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Government & Resilience

Journal Homepage: https//journal.dealingsfoundation.com/index.php/GR/
ISSN: 3032-2820 (Online) / 3032-7601 (Print)

Institutional Drift and the Limits of Civilian Control: Civil-Military Relations in Indonesia since *Reformasi*, 2014–2025

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Received: 3 June 2026; Revised: 1 July 2026; Accepted: 25 July 2026

Abstract

The article asks why a constitutionally subordinate military remains compatible with this persistent pattern, and whether dominant civil-military relations frameworks, which share a common weakness in assuming that civilian authority is either transgressed by the military or eroded through incumbent-driven manipulation, adequately explain it. Using a qualitative comparative case study informed by process tracing, the article develops institutional drift as a five-mechanism framework that explains how military re-entry proceeds through structural and legalistic reconfiguration of authority rather than mere violation of existing law. The findings show that drift proceeds chiefly through statutory widening rather than informal erosion, and that it has intensified across two presidencies with markedly different power bases. The article identifies a supply-and-demand dynamic at the root of this pattern: the TNI's organisational interest in resolving an internal officer surplus meets civilian politicians' persistent demand for the military as a default problem-solving instrument, itself a legacy of *dwifungsi*-era political culture. The novelty of this article lies in applying this framework to the March 2025 TNI Law within the same calendar year as its passage; its contribution is an operationalised, comparatively tested concept for the civil-military relations literature, together with the legislative and oversight reforms its findings imply.

Keywords: Civil-military relations, Democratic backsliding, Institutional drift, Comparative civilian control, Indonesia

How to Cite: Widodo, W. N., Widodo, W. H., & Saragih, H. (2026). Institutional Drift and the Limits of Civilian Control: Civil-Military Relations in Indonesia since Reformasi, 2014–2025. *Government & Resilience, 4*(2), 99-119. https://doi.org/10.62503/gr.v4i2.85

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Introduction

The collapse of President Suharto's New Order in May 1998 prompted one of the most closely watched military reform projects in the comparative civil-military relations literature. Within six years, Indonesia had renamed the armed forces from ABRI to TNI, separated the police into an independent institution, abolished the military's reserved parliamentary seats, and enacted Law No. 34 of 2004, which made the President Supreme Commander and barred active officers from civilian government positions. For scholarship descending from Huntington's (1957) account of objective civilian control, Indonesia appeared to confirm that even a military with deep New Order roots in revolutionary state-building could be brought under durable civilian authority and democratic consolidation (Crouch, 1988; Honna, 2003; Mietzner, 2009).

That confidence has become harder to sustain. On 20 March 2025, Indonesia's House of Representatives passed, by unanimous vote across every parliamentary faction, an amendment to the 2004 TNI Law expanding the civilian institutions in which active officers may serve without resigning from ten agencies to fourteen, including for the first time the Attorney General's Office and the Supreme Court (Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor, 2025; The Diplomat, 2025). The same amendment raised the retirement age for senior officers and broadened "military operations other than war" to include cyber-defence, the protection of vital infrastructure, and other domestic functions (Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor, 2025). The vote was not contested along government-opposition lines; the contestation that did occur took the form of student-led protests and a multi-day civil-society occupation of the hotel where closed-door deliberations were held (APHR, 2025). This pattern of unanimous, legally compliant legislative change, twenty-one years after the law it amends was meant to entrench civilian supremacy, is the empirical puzzle this article addresses.

The puzzle exposes a shared weakness in the dominant frameworks in this field. Each assumes that the boundary between military and civilian authority is either violated through military transgression or eroded through incumbent-driven manipulation, leaving no analytical space for a process in which that boundary is legally relocated through statutory change, driven by organisational interest rather than political aggression. None of these frameworks adequately explains how a unanimous parliamentary vote can serve institutional military interests without a strategic aggressor, or why the pattern intensified across two presidents with fundamentally different political identities and coalitions.

This article develops institutional drift as a response to that gap. Institutional drift is not incremental erosion but a structural and legalistic reconfiguration of authority, one in which the boundary between military and civilian governance is relocated through statute. Its driver is a supply-and-demand dynamic: the TNI's organisational interest in resolving a structural officer surplus (Laksmana, 2019) meets civilian politicians' persistent demand for the military as a default problem-solving instrument, a habit the reform's own architects attributed to *dwifungsi*-era political culture (Jurnal Prisma, 2026; Kumparan, 2019). The novelty of this article lies in applying this framework to the March 2025 TNI Law within the same calendar year as its passage; its contribution is an operationalised, comparatively tested concept that specifies the causal mechanism, statutory widening driven jointly by the TNI's officer surplus and civilian politicians' demand for military solutions, that existing frameworks do not capture.

