

Indonesia: The Land of Liars, Criminals and Frauds?

Who should I respect in Indonesia? The longer I stay in this beautiful tropical country, the harder it is for me to respect anyone. Also, why don't I feel safe?

Oh, there are no registries or available public records disclosing people's backgrounds. We don't know exactly who we are dealing with as there is no way to check up on their past records.

Sure, a new acquaintance might introduce himself any way he wants, because he doesn't need to take any responsibility for what he tells others. Polite and not-so-polite lies are of little consequence because there are no records against which people can check and recheck.

Too much power is in the hands of liars, crooks and criminals.

In Indonesia, I have to trust my "gut feeling", which often isn't reliable due to various preconceived notions. I may be representative of many foreigners who are

considering investing in Indonesia. I'm not the only one who thinks this way.

I respected government ministers in Indonesia, but recently some ministers have been accused of mega-corruption.

I respected local leaders, but then there was the regency official who disrespected his wife by divorcing her within days of their wedding due to her "not being a virgin" anymore. I respected many top individuals, only to find out that they are either liars or criminals in disguise.

It seems like criminality, both big and petty — is rampant throughout Indonesia. Those who look like they are financially wealthy may well turn out to be the country's largest corruptors or tax evaders.

Those who look so pious may well be hiding fraudulent activities behind their religious masks. People can easily lead double lives because there is no system in place that forbids them from behaving un-

ethically. Having no financial or legal public records is like walking in the dark. Every step taken comes with exponential risks.

I have come to be very cautious when dealing with people in Indonesia, especially when it comes to doing business and hiring people. In the US, whenever we are hiring someone, background checks can be made immediately.

In 50 states, someone's crime records (including traffic tickets for both moving and non-moving violations), medical records, financial records bearing credit scores, taxation records and other public records are available. Also, checks can be cleared immediately with online communication between the beneficiary and the bank in which the funds are deposited.

In the US, there is no way for someone to hide. Important things that affect person-to-person interactions are transparent.

The system forces people to behave as good citizens, which later becomes a habit and turns the society into a civilized society.

If you have been convicted for sex-related crimes, like molestation, sexual

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harassment or rape; national, statewide and citywide registries are available for immediate perusal. You can literally find out whether there are sexual offenders residing close to your home and your children's school. These "Megan's Law" registries include the full names, home addresses and photos of sex offenders. How embarrassing and restricting. Bad apples shouldn't spoil the rest of the apples.

In Indonesia, ironically, good people often place restrictions on themselves, such as living behind high fences and refraining

from certain activities due to fear and a sense of insecurity.

Rampant fraud carried out by mobile phone is a clear example. I no longer take calls from unrecognized numbers on my smartphone.

A friend in California once said about his home country the Philippines, that it was like a "big black hole". The same thing can be said about Indonesia. It's so dark and not transparent that we gamble with our lives every day.

Who are these people that we encounter every day? When they brag about how much they earn, is it truthful? Who is that new teacher? What if he is a sexual predator and now teaching our children? Who is this polite guy? Is he a polite liar?

I certainly don't know.

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