

# Germany in the Eyes of Indonesia

A strategic partnership under scrutiny

Study report, June 2024





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# | Foreword

The world is changing – rapidly and at ever shorter intervals. Old ways of doing things have disappeared.

In 1983, the G7 countries accounted for 49% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and the BRICS countries for 11%. Today, 40 years later, the BRICS nations (37%) have now overtaken the G7 countries (32%) in terms of share of global GDP.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the bipolar world order became a multipolar one. China and increasingly India have since established themselves as poles alongside the United States (US) and Russia; the European Union (EU) is the fifth pole.

Indonesia positioned itself as a second-tier country in Asia under the presidency of Joko Widodo (2014 to 2024). The most populous country and the only G20 member among the 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member states, it has undergone impressive economic development since its transition to democracy in 1998. Its economy is growing by 5% per cent every year.

The German Federal Government has identified Indonesia as a strategic partner in its pursuit of value-driven policies on foreign affairs, development and security. The fact that Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz invited Indonesia to the G7 summit in Elmau in June 2022 underlines the special role Germany has accorded to Indonesia: it sees the country as a global partner. Germany has been supporting Indonesia with large-scale programmes for decades; it is currently working with the country to roll out the Indonesian-German Green Infrastructure Initiative in a strategic partnership and is participating, along with other countries, in the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), which was agreed at the end of 2022.

But what is the view from the other side of the partnership? How are Germany's efforts in connection with this geopolitically key country in South-East Asia

perceived in Indonesia itself? How important is Germany for Indonesia today? Does Indonesia see Germany as a partner with whom it can pursue shared interests and values?

To find out how Indonesia currently perceives Germany, we carried out a total of 40 interviews in Jakarta from 11 to 22 March 2024. The Indonesian interviewees came from very different areas of society. This report summarises the findings of these interviews. The aim is to prompt decision-makers to reflect on whether Indonesia's view of Germany fits with what Germany had consciously planned. Or are some adjustments needed?

This much can be said in advance: Germany is a reliable partner for Indonesia when it comes to implementing cooperation agreements. Nevertheless, Germany's visibility, image and attractiveness in Indonesia have suffered. We could improve this by means of more pragmatism, more modern formats of communication and cooperation, combined with regular higher-ranking visits from Germany's federal ministries and their pursuit of a common, coherent strategy. Last but not least, Germany would need to improve its public relations efforts to make its contribution more visible.

Jakarta, June 2024



**Martin Hansen**

Country Director for Indonesia & ASEAN

## **Authors' note**

The following text comprises four sections, describing the perceptions of the people interviewed. The authors of the study developed this structure on the basis of the interview material. The sections therefore represent different aspects of how Germany is perceived and of the German-Indonesian relationship as addressed by the majority of the interviewees.

Some repetition is inevitable. For example, some observations on Germany were used to describe changes in the situation on the ground in Indonesia and to characterise present-day Germany, and as a way of developing suggestions on how to improve German-Indonesian relations. This allows readers to pick out aspects of the topic that particularly interest them and to either read selected parts or all of the text. The assessments and interpretations below originate exclusively from the interviewees and do not represent the opinion of GIZ or the authors of the study.

We hope you enjoy reading the study and would be delighted to see its findings inspiring as many readers as possible to continue improving Germany's cooperation with Indonesia.



# | Executive Summary

## Focus on Indonesia

### The new Indonesia

Indonesia has made remarkable progress in recent decades – as people there proudly point out – and is increasingly presenting itself with confidence on the international stage. The country strives to use its natural and human resources efficiently to increase prosperity for the benefit of its population. It is happy to take its cue from the German and Northern European social and environmental market economy models, but would like to implement these models on its own terms.

The long-standing partnership between Germany and Indonesia, which dates back to the 1960s, is rated positively on the whole. Despite the broad-based and well-established collaboration, the interviewees believe there is still considerable potential for relationships to be deepened in order to redefine opportunities for the future and realise them together.

One thing emerged clearly from the interviews: Indonesia has raised its expectations of international collaboration arrangements, including in the area of development cooperation. The Indonesian partners want cooperation on an equal footing with formats that have been adapted to today's needs; they would also like to see a better coordinated approach across the different policy fields and more consultation between politics and business.

### Germany's dwindling presence

Our Indonesian interviewees believe that German companies, once very present in Indonesia, have lost visibility over the years, while Asian competitors have captured the markets. Today, the strength of German industry tends to be in the B2B sector, while consumer goods predominantly come from Asian countries.

Generally speaking, Germany's involvement in Indonesia is currently perceived as somewhat low-key, with strikingly little follow-up after initial contacts. Interviewees see this as reason to question Germany's general interest in a deeper partnership with Indonesia.

### Overshadowed by the competition

Asia's economic powers, on the other hand, especially China, are continuing their push into the Indonesian market with dynamic and cost-effective offers and expanding their already dominant position. By comparison, Germany appears hesitant and less able to adapt, an attitude that is costing it market share.

The interviewees see China in particular as using pragmatic and comprehensive solutions that are rapidly implemented and closely tailored to Indonesia's needs. By contrast, Germany's approach seems cumbersome and overly concerned with principles, which often results in delays and erodes competitiveness.

German companies, the interviewees continued, are cautious and risk-averse, especially in new sectors such as

digitalisation and electric vehicles. This hesitancy is seen as a disadvantage in a dynamic and fiercely competitive market.

They believe that Germany's technological leadership is declining more and more due to a wait-and-see attitude and a lack of commitment. Countries such as China and Japan are reportedly more aggressive and use their economic and political relations to consolidate and expand their influence in Indonesia.

## Now lacklustre

### Europe's problematic reputation

Today, many Indonesians no longer regard Europe as forward-looking. The continent is considered to be of historical significance, but not so relevant to current and future developments.

Moreover, European foreign policy often comes across as normative and patronising. This attitude, the interviewees believe, makes it difficult to cooperate on an equal footing and is viewed critically in Indonesia.

Europe's colonial past also influences how its trade policy is viewed in Indonesia. Debates over palm oil and nickel are perceived as neocolonial and meet with strong opposition.

### Between excellence and loss of relevance

As a result, compared with other countries, Germany is losing relevance in Indonesia: as an investor and a trading partner, as a country with good educational

opportunities, and as an attractive destination for tourists and labour migrants. More dynamic regions such as Asia, on the other hand, are gaining influence and appeal, the interviewees pointed out.

Although Germany's reputation for excellence in engineering is untarnished, it is now seen as lagging behind other leading nations in terms of innovation in new technologies. Indonesians feel that Germany is trailing behind in areas such as artificial intelligence and digital media in particular.

Germany is also becoming less attractive to Indonesian students as a place to pursue an education. Countries such as the US, the UK and Australia attract more students, despite the fact that the number of English-language degree courses in Germany has increased.

### A mixed picture of Germany

Although Germany continues to enjoy a high reputation for its engineering skills and discipline, it is nevertheless seen as less flexible and modern compared with more dynamic societies.

Germany is viewed by external observers as a country facing considerable challenges, such as an ageing population, high immigration levels and a high cost of living. Added to that, it is under political and economic strain resulting from its support for Ukraine in its efforts to defend itself against Russia. These problems greatly affect the global perception of the country's political stability.

Germany's support for Israel in the Gaza conflict meets with criticism in Muslim-

majority Indonesia. Germany's policy here is perceived as inconsistent and problematic, especially when compared with its involvement in other international conflicts.

## Old strengths, new opportunities

### Common values, common interests

According to our interviewees, Indonesia and Germany share many fundamental values in areas such as human rights and the rule of law. They see these shared convictions as providing a solid basis for deeper cooperation.

The two countries face similar global challenges, such as climate change and sustainable energy policies. These mutual problems could form the basis of closer cooperation.

### Potential for more in-depth cooperation

The respondents believe that there are significant untapped opportunities for cooperation in the field of green technologies, where Germany is considered to be a leader. They believe that closer cooperation could be of mutual benefit.

They also see the migration of skilled workers as offering considerable opportunities for both Germany and Indonesia, but point out that there are obstacles such as strict visa requirements and language barriers that the two countries need to tackle together. Making this

exchange more effective could benefit both countries considerably.

The current political changes in Indonesia are seen as an opportunity to deepen bilateral relations further. More intensive cooperation, however, would require Germany to send clear signals and visibly step up its involvement.

### The role of Germany/Europe

Indonesia appreciates Europe and Germany for their ethical standards and leadership roles in the field of human rights and environmental technology.

Indonesia would therefore like to see greater European involvement at times, including in its own region, in order to achieve a better balance of power between China and the US. Our interviewees think Germany could take the initiative within the EU and instigate change.

After all, Germany is seen as a key player in Europe with particularly important influence in political and economic matters. They believe a clearer and more consistent strategy could further strengthen Germany's leadership role.

## What needs to be done

### Genuine partnership and new formats

Indonesia would like to see a partnership with Germany that is about more than just trade and would include promoting the Indonesian economy and achieving a better understanding of local needs.