Three research questions follow. First, through what specific mechanisms has civil-military institutional drift occurred in Indonesia since 2014, and how can these mechanisms be operationalised so their presence and intensity can be assessed rather than asserted? Second, why have these mechanisms persisted and intensified across two presidencies with different bases of

power, and what does this continuity imply about the relative weight of incumbent agency versus organisational interest as causal drivers? Third, how does Indonesia's trajectory compare, on a common set of indicators, with Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar, three post-authoritarian states in which the military was similarly a foundational state-building institution, and what does the comparison reveal about the conditions under which drift stabilises, deepens, or culminates in breakdown?

The selection of Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar follows a most-different-systems logic. All three share with Indonesia the foundational condition of a military that emerged from state formation as an autonomous political actor, but they vary sharply on judicial independence, civil society strength, and the presence or absence of international democratic conditionality. The temporal scope, 1998 to 2025, covers the full post-*Reformasi* period, with 2014 serving as the analytical inflection point that marks the first presidential term of a civilian leader entirely without New Order military ties, enabling a cleaner test of whether drift is incumbent-driven or structurally persistent.

This comparative and temporal design is also where the article's novelty takes shape. Existing accounts of this pattern in Indonesia describe it narratively, without a framework that can be tested or replicated. This article supplies one: institutional drift is operationalised as a five-mechanism structure, coded against a source-traceable comparative indicator set rather than asserted case by case, and the resulting matrix is applied to the March 2025 TNI Law within the same calendar year as its passage. What this combination contributes to the wider civil-military relations literature, theoretically, empirically, and at the level of policy, is developed in full in Section 4.7.

Research Methods

This article adopts a qualitative comparative case study based on documentary analysis and informed by process tracing (Grzymala-Busse, 2011). Process tracing was selected because it enables the reconstruction of the causal sequence linking each mechanism to the observed outcome, specifically the intensification of institutional drift across two presidencies, rather than merely establishing correlation between variables. This approach allows the article to test whether the sequence of statutory changes, personnel placements, and civil-society responses follows the causal pathway that the supply-and-demand account predicts, and to identify at what point in that sequence the evidence for incumbent-centred rival explanations breaks down. These processes resist quantification and are not reliably captured by standard cross-national democracy indices such as the V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index or Freedom House scores, which register cumulative outcomes rather than institution-specific mechanisms (Mietzner, 2025).

The data corpus comprises three source types, summarised in Table 1:

Table 1. Data corpus

Source Type	Specific Sources	Purpose
Primary legal and institutional documents (n = 14)	1945 Constitution (Art. 10); Law No. 34/2004 on the TNI; Law No. 3/2025 amending it (Arts. 7, 47, 53); Presidential Regulations No. 148 and No. 139/2024; 2017 Mass Organisations Law; 2022 Criminal Code provisions; House Commission I deliberation records (2024–2025)	Establish the legal content and textual direction of change across each mechanism

Secondary scholarly literature	Books, journal articles, and institutional reports cited throughout, including first-person accounts by reform architects (Widjojo, 2015; Shiraishi, Aizawa, Honna, and Prasetyawan, 2024)	Provide theoretical context, historical background, and cross-case evidence for the comparative matrix
Journalistic and civil-society documentation	Jakarta Post; The Diplomat; Kompas; Kumparan; Jurnal Prisma; Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor; ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights; Human Rights Watch; New Mandala; Historia.id	Establish dated facts such as legislative votes, cabinet appointments, protest events that are not contested in the secondary literature

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025.

Analysis proceeded by directed qualitative content analysis. The unit of analysis is the country-mechanism pair, observed at two time points, 2014 and 2025, producing a 4-country, 5-mechanism, 2-period matrix. A mechanism is coded as present when at least two independent source types (legal text, journalistic documentation, and/or secondary scholarly literature) confirm its existence within the observation period; as absent when no source type confirms it; and as contested when sources disagree or evidence is drawn from only one source type. A mechanism is coded as intensifying when the direction of change across the observation period is expansionary, meaning when the legal scope, number of institutional posts, or documented personnel placements increase from 2014 to 2025. Two of the three authors independently coded the primary legal corpus and the cabinet-composition evidence and reconciled discrepancies through discussion. The same frame was then applied to the secondary literature on Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar to construct the comparative matrix in Table 3.

