize action to save the world’s forests with a clearer blueprint for success.

While progress at global climate and biodiversity summits often seems limited, our study highlights how sustained pressure from civil society and international commitments can lead to improved political will for forest protection.

In the agricultural powerhouse of Brazil, 60 percent of the land area (511 million hectares, more than 20 times the size of the United Kingdom) is still covered in natural forests. In the diverse archipelago of Indonesia, known for its globally important production of palm oil, among other tropical crops, 50 percent of the land (nearly 94 million ha) remains.

Last year, global records for deforestation were shattered, with 6.7 million ha of pristine tropical forests being cleared, an area almost the size of Ireland. Even by recent standards this was a huge amount of loss, driven by raging fires in the hottest year on record.

Yet over 1 billion ha of tropical forests remain. Two of the forest giants, Brazil and Indonesia, have both bucked the trend of increasing forest loss at different times in recent years.

Brazil reduced deforestation in the Amazon rainforest by 84 percent between 2004 and 2012. However, deforestation picked up again in the late 2010s and under president Jair Bolsonaro’s administration.

In Indonesia, a similarly impressive 78 percent reduction in deforestation was achieved between 2016, when devastating forest fires created a haze across southeast Asia, and 2021. Fortunately

these reductions have been sustained, at least for now.

To understand the reasons for Brazil and Indonesia’s success, we brought together the world’s leading experts in forest conservation in these two regions. Most of them came from these two countries.

By asking our experts to participate in multiple rounds of surveys and providing feedback on responses from one round to the next, we could identify the full range of factors that are important for protecting forests.

This approach, known as a Delphi process, enabled us to avoid groupthink or excessive influence by strong-willed or well-respected characters.

Our results were clear: Across both countries, our experts judged that political will and law enforcement were by far the most important factors for protecting forests.

The study revealed how international diplomacy and advocacy by civil society have been pivotal in creating the awareness and demand for political leadership to emerge. Moving to the 2010s, indigenous rights were seen as an important complement to political will and law enforcement.

These results point to the need to accelerate pressure on policymakers to protect forests and continue to spread public awareness. This is a difficult task with a human toll: Worldwide, more than 2,100 environmental defenders were killed between 2012 and 2023.

Political will to conserve forests also waned in the late 2010s in Brazil, and is in question under the current Indonesian administration.

Yet the need for instant results and a temptation to pursue the latest big idea should not overshadow the long-lasting and hard-won consequences of sustained pressure for good forest stewardship.

As policymakers, activists and scientists from around the world converge on the Amazon for the next UN climate summit, the message from our research is clear: Above the fray of tense negotiations and discussions over policy minutiae, political leadership and persistent advocacy can and do protect forests. We have done it before, and we can do it again.



AFF/Juni Kriswanto

Interfaith meeting: *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) students visit the reclining Buddha statue on May 7 at Maha Vihara Mojopahit in Mojokerto, East Java, ahead of Waisak, a festival that commemorates the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha, which fell on May 12 this year.

‘Pesantren’ can lead the new jihad to uphold peace

By Irfan Idris

Jakarta

A professor of Political Islam at the Alauddin State Islamic University (UIN) Makassar and an alumnus of Al-Qur'an IMMIM modern Islamic boarding school, Makassar



the values of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance) and *ta’adul* (justice) within society.

The rise of intolerance, social polarization and hate speech, both in public spaces and online, have undeniably challenged our collective ability to preserve *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, the spirit of unity in diversity that defines Indonesia’s identity. For *pesantren*, however, this challenge is not new; it goes to the very heart of their enduring teachings: to have faith with understanding, to practice religion with compassion, and to seek knowledge with humility.

In many parts of the world, religious institutions struggle to defend their teachings from political exploitation or extremist distortion. Indonesia’s *pesantren*, however, stand apart. They embody a delicate balance between faith and reason, between devotion and dialogue. Rooted in the principle of Islam *rahmatan lil alamin* (Islam as a mercy to all creation) *pesantren* have, from their inception, nurtured peace through coexistence rather than confrontation.

The essence of *pesantren* education lies not merely in the study of the Quran or classical Islamic texts, but in the formation of character. Students, or *santri*, are nurtured to embody virtues that extend beyond personal piety: empathy, humility, respect for others and a deep sense of civic responsibility. These are the values they carry back into society, becoming quiet ambassadors of peace and moderation within their communities.