The EU's position, often perceived in Indonesia as patronising, would have to give way to a more balanced dialogue. A genuine partnership, the interviewees point out, requires more mutual respect and recognition.

European policies – particularly trade policies, which are perceived as neocolonial and as hindering Indonesia's development – need to be reviewed and corrected. Interviewees drew attention to the need for a strategy that recognises Indonesia as an equal partner and benefits both sides equally.

Greater involvement of local actors would also be necessary. And better communication, they pointed out, could help make collaboration more effective. Innovative financing instruments and more intensive cooperation with civil society would be needed.

## More dialogue and public outreach

Interviewees believed that Germany should increase its visibility in Indonesia by being more proactive in communicating its initiatives, for example. Better public outreach work could make Germany's commitment more widely known beyond the close circle of those involved.

They pointed out that Germany's media strategy needs to be modernised to make more intensive use of social media and to speak more broadly to younger target groups. Likewise, they noted that a generally stronger media presence could improve how Germany is perceived.

They also see a need for regular and high-level exchanges between Germany and Indonesia with a view to strengthening bilateral relations, believing that better cooperation will not be possible without a more intensive dialogue.

## Presence as a reflection of willingness

The people we interviewed feel that presence is ultimately the key to success. The degree to which other countries are perceived as patiently doing in-depth work on the ground to tackle the challenges ahead as partners is seen as the yardstick of their interest in Indonesia.

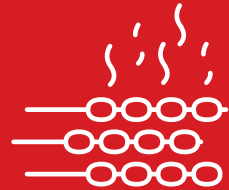
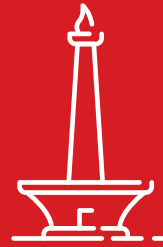
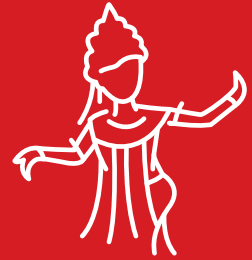
Indonesia's recommendation is for Germany to cultivate a deeper and long-term commitment that goes beyond economic interests. The view of the interviewees is that only an integrated strategic approach can sustainably strengthen the partnership.

To this end, they believe it also makes sense to step up cooperation in education and research because sharing knowledge and working on joint projects offers great potential.

Last but not least, as they pointed out, the cultural exchange between Germany and Indonesia should be intensified to promote mutual understanding and cooperation.



# | Focus on Indonesia



## The new Indonesia

### Increased self-confidence

Indonesia has made impressive development progress in recent decades. The participants in this study stressed this as the premise underlying all further considerations. It is becoming increasingly self-confident and independent of foreign aid. People are aware of the country's own wealth of natural and human resources and would like to use them to further increase its prosperity and social protection for the benefit of the population. A social and environmental market economy of the kind seen in Germany and Northern Europe is definitely considered an option that could be used for guidance. However, people consistently emphasised that models of this kind cannot simply be replicated and that the country must develop its own path to achieve this. This path is something they would like to define and seek independently. Any support from abroad must be provided on the basis of partnership, the interviewees stressed. Indonesia is being courted and is increasingly able to choose its partners. Attempts from other countries to impose their own ideas of development and their own values on Indonesia are sensitively registered and vehemently rejected.

In economic terms, Indonesia's goal is to become one of the world's four largest economies in the near future. This could offer German companies increased opportunities for cooperation. However, it was pointed out that Indonesia now chooses its economic partners with great care and seeks the kind of cooperation opportunities that promise genuine mutual benefit.

*Indonesia is now more self-confident, has greater financial opportunities and well-trained people.*

Indonesia's new strength is seen as heralding an opportunity for a new era of partnership between equals, in which old dependencies and paternalistic cooperation patterns need to be abandoned and shared opportunities for the future redefined and realised.

### Transformation of a partnership

The long-standing cooperation between Germany and Indonesia is fundamentally viewed in a positive light. Those people who have, or have had, more to do with Germany even remember the early days of cooperation in the 1960s when Germany supported Indonesia in its fight against malaria. Over the decades, the cooperation developed into a comprehensive partnership, they recall, pointing out how it covers a wide range of areas from health promotion and technological cooperation to armaments collaboration and cultural exchange. Germany's increased commitment to promoting democracy – through its political foundations, for example – following the Suharto era was also noted. In contrast to relations with other countries, cooperation with Germany is perceived as being continuous and running smoothly. Despite the fact that this collaboration was initiated early on and has grown on a broad-based footing, the respondents in this study see great potential for the relationship to be deepened.



*Germany does have a close relationship with Indonesia, but it's not really very close. The relationship could be improved; there are many gaps to fill.*

## Expectations have risen

The highly dynamic developments in recent decades have also significantly changed Indonesia's expectations about the type of collaboration, for example in the area of development cooperation. As the Indonesian interviewees see it, German development cooperation still follows the formats that were designed in the 1970s and in many respects no longer meet today's needs. For example, Indonesian partners would like to see a much stronger link between politics and business ('spend to invest'), less fragmentation across policy areas, and development of innovative financing models going forward. In addition to that, they believe that a whole raft of measures to promote labour and education migration would have to be put in place if Germany wants to be more successful in this area in the face of ever-tougher competition in Indonesia. They range from easing visa rules, actively promoting the German language and advertising Germany as an attractive destination through to awarding significantly more grants.

However, people believe that it is not only formats and instruments that need to be adapted. They say the sense of superiority that still sometimes prevails must give way to a spirit of partnership and be replaced

by a genuine, intensive engagement with Indonesian culture and local circumstances. The importance of working on the ground and with an understanding of the culture is considered essential to success.

*Cooperation cannot just be about applying one-size-fits-all templates. It is crucial to do more 'on the ground' and understand the intricacies of the culture.*

In some respects, what people are calling for is nothing less than a paradigm shift, under which old instruments are reviewed and new ones introduced that can meet current challenges. The aim of a realignment of this kind would be to make cooperation not only more efficient but also more respectful and sustainable.

# Germany's dwindling presence

## Losing visibility

The way German companies are perceived in Indonesia has changed noticeably over the past two decades. Major German companies such as Siemens, Bayer and BASF have been present and well-known in Indonesia for decades. While these names used to be associated with consumer goods, it is Korean and Chinese goods that now dominate those markets. Today, the strength of German companies is more likely to lie in the B2B sector. German companies have thus lost visibility compared with Chinese, Japanese and Korean competitors.

But it is not just about German companies and products: Germany as a whole is perceived as being less present in Indonesia than in the past. While high-ranking politicians from Asia, but also from the US, Australia and other countries, visit Indonesia regularly, usually accompanied by business representatives, the majority of our interviewees feel that German politicians ignore Indonesia. CEOs, especially those of new, innovative small or medium-sized German companies, are also noticeable by their absence. German politics and business rarely feature jointly in the perception of Indonesians. German institutions such as the Goethe Institute, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) or the chambers of commerce come across as being far less dynamic and present than those of other countries – even European ones. Unlike countries such as Korea or Japan, Germany

does not actively promote itself, its language, its economy, or its culture. Korea, for example, has now massively built up and expanded its cultural presence through media and education opportunities. Its cultural offerings, especially K-pop and films, are now a firm feature of Indonesians' lives.

It was also pointed out that the number of Germans living in Indonesia is declining, further weakening cultural and personal ties. Proposals to involve the network of German alumni more closely as a way of strengthening bilateral relations have been expressed.

## Lukewarm interest

Germany's lack of presence and relative reticence raises questions about its interest in Indonesia. Indonesians see Germany as treating China, and possibly Viet Nam and Thailand too, as its Asian countries of preference. Our interviewees did not feel that Germany showed any particular interest in Indonesia.

*Germany must engage with Indonesia seriously, patiently and on a long-term basis. The way it currently engages is too superficial.*

For example, the Indonesians criticise a lack of follow-up by business people and politicians, recounting how initial contacts, forged at trade fairs or meetings, for example, often do not lead anywhere.

German contacts are happy to sign Memoranda of Understanding but there is a lack of rapid and concrete implementation thereafter. Germany lags behind Japan, where the political and business spheres work closely together.

*Last year, Indonesia was the official country partner at Hannover Messe, which was good. But where is the follow-up?*

## Overshadowed by the competition

### Asia is gaining ground

German businesses are facing much tougher competition in Indonesia, we were told. Germany's technology still has an excellent reputation, our interviewees said. But China, Korea and other countries seem to be more agile and far cheaper. Germany is losing market share, while countries such as Korea, Japan, and in particular China are pushing ahead with more aggressive investments and more competitive prices. New, innovative technologies are more likely to come from other countries, such as the US. And Germany's traditional business sectors such as mechanical engineering, the automotive industry, etc. are also becoming crowded. German products are still valued, but they are considered too expensive. Instead of buying a more durable, better-quality German machine, which lasts 15 years but is also three times more expensive, people prefer to replace a less sustainable machine

from China every five years, enabling them to benefit from technological advances in the process. Or people buy a Chinese model and turn to German manufacturers when they need to replace individual components.