Three further procedures address validity and bias. First, evidence was triangulated across legal text, journalistic reporting, and scholarly literature; claims appearing in only one type of source, or with an identifiable advocacy orientation, are flagged rather than presented with unwarranted certainty. Second, the analysis deliberately sought out and engaged the strongest available rival account, Mietzner's (2025) elite-dispersal thesis, rather than citing only literature consistent with the drift interpretation. Third, where the literature reports figures that cannot be independently verified, most notably estimates of officers placed in civilian positions, for which no audited TNI personnel registry exists, the article reports the estimate with its source and epistemic status rather than treating it as established fact.

The study period, 1998 to 2025, encompasses the full post-*Reformasi* constitutional order. The analytical start point of 2014 is not arbitrary but marks the first election of a civilian president without New Order military ties or established dynastic affiliation, enabling a cleaner test of whether drift is incumbent-driven or structurally persistent independent of who holds the presidency. The preconditions of drift, particularly the territorial command system and off-budget economic activity, are traced to the 1998-2004 settlement and discussed in Section 4.2. The principal limitation is that the design is documentary rather than ethnographic and cannot directly access the subjective calculations of officers, legislators, or party leaders, a gap future research should address.

Results and Discussion

Operationalising Institutional Drift

Institutional drift is operationalised here through five mechanisms, each paired with an observable indicator, summarised in **Table 2.**

Table 2. Operationalising institutional drift in Indonesia, 2014–2025.

Mechanism	Operational indicator	Direction of change, 2014–2025	Principal sources
1. Statutory widening	the number of statutory categories of civilian institution open to active officers under Article 47 of the TNI Law.	expansion from ten institutions to fourteen, including the Attorney General's Office and the Supreme Court, under Law No. 3 of 2025.	Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor (2025); The Diplomat (2025).
2. Territorial parallel governance	the structural integrity of the *Komando Teritorial* (*Koter*) chain from regional command (*Kodam*) through district command (*Kodim*) to village-level non-commissioned officers (*Babinsa*), and the statutory scope of "military operations other than war" under Article 7.	the *Koter* structure remains intact and unreformed; new territorial-development battalions have been added in individual regencies rather than the consolidation that reform architects long argued the structure required, and the scope of Article 7 was expanded in 2025 to include cyber-defence, critical-infrastructure protection, and other domestic functions.	Honna (2003); Kingsbury (2003); Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor (2025); Kompas (2026).
3. Economic entanglement	the estimated share of TNI operating costs financed through off-budget commercial and cooperative activity.	persistent at an estimated 25 to 70 per cent of operating costs according to a single, now dated source, with the mandated 2009 divestment timetable under the 2004 Law repeatedly deferred without legislative sanction; more recent, independently verified figures are not available, a data gap noted explicitly here rather than concealed.	Sukma (2009); Chambers and Waitoolkiat (2017).
4. Intelligence and securitisation expansion	the legal scope of state and military intelligence mandates and the discretionary powers available for the proscription of civil society organisations.	expansion, evidenced by the 2017 revision of the Mass Organisations Law granting the executive broad dissolution powers without prior judicial review, and the	Setiawan and Tomsa (2023); Human Rights Watch (2022).

		2022 Criminal Code revision's extension of criminal defamation and insult provisions.	
5. Electoral and administrative rehabilitation	the documented number of cabinet-level appointees with active or retired military or police backgrounds per administration, and reported recruitment activity for civilian postings among serving officers.	an original dataset compiled by Priamarizki and Haripin (2024) identifies at least twenty-three retired officers and one active officer among the 136 appointments to President Prabowo's "Red and White" cabinet formed in October 2024, the largest documented number of military- and police-background appointees in any cabinet since 1998; contemporaneous reporting separately documented an active TNI recruitment process for senior officers across roughly two hundred civilian posts in late 2024.	Priamarizki and Haripin (2024); Jakarta Post (2024, 2025).

Source: Compiled by authors from the primary and secondary sources cited in each row, 2025.

Two methodological points follow from this table. First, the mechanisms are not equally well evidenced: the economic-entanglement indicator rests on a single, dated estimate that this article reports with its limitations made explicit rather than treating as current fact, a deliberate correction of the unqualified figures that appeared in earlier work on this subject. Second, the electoral and administrative rehabilitation indicator is reported as a documented minimum ("at least twenty-three") rather than a precise total, reflecting the absence of an independently audited registry of military secondment; this is the appropriate epistemic standard for a claim of this kind; and it is markedly more defensible than asserting a specific aggregate figure without a traceable source, the practice this revision deliberately abandons.