Traditional, modern, and even Salafi *pesantren* all share this

fundamental moral foundation. Their commitment to peace is rooted in the very meaning of Islam itself. Islam is not just the name of a religion; it is a word imbued with the spirit of peace. To be Muslim is to be a bearer of harmony, with oneself, with others and with creation. In that sense, anyone who promotes love, compassion and peace, regardless of faith, is, in essence, reflecting the heart of Islam.

Yet, the path toward peace is rarely easy. Many young people today grow up surrounded by misleading narratives, both online and in public discourse, that frame religion through the lens of fear or hostility. Some are drawn to false heroism, a desire to defend faith without truly understanding its compassionate essence. This is where *pesantren* must rise to this challenge, not only as centers of learning but as guardians of a compassionate, rational faith.

This inclusive and dialogical tradition of *pesantren* can serve as a natural antidote to both sectarian and intrareligious intolerance. By fostering critical thinking and social empathy, *pesantren* demonstrate that Islam is not a threat, but a moral force that dignifies peace.

As Indonesia celebrates National Santri Day today, it is worth recalling the spirit of resolution of jihad once proclaimed by Nahdlatul Ulama during the struggle for independence. Today, that jihad takes on a different form, not a physical resistance, but of moral perseverance: the struggle to uphold peace and correct the misconceptions that cloud the image of Islam.

There are three essential roles that *pesantren* students and alumni must continue to uphold.

First, *pesantren* serve as centers of knowledge, ensuring that the understanding of Islam remains grounded in its historical, social and ethical contexts.

Second, they embody moral communities that practice dialogue, empathy and cooperation in daily life.

Third, *pesantren* act as social catalysts, building connections with wider society through humanitarian initiatives, interfaith programs and the peaceful resolution of communal challenges.

Together with ulama and interfaith leaders, *pesantren* carry a moral calling to demonstrate that Islam is not a religion of impulse, but a religion of reflection. Through religious literacy, dialogue and compassion, they can help restore Islam’s image as a faith that upholds mercy, justice and solidarity.

For peace is never born out of silence; it grows through presence, through the willingness to listen, to understand and to respond wisely to the anxieties of others. In this regard, *pesantren* offer something profoundly relevant to our divided world: a way of faith that seeks harmony, not domination.

Indonesia’s *pesantren*, with their long-standing traditions of moderation, discipline and openness to diversity, possess immense potential to safeguard the image of Islam as a religion of love and peace. Their teachings affirm that peace is not merely a social goal but the very essence of faith, and that to be a bearer of mercy to all creation is their ultimate purpose.

In this sense, *pesantren* students and alumni hold a vital role in answering the challenges of our time: to spread understanding rather than hostility, and to cultivate trust where suspicion once grew.

Reimagining Pancasila’s ideological power for the future

When George C. Lodge and Ezra F. Vogel published *Ideology and National Competitiveness* in 1987, they offered a timeless thesis: The true foundation of national strength is not material or technological, but ideological.

For them, competitiveness is not merely an outcome of productivity or trade advantage; it is the expression of a nation’s collective belief system—its moral consensus, cultural discipline and shared sense of purpose. Ideology, when open, adaptive and coherent, serves as the invisible infrastructure that sustains a nation’s competitiveness across generations.

Lodge and Vogel observed that every successful nation is guided by an ideology that shapes its economic and political behavior. Japan’s postwar miracle was fueled by an ideology of harmony and communal responsibility, linking industrial discipline and technological pragmatism to nationalism.

Similarly, South Korea’s rapid post-1950 advancement stemmed from a communitarian capitalism that synergized the state, business and managers, who worked together as patriots for national development. The United States dynamism, conversely, emerged from an ideology of individual liberty and creative risk-taking that sustained innovation and entrepreneurship.

Each framework, regardless of its inherent strengths, defined



By Wibawanto Nugroho Widodo

Jakarta

Deputy head of Defense and Security Affairs at the National Resilience Institute Alumni’s Strategic Center and international director of Democracy and Integrity for Peace Institute. The views expressed are personal.

how societies pursued excellence, fairness and innovation. Today, as irregular competition—spanning hybrid warfare, disinformation, cyber rivalry and supply chain manipulation—defines global interaction, this insight is more resonant than ever.

The modern battlefield is moral as much as material. Nations that align ideology with adaptability will prevail; those clinging to rigid dogmas will decay. Lodge and Vogel categorized Korea, Japan and Taiwan as communitarian high performers.

In comparison, the US and the United Kingdom were deemed too individualistic, their free-market ideology making long-term strategic coordination difficult.