Countries such as China, Korea, and Japan, for example, dominate key sectors such as the electric vehicle industry and infrastructure. Their dynamic investment policy is a dominant feature of everyday life in Indonesia. Germany, on the other hand, seems to have lost its once leading role in technological solutions as a result of it increasingly taking a wait-and-see attitude.

*China is everywhere. Germany has become so slow. Germany used to be a leader in many areas, such as the automotive industry.*

German automobiles continue to appeal to Jakarta's elite, we were told, but brands such as Hyundai are gaining ever more market share. German and Dutch banks are also increasingly withdrawing from Indonesia, which is symptomatic of Germany's dwindling influence compared with the more agile Asian economic powers who are investing more effectively in future-oriented technologies such as IT and artificial intelligence.

## The Chinese way

China occupies a key position among all its Asian competitors. While Germany comes over as hesitant, complicated and fragmented, China is dynamic, pragmatic and customer-oriented.

In particular, interviewees noted, China offers comprehensive package solutions that include financing, contracting services and technology transfer, are tailored to the needs of Indonesian customers and are implemented quickly. It is also investing in grant programmes, inviting Indonesian decision-makers to China and intensifying cultural cooperation. Any problems arising during the implementation of the many large-scale investment projects are dealt with as and when they occurred. On the other hand, Germans want to clarify everything in advance, based on principles and agreements, in order to rule out any possible risk. They consider economic investment opportunities in isolation and do not integrate them into a package of public and private services. That weakens their competitive position, our interviewees said.

*The Germans should not hesitate to learn from China.*

Our interviewees explained how, even if there are problems with compliance here and there, the Indonesian Government and the local business community appreciate Chinese people's fast and flexible way of working. Chinese partners, we heard, can almost always be reached using

modern means of communication such as WhatsApp or WeChat and they respond immediately. German partners, on the other hand, are often regarded as being hard to reach, hesitant about using social media, and keeping strictly to formal working hours, which means they are slower to respond.

*The Chinese are quick, they risk a lot and invest on a grand scale. The Germans are cautious about taking action and are risk averse.*

However, despite the general admiration for Chinese efficiency, criticism was also voiced about agreements being based on short-term thinking and often necessitating subsequent corrections.

## Complex competitive logic

German companies are generally perceived as acting very cautiously and hesitantly and they are regarded as risk-averse – especially in new sectors such as the electric vehicle industry. That said, the Indonesian interviewees do acknowledge that Indonesia is not an easy country for many companies. Measures taken by the Indonesian Government to improve the investment climate seem to have changed little to date. Despite new legislation designed to facilitate foreign direct investment, Indonesia clearly remains a difficult market for German companies. Germany sets great store by strict agreements and high environmental and quality standards, which often results

in slower progress in dynamic markets such as Indonesia. This approach contrasts with the faster and more flexible approach of countries such as China, which are gaining increasing influence in the region as a result of their more aggressive strategies.

The Indonesian Government and private sector recommend that Germany invest more and build local production facilities to serve the market more effectively. Large-scale projects such as the construction of new cities hold immense potential here, yet it remains untapped. A further criticism of the interviewees is a lack of understanding of the complex Indonesian market and inadequate cultivation of local relationships.

In terms of economic policy, Indonesia under President Joko Widodo became more closely aligned with China, while traditional ties with Germany faded into the background. This geopolitical shift is likely to persist in the future, with China increasingly becoming the partner of choice.

*The Germans are very value-oriented. Koreans, Japanese and Chinese are simply concerned with investing in good infrastructure projects. That's easier.*

In addition to price, speed, pragmatism, innovative spirit and risk-taking, there is another cultural issue that our interviewees see as hampering Germany's competitive situation: German management is sometimes perceived as being ethnocentric. This makes it difficult for Indonesian

employees to progress beyond middle management. By comparison, Japanese and Chinese firms promote local workers to the highest levels of management, making them more attractive as employers.

## Falling behind by comparison

Germany's cooperation strategies and how it presents them to the outside world appear inadequate to our interviewees, especially by comparison with other countries that are far more determined and willing to innovate. We heard how France accompanies its economic investment with high-level political dialogue, how the US has a strong presence at the highest level and has diplomatic skills, and how the Netherlands, Japan and South Korea link development cooperation with trade and economic investment. Even a country like Hungary stands out with its active promotion of education, we heard. And even institutions such as the Goethe-Institut are unable to compete successfully with the presence of institutions such as the British Council.

People also perceive a need for action in the education sector and in science

communication. The educational opportunities Germany offers often remained unused due to language barriers and lack of information about the German education and academic system, while countries such as Hungary and Great Britain appear to be far more active in these areas. Germany clearly does not give the impression of having to be proactive and innovative in promoting itself as a country with good educational opportunities.

*Other countries are very active and aggressively promote their country, whereas less information is available on Germany.*

# | Now lacklustre



# Europe's problematic reputation

## Europe's decline

Many Indonesians see Europe as the continent of the past. They say they no longer look to Europe when it comes to the future. Many people see the future of Europe itself as uncertain, an image reinforced by the war in Ukraine. They see this as having tied up Europe's attention and resources, which are so urgently needed in other fields and for other issues.

*You currently feel queasy when you look towards Europe. It seems politically fragile. You get the impression that many things could take a turn for the worse in a very short space of time.*

The few people who have more intensive interaction with Europe are increasingly concerned about the rise of right-wing parties such as the AfD in Germany and Europe. They see this political shift as creating uncertainty about the future direction of European policy, especially with regard to migration issues and the potential for Islamophobia. There is concern that taking in increased numbers of refugees could fuel social tensions, which in turn could increase the risk of xenophobia.

By contrast, many Indonesians see greater opportunities for growth and development in Asia, especially in countries such as

China, Japan, and South Korea. This makes Europe less attractive as an investment destination. Although Germany is valued to be Europe's economic powerhouse, Indonesia sees challenges such as rising energy prices and inflation, which have been exacerbated by the Ukraine war, as threatening economic stability.

*Europe is past its peak. There is great uncertainty about its future – not only economically, but also because of the Ukraine war.*

Germany's international positioning, especially in the war in Ukraine, therefore tends to be viewed critically. There are voices in Indonesia who are in favour of a stronger European security policy, independent of the United States.

*Europe is gradually getting old, fusty, 'turn of the century'; we see Asia as offering better opportunities. China, Japan and South Korea are more interesting for us here.*

The Indonesian Government has traditionally sought a balanced relationship with all the major powers and has an interest in a multipolar world order. Accordingly, there is understanding for both the European and the Russian interpretation of the conflict.



## Normative, patronising

German and European foreign policy is often perceived in Indonesia as too normative and patronising, especially in areas such as environmental protection, data protection and technological innovation. The perception that the EU and Germany are setting demanding standards that are difficult for countries such as Indonesia to achieve reinforces the sense of a 'teacher-student' dynamic in international cooperation. Our Indonesian interviewees are particularly sceptical about the German approach to digital innovation and media communication.

*We do not want to be lectured. We want to be treated as an equal partner with all our strengths and weaknesses.*

The strict environmental conditions imposed by the EU and Germany are also regarded by many Indonesians as unfair trade barriers. They feel that Germany ought to have a better understanding for the situation in which Indonesia finds itself, the special challenges it faces and the time it will take before certain standards can be met there too. This assessment is reinforced by the feeling that Europe puts its own commercial interests above Indonesia's development needs. Relations are suffering from this perceived inequality and an attitude that seems too focused on economic interests.

Despite the criticism, many people in Indonesia do acknowledge Germany's leading role in environmental protection, for example, while stressing that solutions that work in Germany are not necessarily transferable to Indonesia.

## Echoes of colonial patterns

The postcolonial discourse has also left its mark on Indonesia. Accordingly, the colonial past and its aftermath also influence Indonesia's perception and assessment of Europe's present-day international relations. The values-oriented foreign policy practised by Germany and Europe can quickly start to look like a neocolonial attempt to force Indonesia to adopt European values. In the disputes around trade and economic policy, Europe is perceived as being ethnocentric and focused solely on its own benefit. Some people even have the impression that the European Union and Germany, with their restrictive economic policies, are deliberately putting the brakes on Indonesia's industrial development. The disputes over palm oil and nickel are criticised in particular and are even seen by many as part of a neocolonialist agenda aimed at keeping Indonesia's economy down.

*Speak to us less in terms of GDP, do not monetise everything. It would be much more important to talk about wellbeing, happiness and sustainability. It is a pity that it is ultimately only ever about nickel.*

The relationship between Germany and Indonesia is often considered haughty, almost as if between patron and beneficiary. This perception is reinforced by the attitude of European institutions, which is seen as condescending and domineering. Although, unlike the Netherlands, Germany has no direct colonial ties with Indonesia, a deep sensitivity to this issue persists.