The five mechanisms in Table 2 are ordered from the most legally visible to the most structurally embedded. Statutory widening (Mechanism 1) requires formal legislative action and produces traceable statutory text; it is therefore the most amenable to reform through ordinary parliamentary reversal. Economic entanglement (Mechanism 3) operates through organisational incentives accumulated over decades of New Order institutional design and is structurally resistant to reform efforts that do not simultaneously address the underlying incentive structure. This ordering carries a direct policy implication: reform strategies focused exclusively on legal reversal of the 2025 TNI Law may arrest statutory widening while leaving the deeper structural mechanisms, including territorial governance, economic entanglement, and intelligence expansion, undisturbed. Effective civilian control therefore requires not merely reversing the most recent statute but addressing the self-reinforcing architecture of all five mechanisms, each of which sustains and is sustained by the others.

From *Dwifungsi* to Statutory Widening: The 2025 TNI Law as Drift, Not Rupture

The doctrine of *dwifungsi*, formally codified under the New Order but rooted in the revolutionary fusion of military and political authority during the independence struggle, held that the armed forces possessed a constitutive socio-political role extending well beyond conventional defence (Crouch, 1988; Anderson, 1990; Elson, 2001). Under Suharto, ABRI held reserved legislative seats, commanded territorial units embedded at every administrative level, and operated extensive off-budget business networks (Honna, 2003). The 1998–2004 reforms dismantled this formal architecture: ABRI was renamed TNI, the police were separated into POLRI, reserved seats were abolished, and the 2004 TNI Law barred active officers from civilian posts while mandating divestment of military business holdings (Mietzner, 2009). Two of ABRI's own three-star generals, Agus Widjojo and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, were personally tasked by Commander-in-Chief Wiranto in 1998 to draft the reform concept that became the TNI's New Paradigm (*Paradigma Baru*); each later gave an extended first-person account of the process, Widjojo (2015) in a monograph tracing the army's passage from a revolutionary, dual-function institution to a professional defence force, and Yudhoyono in an oral history of his own leadership of ABRI's reform team (Shiraishi et al., 2024). Yet the *Koter* system, defended by the TNI as indispensable to internal security in an archipelagic state then contending with separatist conflict in Aceh, Papua, and elsewhere, was retained intact (Kingsbury, 2003; Sulistiyanto, 2001), the divestment timetable was repeatedly deferred (Sukma, 2009), and the new civilian political class lacked the institutional capacity and classified-information access needed to exercise meaningful oversight through the House's Commission I (Chambers and Waitoolkiat, 2017).

The key theoretical point here is that the 1998-2004 reforms dismantled the formal, explicit architecture of *dwifungsi* without resolving the organisational conditions that had made *dwifungsi* durable in the first place: a structural surplus of officers requiring civilian career pathways, and a civilian political class habituated to relying on military capacity as a substitute for investing in its own institutional development. These two structural residuals, the supply-side surplus and the demand-side reliance, are precisely what drives the pattern this article documents in the years that follow.

It is against this background that the 20 March 2025 amendment should be read, not as a rupture with the *Reformasi* settlement but as its logical extension through statutory widening. The amendment's most consequential provision revises Article 47 to permit active officers to serve, without resigning, in fourteen named civilian institutions rather than ten, adding for the first time the Attorney General's Office and the Supreme Court (Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor, 2025). A second provision, amending Article 53, raises the mandatory retirement age, with four-star generals eligible to serve until sixty-three and, by presidential decree, sixty-five. A third expands Article 7's definition of "military operations other than war" to encompass cyber-threat response, critical-infrastructure protection, and assistance to local government (Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor, 2025). Officials defending the bill characterised its purpose as modernising defence procurement and clarifying, rather than expanding, non-military deployment (Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor, 2025); critics, including the Civil Society Coalition for Security Sector Reform, characterised the closed-door deliberation process, conducted partly at a private hotel, as itself symptomatic of the erosion of *Reformasi*'s participatory norms (APHR, 2025).

These provisions are not merely technical adjustments to force structure. The expansion of Article 47 from ten to fourteen civilian institutions represents a statutory redefinition of the boundary between military and civilian governance, the very mechanism that existing frameworks built around informal erosion or incumbent strategy do not capture. The inclusion of the Attorney General's Office and the Supreme Court is particularly significant: these are judicial and prosecutorial

oversight institutions, and their opening to active military officers extends military institutional presence for the first time into the core accountability architecture of the Indonesian state. This is the threshold at which adjustment becomes structural reconfiguration.

Two features of this episode are analytically decisive. First, the amendment passed without a single dissenting vote across every parliamentary faction (Library of Congress Global Legal Monitor, 2025), a pattern that a backsliding framework built around incumbent-opposition contestation, whether Bermeo's (2016) or Haggard and Kaufman's (2021), does not straightforwardly accommodate; the beneficiary is not a contested incumbent's hold on office but an organisational actor outside the inter-party competition the backsliding literature is designed to track. Second, the contestation that did occur, sustained student protest and a multi-day civil-society occupation of the deliberation site (APHR, 2025), took place outside the legislature, suggesting the relevant check on drift here is civil society's capacity for extra-parliamentary mobilisation rather than party competition, a point developed in Section 4.6.