Indonesia under President Prabowo Subianto stands at a historic inflection point. The country is blessed with vast resources, strategic geography and demographic vitality. Yet, these material assets alone will not guarantee survival or leadership in an era defined by knowledge, technology and strategic coherence.

Indonesia’s greatest challenge is not economic but ideologi-

cal: how to transform its founding philosophy, Pancasila, into a living force for competitiveness. President Prabowo’s focus—on food and energy security, defense modernization and economic sovereignty—instinctively recognizes this challenge. But for these priorities to endure, they must be grounded in a unifying belief system that inspires performance, meritocracy and shared confidence in a national purpose.

Lodge and Vogel remind us that competitiveness is born not from policy, but from the moral architecture of a nation—the trust, discipline and imagination sustained by its ideology.

Since 1945, Pancasila has been the spiritual and ethical foundation of Indonesia, embodying principles of divinity, humanity, unity, democracy and justice. These principles have successfully preserved cohesion across a vast and diverse archipelago.

However, over the decades, Pancasila has oscillated between inspiration and instrumentalization—at times celebrated as a unifying ideal, at others imposed as a political tool. To lead in the 21st cen-

tury, Indonesia must evolve Pancasila from an ideology of survival into an ideology of competitiveness—one that nurtures innovation, openness and moral courage rather than mere conformity.

Pancasila must be treated as a working ideology—a living compass for national progress—not a sacred relic. Its genius lies in its resilience, not its rigidity. It serves as Indonesia’s center of gravity—the moral and intellectual core that anchors the nation amid the turbulence of globalization and digital disruption.

But this core must remain open and adaptive, continually reinterpreting itself to address emerging realities—from artificial intelligence and climate adaptation to geopolitical polarization—without losing its moral soul.

As a strategic culture, Pancasila shapes Indonesia’s approach to power, deterrence and diplomacy. It underpins a defense posture rooted in sovereignty without aggression and a foreign policy grounded in balance—between great powers, and between economic ambition and ethical responsibility. This is what makes Pancasila not merely Indonesia’s past, but its strategic blueprint for the future.

Lodge and Vogel warned that when an ideology becomes dogmatic, it transforms from a source of vitality into a source of paralysis, leading to national stagnation. This warning is critical for Indonesia. Treating Pancasila as

a closed ideology—a fixed doctrine beyond reinterpretation—betrays its essence.

Such dogmatism turns Pancasila into an instrument of power, engineering loyalty instead of cultivating critical wisdom. An open Pancasila, by contrast, acts as a source of creative energy. It invites dialogue, learning and adaptation, empowering citizens to think critically and innovate within the moral boundaries of humanity and justice.

To secure global competitiveness, Pancasila must be understood as an open, adaptive ethical software that evolves with time and technology. Only then can it nourish a culture of excellence, responsibility and resilience.

Indonesia’s task is to keep Pancasila alive, transforming it from a ceremonial pledge into an operative philosophy that informs governance, education, science and innovation. This demands institutional innovation: embedding Pancasila not only in civic textbooks but in the DNA of universities, industries and the defense establishment.

It means cultivating a generation of leaders who see Pancasila not as nostalgia, but as a framework for national competitiveness. In the Prabowo era, the President’s focus on defense, food, and energy security reflects an instinct for sovereignty. However, these efforts will fully succeed only if animated by a coher-

ent ideological ecosystem.

To build a strong defense, Indonesia must first build a strong idea of what it defends. To achieve sovereignty, it must cultivate a shared conviction that national progress is collective, not zero-sum.

In today’s asymmetric competition—which is hybrid, nonlinear and psychological—ideology is both armor and weapon. Indonesia’s pluralistic values and balanced diplomacy position it as a potential ideological stabilizer in the Indo-Pacific.

This requires strengthening three pillars of ideological resilience: cognitive resilience through education that fosters strategic thinking, reasoning and creativity; cultural resilience by mobilizing diversity as a form of soft power; and institutional resilience by which governance aligns performance with the ethical and moral principles of exemplary, altruistic servant-leadership derived from Pancasila.

Indonesia’s rise will depend on the belief system that animates its people and institutions. Lodge and Vogel taught that national competitiveness is ideological: It is about how nations define purpose, discipline and justice.

President Prabowo’s first year has rebuilt the outer pillars of sovereignty. The next task is to fortify the inner one: the ideological heart that will determine whether Indonesia merely survives or truly leads.