*This colonial mentality must change. What we need are genuine partnerships in which each side learns from the other.*

Cultural misunderstandings and differences in styles of communication are also said to increase the strain on the relationship. Germans are often perceived as being cold and individualistic, while Indonesians prefer a warmer and less materialistic approach.

Cultural projects – such as the storytelling project funded by Google in 2019, which addresses colonisation – flags up ways in which cultural cooperation can help the process of coming to terms with historical issues and promote trust and social cohesion. Initiatives of this kind could also be useful in the relationship between Germany and Indonesia and could help move beyond what is referred to as the ‘Yes sir’ mentality in cooperation.

## Between excellence and loss of relevance

### Dwindling relevance

Germany is experiencing a phase of dwindling visibility and relevance in Indonesia. Whereas attention is focused on China and the dynamics of South-East Asia, Germany is struggling with a loss of significance – as an investor, as a trading partner, as a technology supplier, as a development partner and also as an attractive destination for students, migrant workers and tourists.

German politics, which previously played a defining role due to figures such as Angela Merkel, is losing its profile compared with more dynamic actors. Germany is perceived as being a reliable, but distanced and reserved friend.

*How does the world see Germany? It doesn't anymore!*

This development, reinforced by political instability in Europe, especially the conflict in Ukraine, is causing Indonesia to increasingly focus on more dynamic regions such as East and South-East Asia, the Middle East and North America.

*In the public perception, there are fewer and fewer discussions about what is happening in Germany.*

## Unclear technology status

Germany's reputation for excellent quality in the field of engineering, especially mechanical engineering, medical technology and the automotive industry, remains undisputed. 'Made in Germany' continues to be a byword for excellence and ensures products in these sectors are held in high regard worldwide.

*The first thing that comes to mind about Germany is technology: very good quality, but expensive.*

Germany's strengths in the fields of science, technology and the environment are definitely acknowledged, and are even considered exemplary; however, the degree to which these can be applied in Indonesia is decreasing as home-grown ideas and other suppliers and partners come more and more to the fore.

Germany is perceived as lagging behind in newer fields of technology such as artificial intelligence and digital media by international comparison with countries such as the US, China and South Korea. This calls into question whether German technologies can be adapted to international contexts.

In this regard, our interviewees repeatedly criticised Germany's strict data protection legislation. It is seen as providing a high level of protection for private data, but as being an obstacle to agile business strategies that are willing to embrace risk in global competition. In contact with countries such

as Indonesia, which show greater flexibility and willingness to take risks when handling data, this caution is having an increasingly counterproductive effect.

*As a child, I had the feeling that German technology was right at the top of the list. Today, we make greater use of e-payment systems in Indonesia than Germany does.*

In Indonesia, for example, Germany's attitude to e-payment systems is seen as backward even.

Infrastructure and urban developments are also seen as stagnating, especially in Berlin. Indonesians interpret the lack of punctuality by Deutsche Bahn and the chaos it causes at railway stations as a clear sign of a regrettable erosion of Germany's core virtues, which they find difficult to understand. These observations raise questions about the efficiency of Germany's politics and economy and call into question the country's ability to innovate. As a result, Germany's ability to achieve the goals it has set itself, for example for the energy transition and climate policy, is also sometimes doubted.

## Reputation as a centre of educational excellence tarnished

Germany's appeal to Indonesian students as a place to attend university has decreased significantly – despite an increase in

English-language degree courses. Whereas Germany was still a popular destination in the 70s and 80s, Indonesian students now favour countries such as the US, the United Kingdom and Australia. The reasons for this range from growing international competition to the specific challenges that going to university in Germany entails (language, accommodation, etc.).

*The competition for good students in the education sector is very strong. Germany needs to make more effort in this area if it wants to be competitive.*

One of the reasons for this decline, according to interviewees, may also be that German universities do not occupy the top rankings in the Global University Index. This reinforces the perception that Germany lags behind countries such as the US or China in cutting-edge fields such as digital technology and artificial intelligence.

Nevertheless, Germany is appreciated for its strengths in traditional technical and vocational courses, especially because it tailors curricula closely to the needs of industry. There are still challenges to address, such as language barriers and the need to boost the attractiveness of German universities by increasing the number of English-language programmes and giving them a more international focus.

After completing their studies in Germany, many Indonesian graduates return to Indonesia where they then apply the knowledge they have acquired. This underlines the important role of education in acting as a bridge between the two countries.

There is a need for more investment in relationships in the education sector, including funding joint training and research projects and increasing the number of scholarships available to enable Germany to position itself as a more attractive study destination. Germany could also benefit from a stronger presence in Indonesia and a more active recruitment strategy, similar to other countries whose universities have established campuses abroad.

*Hungary is currently one of the countries offering the highest number of scholarships in Indonesia. There is a growing interest in Eastern European countries because people assume they have similar values.*

# A mixed picture of Germany

## Germany's image

Although the fact that it has lost relevance is plain to see, Germany and the Germans are still valued in Indonesia. Germans are generally regarded as being fair, reliable, credible, tolerant, systematic and stringent. People who have more to do with Germany have developed a fundamental liking for Germans over the decades and other people at least harbour no negative feelings towards them.

Germany enjoys a good reputation in Indonesia as a country of discipline and engineering excellence, and as the leading economic power in Europe. German precision in manufacturing and people's disciplined adherence to the rules in everyday life are particularly appreciated. German culture, especially football and the Oktoberfest, is hugely popular in Indonesia, although its modern media and pop culture do not have such a strong presence.

*Germany still holds a fascination. It is perceived as having strengths in engineering and industry, and as being precise and disciplined.*

From an academic point of view, a qualification acquired in Germany inspires confidence and brings recognition for Indonesians in their professional life. Germany's work culture, which emphasises a good Work-Life-Balance and Sunday as a genuine day of rest, is also regarded positively. However, compared with other cultures, German society is perceived as being less flexible and humour is not thought to be a major feature.

*Germans are not easy to influence. Once they have decided to do something, they see it through. They stand by their convictions.  
Like a tree. I think that's good.*

Although Germany is valued for its technological achievements and cultural contributions, there are areas where it is considered too traditional and reticent, especially in terms of cultural expression and when compared with more dynamic societies such as the US or Asian countries.

## Changes within the country

As was to be expected, respondents' perception of the changes within Germany was selective, since they had not actually witnessed them. Germany is perceived as being the strongest country within Europe and as having a leading role, but it also comes across as being less stable today than in the past. As the Indonesians see it, for example, Germany faces considerable demographic challenges, characterised by an ageing population and a high cost of living, which often make young families think twice about bringing up children. Added to that, the shortage of psychological counselling services and an inadequate support system for parents, are seen as further factors in the falling birth rate.

There are also differing views of integration and coexistence in Germany, especially in the context of immigration and diversity. Germany's refugee and immigration policy are widely acknowledged. People are impressed and feel gratitude for the fact that Germany has been so open to Muslim refugees from the Middle East. Germany is now perceived as being much more diverse as a result of immigration. Its tolerance and respect for other cultures and religions are seen as exemplary.

*What I also appreciate very much about Germany is its tolerance towards other religions. The level of acceptance of other religions is extremely high there.*

But there are also concerns that high immigration levels could jeopardise social cohesion. And while some people are pleased that it is now easy to find a mosque or halal food, others are worried about whether Germany will succeed in preserving and fostering its own culture.

*Germany is no longer a monoculture. Before you strengthen relations with other countries, it's about time you strengthened internal relations. This will help you better understand the cultures around you. You have to go beyond the level of merely tolerating them!*

And another change has also been registered: the few cultural professionals who have more intensive contact with Germany, perceive the German cultural scene as becoming increasingly restrictive in the wake of documenta fifteen, especially with regard to the freedom of museums to decide what content to exhibit.

*Documenta was not only problematic per se; it is also perceived as a rise in cancel culture. There has been a change in atmosphere: Germany is no longer as free as it once was. Political issues are impacting on freedom.*

## Israel and Gaza

The majority of people in Indonesia have reacted critically to Germany's support for Israel, especially in the war in Gaza. Although the US is seen as bearing the brunt of responsibility for resolving the conflict, German foreign policy is perceived as biased. There is some understanding for it based on historical reasons, but it is rejected by the majority in view of Israel's excesses in the war in Gaza. While efforts such as the German Foreign Minister's call for a ceasefire during Ramadan are welcomed, they are not sufficient to change the basic view: Germany is accused of double standards, particularly with regard to its support for Ukraine.

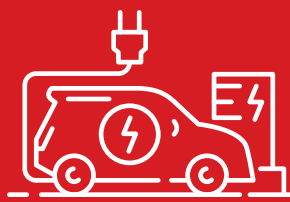
*If Germany wants to make a positive impression in Indonesia, it will have to do something positive in Gaza.*

The discrepancy between Germany's official political line and public opinion on sensitive issues such as the Gaza conflict is also addressed in Indonesia. The country's younger generation in particular wants Germany to adopt a clear, but above all comprehensible, stance on global issues and stresses the need for authentic communication.





# Old strengths, new opportunities



## Common values, common interests

### Similar sense of values

Indonesia is an important partner for Germany in South-East Asia in terms of values. It is in agreement with Germany on many fundamental issues and values: this applies both to issues around human rights, the rule of law and democracy, as well as with regard to the social market economy model. Many of the institutions that are characteristic of Germany's fundamental regulatory orientation have already been adopted in Indonesia – at least in part – or are regarded as providing guidance: antitrust legislation, the Federal Constitutional Court, the Central Bank, elements of federalism, the social protection system (in particular social health insurance), dual vocational training, the fight against corruption, environmental protection, gender policy, etc.

People value the focus on consensus in German politics, the role of the state in Germany and are committed to pluralism. Against this backdrop, it seems surprising to many that Indonesia does not play a more prominent role in Germany's values-driven diversification strategy in Asia.

Germany is perceived in Indonesia as a country that should exercise more influence in international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) or the World Trade Organization (WTO) and serve as a model in a number of areas. For example, Germany is highly regarded for its open-border policy towards immigrants and its commitment to the Uyghur Muslim minority, even though

this is not explicitly discussed so much in Indonesia out of diplomatic consideration for China. Germany's support for human rights and democratic movements worldwide contributes to the perception that it is a stable democracy.

*People still prefer to work with Germany or the West in certain respects because it is at least possible to talk about ethics.*

The way Germany has come to terms with its own history, in particular overcoming the Hitler regime and the transition to democracy, is regarded as exemplary and could help Indonesia in reappraising the dark chapters of its own past.

In terms of social issues, Germany is known for its commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality, whereas access to information on these issues is often limited in Indonesia.

The German technical and vocational education and training system (TVET) in particular is highlighted as a model that Indonesia could use to boost its training of skilled workers. In environmental matters, Germany is seen as stringent and demonstrating best practice in the areas of environmental compliance and green tech management, offering valuable learning opportunities that could help Indonesia improve its own environmental policies.

The German health and education systems, which ensure universal access irrespective of income, are held in high regard. Our

interviewees saw these systems as creating the basis for social protection and allowing citizens to focus on other aspects of their life – something that has not yet been achieved to the same extent in Indonesia.

*Germany is a very safe country. Of course, corruption also exists in Germany. But to a far lesser extent and not in the same way as here in Indonesia.*

The culture of inclusion and acceptance in Germany, which can be seen in its willingness to take in refugees and its attitude towards same-sex partnerships, is regarded as exemplary. Recognition is given to this open approach to social and political challenges.

*What I particularly appreciate is that Germany has taken in so many refugees from the Middle East and welcomed them with open arms. At a time when other countries have reacted very differently.*

Germany also serves as a model with regard to infrastructure and environmental awareness. The clearly organised transport networks and high environmental standards provide important learning opportunities for Indonesia. The country would also like to benefit from German experience here as well as in the public sector and medical care.

The close cooperation between academia, the scientific community and the private sector, and the concept of the social market economy, offer structural guidance that is different from the liberal capitalist models found in other Western countries. However, implementing models and principles of that kind in the Indonesian context is perceived as very challenging.

Thus, bilateral cooperation between Germany and Indonesia could be developed and expanded into a very diverse partnership based on shared values.

## Shared challenges

In addition to the basis of shared values, fields of action are also mentioned in which the two countries pursue similar interests. Our Indonesian interviewees consider Germany and Indonesia to be two key players in the field of renewable energy and environmental protection. They have an identical, or at least comparable, view of global challenges such as climate change and migration. This shared concern and view of the problems would make it an obvious choice as an area to step up bilateral cooperation.

*Whether it is conflict or drought, both force people to leave their home. Germany is becoming increasingly aware of this – but so is Indonesia. We are becoming a transit country for refugees such as the Rohingya en route to Australia.*

## Old strengths, new opportunities

For example, Germany is demonstrating its commitment to Indonesia through projects and through the work of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), particularly in the field of renewable energy, including solar energy, in regions such as Sumatra and East Indonesia.

Indonesia, as an accession country of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), could benefit from the principles of good governance, with Germany as a supporting partner. However, cooperation could also be developed in the technological field, where both countries face similar challenges.

*Technological cooperation is an important area where we face the same challenges.*

In the industrial sector, Indonesia strives to achieve Germany's production and export levels, in particular by sharing knowledge and cooperating in sectors such as the aviation industry.

Indonesia's political hesitancy – it often waits to see what position Germany takes on global security issues – illustrates its interest in aligning itself with the stance taken by recognised partners. At regional level, cooperation between ASEAN and the EU in the field of carbon pricing and CO<sub>2</sub> markets could be stepped up with a view to jointly developing effective climate change mitigation solutions. And even a dialogue on public relations strategies

could be an area for closer cooperation, as both countries face similar challenges in presenting their initiatives.

## Potential for more in-depth cooperation

### Opportunities in green and other sectors

With this in mind, when questioning people in Indonesia about specific potential for cooperation that has scarcely been tapped to date, a surprisingly differentiated and clear picture emerges: green tech, renewable energy, and biodiversity rank highest among the issues where Germany is perceived as being strong and where people can very easily imagine stepping up cooperation with Germany to a considerable degree. Another area that is also mentioned frequently is the health sector, in particular medical technology, but also pharmacology in connection with biodiversity.

Provided it is based on a firm commitment, cooperation between Indonesia and Germany could enjoy a promising future, particularly in the fields of renewable energy, environmental protection and education. Indonesia values Germany as a leader in promoting renewable energy and sees the projects it carries out via the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and KfW in regions such as Sumatra as a reflection of its strong commitment. This underlines the possibility of expanding the interaction between the two countries in climate tech and biodiversity.

*When it comes to areas such as clean energy, or sustainable development in general, Germany is a country known for demonstrating best practice.*

From architecture to industry, Indonesia is also moving towards energy efficiency. Despite the challenges posed by the difference in conditions, there is great admiration for Germany's technological capabilities. The maritime industry and use of biodiversity are also deemed to offer further opportunities for cooperation for the German business and scientific community.

*Indonesia is a big market. As a customer, we have the purchasing power.*

In the healthcare sector, Indonesia would like to learn from Germany's advanced medical technology products and its system of universal health coverage, which could also offer German companies new market opportunities. Telemedicine, for example, offers huge potential in an island state like Indonesia.

*Why don't we have Lidl here? It is a pity that the food retail sector is completely Americanised.*

However, this wide range of opportunities for cooperation would require a well-thought-out approach in order to make the best use of the two countries' respective strengths and to ensure that cultural and technological differences are taken into account.

## Migration of skilled workers

Indonesia and Germany also have an equally strong interest in intensifying cooperation on skilled labour migration. However, many Indonesians find the visa process restrictive and bureaucratic. This perception of unequal treatment, particularly in comparison with citizens from countries with 'strong passports,' could discourage potential skilled workers and represents a barrier that Germany needs to address.

*We have a lot of young people who are interested in working or studying in Europe. The language problem always comes up in the case of Germany.*

The Triple Win Programme is rated as positive because it significantly increases Indonesian nurses' chances on the German labour market. However, the language problem is repeatedly cited as a major challenge for increased labour migration. The requirements are seen as being too high and the way the language is taught as too inflexible and monopolised.

## Old strengths, new opportunities

Families split up by migration and the high costs of preparing for migration, such as language tests and travel costs, are other important aspects that Indonesia and Germany need to address to make the migration experience more beneficial for both sides. Other countries, such as Japan or Korea, are much more active in this respect, promoting their country and investing more in potential migrants.

A viable approach going forward would require a more flexible migration policy tailored to the needs and skills of both countries, as well as greater support for migrants both in the preparation phase of their emigration and in integrating their families into the German labour market and German society.

## Focus on a change in government

If there is an interest from the German side in stepping up cooperation in the above-mentioned areas, Indonesia believes that the new government taking office will offer favourable conditions. The new president has a connection to Germany and, in the opinion of many interviewees, would be well disposed to more in-depth cooperation. However, a noticeable injection of impetus would have to come from Germany in order to leverage the potential for cooperation and intensify collaboration. Indonesia's doors are basically open for Germany. But Germany also needs to take advantage of these open doors. Given that numerous new and old partners are interested in Indonesia, the country is not likely to go chasing

after Germany. Some effort on the part of Germany is therefore required in order to inject new impetus into bilateral relations and actually make use of the opportunities that already exist.

However, Indonesia's domestic challenges, such as the different forces competing for power, position and money, could continue to pose a challenge to the stability of its democracy and to efforts in the field of environmental protection. In this dynamic environment, people pointed out the importance of international partners such as Germany closely monitoring the political priorities of the new government to enable them to work together effectively.

*A piece of advice: take a close look at the composition of the new government and at the priorities it communicates.*

Better use should be made of high-level forums such as the Asia-Pacific Conference of German Business as a way of strengthening relations and attracting the attention of the new government.

# The role of Germany/ Europe

The value dimension  
is appreciated

Despite the criticism of the sometimes arrogant behaviour in various aspects of societal development described above, Indonesia's view of Europe and the EU is still predominantly positive, a view that was reaffirmed by a survey among students a few years ago. Compared with China, the EU was commended in particular in terms of modernity and the leading role it plays with regard to human rights and environmental technology. This perception contrasts with the mixed feelings towards the US, which is viewed critically, especially because of its military interventions. As part of Europe, Germany enjoys special standing, being seen as an ethical and benevolent player on the world stage.

*I still prefer Europe to the US, simply because it is calmer and maintains higher standards. The prevailing atmosphere in the US is loud and unpleasantly capitalist.*

Western countries, and especially Europe, serve as a role model for Indonesia in the areas of gender equality and childcare. The EU is valued as an 'honest broker' in the field of renewable energy, acting ethically and promoting a sustainable energy policy, not merely pursuing economic interests.

*As far as childcare and equality between men and women are concerned, we are still learning from Western countries.*

However, there are some voices in Indonesia calling for Europe to play a more active role. Interviewees said they could imagine European models similar to the policies tackling anti-corruption and money laundering in sectors such as mining, for example, as a way of holding countries like China accountable for practices that are harmful to the environment.

Overall, Indonesia sees Europe, and especially Germany, as a valuable partner with whom it would like to work in many areas on account of their shared ethical convictions and high standards.

## Europe as an alternative

Indonesia also sees Germany as a potential partner to more effectively balance out the dominant influences of China and the US in the Indo-Pacific region. Interviewees spoke of a desire for Germany to motivate the EU to increase its involvement in the ASEAN region, particularly on security issues, where no clear position has been taken so far.

The challenge for Germany, as some interviewees see it, is to establish an independent and visible position between the major powers and to assume a more active role in global conflicts and migration policy. The expectation that Germany will pursue an independent and sensitive policy given the tensions in the South China Sea was also voiced.

*Here in Indonesia, we wait to see what position Germany takes before positioning ourselves. We would like to see Germany take a clear position on security issues, not one of 'neutrality.'*

Indonesia, and possibly other ASEAN members, would welcome Europe – especially Germany – playing a stronger, independent role as an alternative to the current superpowers, as this would make it possible to tackle global challenges more effectively.

*The European Union cannot break away from the US at the moment. But Europe should develop the EU independently. It should decide for itself which countries are the best partners to do this.*

## Germany in Europe

Germany is regarded as a key player in Europe, having had a decisive influence in shaping EU policy, especially since Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel's terms of office. This key role includes both political and economic aspects. However, there are questions about the clarity and consistency of European and German strategies, which are often perceived as confusing and contradictory. This perception creates uncertainty about the future of Europe, particularly in the face of global challenges such as the war in Ukraine or the conflict in Gaza.

*When you look at Germany, you also have to look at Europe. But Europe is perceived to be on a downhill trajectory, and there is great uncertainty about its future.*

Despite these challenges, Germany is ascribed a key role, similar to that of Indonesia within ASEAN. Although both countries are considered by interviewees to be reluctant leaders of their respective

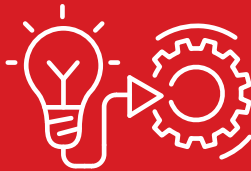


regions, they are nevertheless regarded as playing important balancing roles. Indonesia therefore sees Germany as an important, albeit sometimes reticent, player within the EU, who could take a stronger leadership role in Europe and on the world stage. This would require a more unequivocal commitment and clearer positioning in order to be effective both within Europe and in the international community.

*We see Germany as occupying a leading role in the EU, perhaps even more so than Brussels. We don't really know anything about von der Leyen.*



# | What needs to be done



## Genuine partnership and new formats

### Genuine partnership

The relationship between Germany and Indonesia is characterised by a mixture of appreciation and criticism. Germany is seen as an important – albeit distant – partner that seems to show leadership in some areas, but falls short of expectations in others.

There is a desire in Indonesia for a genuine partnership that is about more than just trade. Indonesia expects cooperation to include promotion of its economy, in particular with regard to developing a stronger downstream nickel industry. It would also like to see a better understanding of the importance of palm oil for the Indonesian economy.

It praises Germany for its technological excellence and for its role within the EU, but its involvement in Indonesia is often felt to be too superficial and rigid. By comparison, countries such as France are perceived as doing more to cultivate diplomatic and economic relations.

*Engagement with Indonesia needs to be serious, patient and long-term. The current level of involvement is perceived as too superficial.*

Indonesia, which attaches great importance to interpersonal relationships, often finds the German approach too cold and individualistic; it sees this as an obstacle to

more in-depth cooperation. It encourages Germany to become more involved and take a more partner-like approach.

Although technological and scientific cooperation is seen as an area with great potential, Germany does not appear to have a strong enough commitment to it.

*In order to make a mark here, you have to actually show up more often and engage more extensively; above all do not come across as if you are here to teach us!*

Despite the challenges, the basic attitude towards Germany remains positive in Indonesia, especially by comparison with the tense relations with the US. Indonesia would like Germany to strengthen its role as a true friend and equal partner. To do this, it would have to revise its strategies and intensify its relations with Indonesia.

### A credible approach by the EU

Indonesia is taking a critical look at its relationship with the European Union, including Germany, particularly because of what it perceives to be Europe's pretence to superiority. Europe's approach, often perceived as lecturing, is viewed critically in Indonesia, which has a strong need for a genuine partnership and mutual respect.

The metaphor that EU communication resembles a dialogue between a Rolls-Royce owner and a Fiat owner underlines the perceived discrepancy between EU values

and the reality of life in Indonesia. This fosters a sense of alienation rather than an open dialogue between equals.

*If you are intent on showing us something, then let that be a path of development that is sustainable and also works: do not come here and lecture us, demanding things that you do not comply with yourself.*

Indonesia is calling for the EU to change its perspective: to drop its paternalistic attitude and develop a balanced relationship in which Indonesia is recognised and respected as an equal partner.

*It would be very desirable if cooperation between Germany and Indonesia were based more on reciprocity. It's time for a change of perspective.*

## Get rid of colonial patterns

Some of our Indonesian interviewees are calling for a change in what they see as the European Union's (neo)colonial attitude. EU policies, especially on palm oil and nickel, are perceived in Indonesia as protectionist and colonialist. They are seen as obstacles to Indonesia's progress towards becoming a modern industrial state and have a negative impact on the image of EU trade policy.

The relationship is perceived as unbalanced, with Indonesia often seen as simply a recipient of charity. This reinforces the sense of injustice and feeds the perception of neocolonial patterns.

They believe it is crucial that the EU and Germany develop strategies that actively address these perceptions and recognise Indonesia as a modern country with equal rights.

*I find it unfair that we are treated like a poor country and that other countries come here to exploit our resources. In that regard, we are the country that is rich.*

## New formats, local contacts

Indonesia aims to establish an innovative link between development cooperation and private direct investment. Among other things, this would make it possible to steer investments into sustainable development projects and the development of new industries and a circular economy in a targeted manner. The country's new medium-term development plan sees great potential for cooperation with the German private sector. However, German companies are expected to make a long-term commitment, not just launch short-term initiatives.

The interviewees believe that the strategic realignment of development cooperation should go beyond traditional projects

## What needs to be done

and include the development of financing instruments and institutions in particular. An innovative example of this is a new law that allows provincial governments to issue bonds in order to attract foreign capital. This capital can then be passed on to local private companies, as is already the practice in West Java. This is seen as also offering opportunities for German financial institutions such as KfW.

*We must not stop at individual projects. We must also develop financing instruments and institutions.*

The Indonesian interviewees would like to see German ministries taking part in intergovernmental negotiations with a coordinated, more coherent presence, and including higher-ranking representatives in their negotiating teams.

A number of participants in the study also felt that German-Indonesian development cooperation focuses too much on technical aspects and formal intergovernmental relations, which often makes it difficult to involve civil society actors and local communities. German development cooperation should not take place at government level only; there should also be direct cooperation with representatives of civil society. Discussions, workshops, documentaries and films could help to strengthen dialogue and information sharing, thus directly addressing and involving the local population.

By contrast with Germany, other countries like the US and Australia, with their development organisations such as USAID, appear to be more visible and active at local level and in their direct cooperation with NGOs. This approach could serve as a model for making German development cooperation in Indonesia more effective and for achieving the necessary degree of local mainstreaming and acceptance.

## More dialogue and public outreach

### Increase visibility

The relationship between Germany and Indonesia is marked by a striking discrepancy: despite major projects and initiatives, Germany's involvement in Indonesia often goes unnoticed. Compared with countries such as the US or Australia, which have a more aggressive communications strategy, Germany comes across as low-key and less present.

*The Germans do not even come to the interviews when they are invited. The others invite themselves.*

Indonesia's public perception of Germany suffers from a lack of visible communication and PR. Large-scale German projects and investments often go unnoticed, which creates an image of Germany as distant, even though it is actually active and committed. This restrained communication, sometimes described as 'elegant,' in reality seems odd and possibly counterproductive.

*The biggest challenge for Germany is to reposition itself on our cognitive map. Germany is invisible.*

Football plays a major role in the media presence of Germany in Indonesia, for example; this could build a bridge to facilitate more intensive bilateral cooperation.

Germany should also emphasise more strongly its role in promoting renewable energy and sustainability and actively market these issues so as to make the true scale of its efforts visible. Interviewees also recommended that Germany make more use of modern communication platforms and social media to address younger people and broader sections of the population more effectively.

## Modernise Germany's media presence

In the 1980s and 1990s, people in Indonesia were familiar with German publications such as *Der Spiegel*, but their influence has waned severely with the rise of online media and social networks. Today's media landscape in Germany is perceived as not being very progressive, due in particular to the strict data protection regulations in social media, which allow for little flexibility and do not sufficiently address local contexts and specific target groups such as Generation Z.

*Germany has little media presence, with the exception of football. Sport can serve as a bridge for intensifying cooperation between Indonesia and Germany.*

Germany's media presence appears low key by comparison with the more aggressive marketing strategies of countries such as the US, Australia and the UK. In terms of foreign policy, Germany is fading into the background in Indonesian media, especially by comparison with China. Media coverage of Germany focuses mainly on business and culture. *Deutsche Welle* is an exception among German media but it is supposedly not particularly prevalent in Indonesia.

*Media competence is not one of Germany's strengths, at least not if you judge by what we get here. The formats are outdated.*

Germany's cautious stance on publishing information and using social media creates uncertainty among migrants about what can be shared online. This hinders the ability to disseminate migrants' success stories and means that the contributions the migrant community makes in Germany are less visible.

According to interviewees, Germany urgently needs to modernise its media strategies and develop a more active global media presence.

*Other countries are very active and aggressively promote their country, whereas not so much information is available about Germany.*

The interviewees also recommended stepping up contact with non-governmental actors, civil society organisations and faith communities in order to broaden the discussion with relevant stakeholders in Indonesia.

## Step up dialogue

As a basic principle, Indonesia's doors are open for Germany. Germany needs to start by taking a decision on whether to make targeted use of existing opportunities. If it decides to do so, it must follow up with a new, clearly perceptible and credible commitment to Indonesia.

The Indonesian interviewees believe that bilateral cooperation between Germany and Indonesia could then become more strategic. This would require more regular and intensive contact. Indonesians suspect a lack of political will and an unclear idea of the objectives of cooperation to be the reason for this not yet taking place.

*In my time at the Habibie Center, I saw more high-ranking representatives from China than from the whole of Europe put together. Germany needs to do its homework here, get a clearer idea of what it wants and engage in dialogue much more.*

*I don't think I have ever been invited to the German Embassy. That really is very strange. We are used to the Americans, British and other countries behaving quite differently in that respect.*

Despite a 65-year history of bilateral cooperation and formerly close contacts at the highest level, there is a clear need for Germany to enhance its international presence and bilateral relations by adopting a clearer approach and engaging more in dialogue so that it can communicate and pursue its objectives and interests more effectively.



# Presence as a reflection of willingness

## Renew German presence

Interviewees pointed out that its reduced visibility in political and parliamentary circles means that Germany has less of a presence than other countries and is therefore not the go-to choice of parliamentarians. They emphasised the need for a continuous and authentic presence to effectively exert soft power and strengthen collaboration.

*I can't stress enough: presence makes all the difference! If you are not here, we assume that we are not important to you.*

They also recommend a stronger German presence in cultural and diplomatic matters. German cultural institutions are not as well-known as their British counterparts and greater use of social media by German diplomatic missions is called for. Cultural diplomacy should be promoted through creative approaches and greater involvement in local culture.

*You have to show up to win. You have to be here. But Germany's presence is diminishing.*

Last but not least, there were also recommendations that more effective use be made of the network of German alumni

so as to strengthen Germany's presence and cooperation in Indonesia and to overcome its image of being a reluctant actor. In this context, it was noted that there are no direct flights from Germany to Indonesia, which may explain the relatively low number of German tourists in the country.

*You can't love what you don't know! You meet hardly any German tourists here; they are mainly Dutch, Russian and Spanish.*

## Long-term commitment

In Indonesia, there is a desire for deeper engagement by Germany, which extends beyond economic interests to include social issues and human rights. The diplomatic representations of Australia and the US are cited as role models in taking an integrated approach. The criticism is that Germany does not make sufficient use of opportunities for collaboration, which leads to a lack of serious and long-term cooperation. It was noted that, while the partnership between the countries might be 'comprehensive', implementation of it is certainly not.

*Indonesia is aiming to become the fourth largest economy in the world. This offers numerous opportunities for German companies and needs to become better known.*

## What needs to be done

Although Germany plays a leading role in the environmental sector, few German companies in this sector are active in Indonesia. This should be something the government works to complement and intensify.

*In Indonesia, everything revolves around cultivating relationships. This takes a lot of time and the Germans have not been very convincing in their efforts. It is about one person working with another – and not just with members of the elites.*

## Education and research

Germany could also play a stronger role as a partner in education and research, especially in less developed regions of the country. German institutions could play a key role in building capacity in Indonesia and supporting its transition to becoming a centre of production.

Involving the younger generation and civil society groups more, as well as expanding exchange programmes and joint research projects in key areas such as biodiversity and climate tech, could strengthen the bilateral relationship and boost interest in long-term cooperation.

A critical view is taken of the dwindling visibility of DAAD and the fact that fewer grants are available, especially by comparison with countries such as Japan

and South Korea. Grants play a vital role by supporting educational cooperation and making graduates cultural ambassadors for Germany.

*Above all, we need greater cooperation in education and science. More Indonesians also need to learn German. The more people speak German, the greater the interest in the country and the easier it becomes to access it.*

In the field of research, interviewees emphasised the potential for increased cooperation with local universities and research institutes. Germany could learn from Japan here by making its cooperation more flexible.

*There are many opportunities to expand cooperation in the field of education.*

More regular and intensive cooperation in education and research is seen as the key to deepening German-Indonesian relations. German educational institutions are believed to be the best channel for communicating values and should be used to expand bilateral cooperation and achieve lasting influence.

## Strengthen cultural communication

Indonesians with a penchant for culture are definitely interested in intensifying cultural cooperation with Germany, but they do not believe that this potential is being fully exploited at present. There is a deficit in how modern culture is communicated and in artistic exchange.

*Germany needs to present a much better, rounded picture of itself: Habermas, Adorno, Fromm, Weber, Bach, Beethoven, Rammstein, Scorpions, Helloween, Kraftwerk and so on.*

There is an interest in German philosophy, poetry and other aspects of culture, but they are thought to be underrepresented. Suggestions for more cultural exchange include support for Indonesian and German artists to take part in joint projects and the organisation of festivals presenting a wider spectrum of German culture. The use of modern media platforms, such as streaming services for German films, could also improve understanding of German culture.

The perception that Germany is less visible in pop culture and modern art also negatively affects its attractiveness as a higher education destination. While technical and scientific degree courses are still popular, a stronger emphasis on degrees in cultural and artistic subjects could boost the interest of young Indonesians and

enhance Germany's appeal as a diverse and culturally rich place to pursue an education.

*You too have a cultural institute. But it does nothing to offset the influence of the Americans and Korean K-pop.*

The Goethe-Institut plays a key role in communicating German culture and language in Indonesia, but faces challenges in its attempts to increase its impact and visibility. Despite a wide range of language courses, cultural events and advice on choosing a university, there is a feeling that the institute could expand its capacities further, especially in the field of cultural events and active promotion of the German language.

People's perception of the Goethe-Institut is mixed. While, on the one hand, it is seen as enriching cultural life, on the other hand, it is criticised for not having adapted sufficiently to local needs and for catering to a niche audience. The Goethe-Institut is less well-known than other international institutions such as the British Council. This reinforces the recommendation that Germany needs to strengthen its cultural diplomacy. Innovative approaches and greater use of social media could help in reaching a wider audience and in making German culture more attractive and accessible.

## What needs to be done

Overall, interviewees felt there was a lack of the kind of in-depth communication that could present German values and culture beyond traditional stereotypes. The prevailing view is that educational and cultural exchange programmes could be used more effectively to convey a broader picture of German philosophy and way of life.

# | Methodology

## Methodology

This study, entitled ‘Germany in the Eyes of Indonesia’, was conducted for the first time in 2024 and references – both in terms of content and methodology – GIZ’s series of international studies on Germany (‘Germany in the Eyes of the World I, II & III’, ‘Looking in from the outside – International perspectives on Germany’) over the last 10 years. The interviews were conducted in March 2024.

The methodological design of the study is based on these previous studies. It used semi-structured, semi-narrative in-depth interviews with selected Indonesian figures from the fields of politics, business, academia and research, media, civil society, the arts and culture, religion, and sport.

The 40 interviewees were selected because their personal relationship with Germany put them in a position to make an assessment. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Each interview was conducted and documented by a team of two. The documentation identified the core statements perceived in the discussions and recorded them with two separate codes (subject area/type of statement) using an electronic evaluation tool. An average interview produced about 20 core statements. In total, almost 800 core statements were made, forming the basis for the analysis that was carried out on completion of the survey.

All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questioning technique. The interview began with unprompted questions of a general nature about Germany (personal relationship with Germany, associations with Germany, recent observations, etc.). This was followed by a phase in which observations on particular areas were prompted by topics. In this phase, a set of 13 cards with the following topics was presented to the interviewees: the economy, security, technology, culture, education, environment, health, media, science, political system, migration, family, miscellaneous (wildcard). Interviewees were asked to select the topics most relevant to them and to associate them freely with Germany. A reference to the miscellaneous card (wildcard) gave interviewees the opportunity to touch on other topics. Reflective questions were discussed in the third and final phase of the interview. These questions (expectations of Germany, ideas for cooperation, opportunities and risks identified, etc.) encouraged the interviewees to look into the future and voice individual expectations or recommendations.

In order to achieve the aim of the study – namely of putting together a picture of Germany based on experiences – it was crucial that the study participants had a personal connection to Germany. The majority of them either lived or worked

in Germany, maintain intensive business relations with German companies or have family ties to Germany. Many of the participants are decision-makers whose particular expertise and experience enable them to talk about Germany in an informed way. As a result, they represent an intentionally broad spectrum.

In simplified terms, the evaluation of the data comprised three stages:

1. Reading, analysis and pre-structuring: individual perusal of all core statements and tentative assignment to observed phenomena (in vivo codes)
2. Coding by phenomena identified: assignment of all core statements to the nearly 40 in vivo codes identified
3. Discussion, structuring and processing of findings: review of the findings, more in-depth exploration based on the raw material, structuring and writing of the study

The text of the study presents the core statements at different stages of processing: first, direct quotations – cited in full or in part – are highlighted. They are kept as close to the source material as possible to convey the original observations made by the interviewees. However, it should be noted that these are not always the interviewees' original statements transcribed verbatim, but rather core statements that have been distilled to give the gist. Secondly, these core statements are summarised as indirect speech or edited into the main text with reference to their source. Finally, on the third level, higher-order correlations are presented in the summary and introduction preceding the study.

The four main sections should be interpreted as a snapshot of how Germany is perceived in Indonesia. They provide input intended to prompt readers to make their own deductions and to interpret the material in their own way, while also encouraging them to take a critical look and reflect on the German-Indonesian partnership.

# List of interviewees

## Politics

**Kurniawan Ariadi, SIP, M.Com,**  
Director, Ministry of National Development  
Planning – Bappenas

**Nur Isravivani,** Programme Manager,  
EU Delegation to Indonesia and Brunei  
Darussalam

**Amb. Prof. Dr. Eddy Pratomo, SH, MA**  
Former Indonesian Ambassador to  
Germany/Dean, Pancasila University

**Dr. Ir. Mohammad Rudy Salahuddin,**  
**MEM,** Deputy Minister, Coordinating  
Ministry for Economic Affairs of the  
Republic of Indonesia

**Dr. H. Mochamad Ridwan Kamil, ST,**  
**MUD,** Urban Design Expert, Governor of  
West Java province from 2018 to 2023

**Emil Elestianto Dardak, B.Bus, MSc,**  
**PhD,** Deputy Governor of East Java  
province from 2019 to 2024

**Dra. Dyah Rejekiningrum, MM,**  
Departmental Director, Indonesian Migrant  
Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI)

**Dr. Ir. Son Diamar, MSc,** Former Advisor  
to the Vice-President, Ministry of National  
Development Planning and Ministry of  
Internal Affairs

**Nyoman Yatmi Pravita Dewi,**  
First Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## Private sector

**Noke Kiroyan, S.Sos, BA, Graduate Dipl.,**  
**MBA,** Chair, Kiroyan Partners

**Benny Soetrisno,** Chair, Indonesian  
Exporters Association

**Salma Dias Saraswati,**  
Chief Executive Officer, Tenang.AI

**Andreas Pandu Wirawan,**  
Chief Commercial Officer, Ecoxyztem

**Daniel Purba,** Head of External Affairs,  
Mercedes-Benz Indonesia

**Ir. Kristianto Santosa, MSc, M.Ipm,**  
Executive Director, Business Innovation  
Center

**Dr.-Ing Ilham Habibie, MBA,** Chair of  
the Board of Trustees, The Habibie Center

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## Academia and research

**Dr.-Ing. Muhammad Abdul Kholiq, MSc,**  
Departmental Director, National Research  
and Innovation Agency of Indonesia –  
BRIN

**Prof. Evi Fitriani, MA, PhD,** Professor,  
University of Indonesia

**Prof. Dr. Eko Prasajo, Mag. rer.publ.,**  
Dean, University of Indonesia

**Dipl.-Kffr. Freesca Syafitri, MA,**  
Expert advisor to the Budget Committee,  
House of Representatives of the Republic of  
Indonesia – DPR-RI



## Civil Society

**Stephanie Larassati**, Founder and Principal Architect, AT-LARS (Atelier Larassati)

**Rahimah Abdulrahim**, Social Activator, Democracy Warrior & Human Rights Defender

**Natalia Soebagjo**, Member of the International Council, Transparency International

**Sely Martini**, Co-Director, Visi Integritas

**Dr. Phil. Syafiq Hasyim, MA**, Vice-Rector, Indonesian International Islamic University (IIU)

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## Media

**Budi Setyarso**, Director, PT Tempo Inti Media Tbk

**Karina Soerjanatamihardja**, News anchor, SEA Today

**Justino Djogo, MA, MBA**, Vice President, PT Ilthabi Rekatama, Habibie Group

**Taufiq Rahman**, Editor-in-Chief, The Jakarta Post

**Amanda Kistilensa**, Political Affairs & Press Officer, German Embassy Jakarta

## The Arts & Culture

**Sandhy Sondoro**, Singer, Songwriter

**Hilmar Farid, MA, PhD**, Director General, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology

**Reza Soerjadi**, German Teacher, Goethe-Institut, Jakarta

**Felencia Hutabarat**, Executive Vice-Chair, Jakarta Arts Council

**Timothy Satyabieza**, Sports Coach and Physiotherapist, Jakarta Intercultural School

**Teguh Ostenrik**, Painter and Sculptor

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## Religion

**Prof. Dr. Philipp Kuntjoro Widjaja**, Chair, Indonesian Buddhist Association (PERMABUDHI)

**Prof. Dr. Franz Magnis Suseno SJ**, Professor, Driyarkara School of Philosophy

**Rahmawati Husein, PhD**, Deputy Chair, Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center (MDMC)

**Prof. Dr. Masykuri Abdillah**, Special Advisor to the Vicepresident of the Republic of Indonesia; Professor, State Islamic University (UIN)

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Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

GIZ Office Indonesia  
Menara BCA, 46th floor  
Jl. M.H. Thamrin No. 1  
Jakarta 10310, Indonesia

T +62 21 2358 7111  
F +62 21 2358 7110  
E [giz-indonesien@giz.de](mailto:giz-indonesien@giz.de)  
I <https://www.giz.de/indonesia>

**Responsible:**  
Martin Hansen, Country Director Indonesia & ASEAN

**Local Project Team**  
Mira Zakaria, Communications Coordinator  
Barliana Amin, Portfolio Manager

**Authors of the study**  
Dr Mischa Skribot, LUMIQUE GmbH  
Dr Christoph Beier

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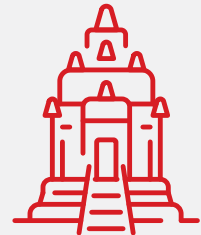
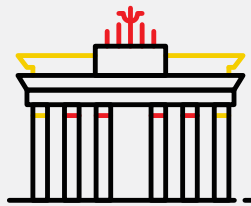
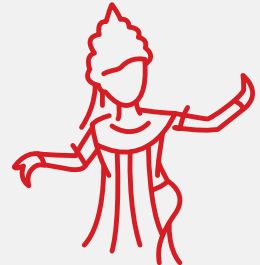
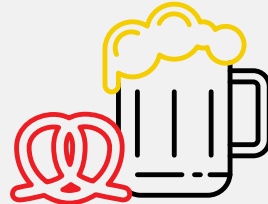
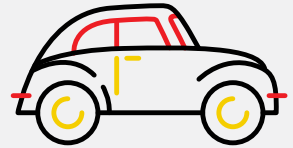
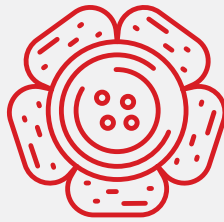
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Jakarta 10310, Indonesia

T +62 21 2358 7111  
F +62 21 2358 7110