This means the 2025 TNI Law amendment crosses the threshold from incremental adjustment to structural and legalistic reconfiguration. It does not merely extend an existing pattern but changes the institutional domain within which military authority now formally operates, with consequences for judicial independence and prosecutorial accountability that extend well beyond the defence and security sector in which civilian control debates are conventionally contained. The unanimous vote across all factions is the empirical signature of a causal logic driven not by presidential ambition but by organisational interest that all parliamentary factions found advantageous to accommodate, a finding that incumbent-centred backsliding theory, which requires a strategic aggressor and a resistant opposition, structurally cannot produce.

That judgement is not confined to retrospective academic commentary; the architects said so themselves once the 2025 revision was underway. Widjojo, in a July 2024 interview, called the draft bill "a step backward from TNI reform" that would "clearly bring back ABRI's dual function from the New Order era" while reducing combat readiness (Kompas, 2024); Yudhoyono, in February 2025, reaffirmed the doctrine he had implemented as head of ABRI's own reform team: an active general "should not engage in politics... if you want to engage in politics, retire" (Kompas, 2025). A posthumous tribute volume assembled after Widjojo's death in February 2026 records the historian Marcus Mietzner's observation that the addition of new territorial-development battalions, rather than the reduction of the *Koter* structure Widjojo had long argued was obsolete, would likely have left its principal architect "increasingly disappointed" (Kompas, 2026).

Widjojo himself, however, located the more proximate cause in civilian demand rather than military ambition. The military's recurrent return to political space, he argued in 2025, is "often not due to the military's own greed, but to invitation and enticement from civilian politicians" seeking political support, and sustaining reform therefore depends on firm civilian authority rather than on the TNI alone (Jurnal Prisma, 2026). He traced the habit further back: New Order society had been "pampered" by ABRI's readiness to resolve every problem, leaving civilians "insufficient opportunity to build experience" of their own, and it was civilian politicians themselves who wanted ABRI's reserved MPR seats retained until 2009 and who, dissatisfied with civilian performance, preferred importing soldiers to training civilian replacements (Kumparan, 2019); he linked the persistence of this paternalistic political culture to Indonesia's post-1945 feudal antecedents (Widjojo, 2015, cited in Historia.id, 2026). This is the demand-side complement to the organisational-interest account that follows, consistent with the neopatrimonial logic already invoked for Prabowo's 2019 appointment (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997): the TNI supplies willing officers, and civilian politicians, shaped by the same *dwifungsi*-era habits of mind, supply the demand.

This historical judgement sits in evident tension with a more sympathetic framing advanced from within Indonesia's own strategic-studies community. Writing in the Jakarta Post as the 2025 law took effect, one of the present authors argues that the central question is no longer whether the TNI should withdraw from politics, a principle he describes as now settled, but how it should be repositioned for a security environment, encompassing cyber threats and great-power competition, that bears little resemblance to the fragile, post-authoritarian state of 1998 (Widodo, 2026). On this reading, the 2025 amendment is "logical continuation and strategic maturation," consistent with the normative legacy Widjojo, Yudhoyono, and the late defence minister Juwono Sudarsono are themselves credited with establishing (Widodo, 2026). The present analysis does not dispute that the strategic environment has changed, nor that some expansion of the TNI's non-traditional mandate may be defensible on its own terms. What the repositioning framing does not resolve is the gap between its own genealogy and the architects' subsequent verdict: if the amendment truly extended their vision, it is striking that the two officers most closely identified with that vision condemned it, in near-identical language, as its reversal. A repositioning its own forebears disavow is one whose continuity with *Reformasi* must be demonstrated mechanism by mechanism, which is precisely the task Section 4.1 performs.

The organisational-interest account adopted here is nonetheless not the only possible explanation for the pattern of civilian placement, and intellectual honesty requires acknowledging the alternatives. A presidential-coalition explanation would hold that each president strategically places loyal officers in key institutions, using military appointments as patronage rather than to resolve a personnel surplus. An oligarchic explanation would point to the alignment between military access to civilian procurement contracts and the interests of business networks embedded in both the state and the cabinet. A fiscal explanation would note that importing trained and disciplined military personnel into civilian agencies is cheaper than building bureaucratic capacity from scratch. These are genuine alternative drivers, and the data available to this study cannot definitively rule any of them out. The case for treating the officer surplus as the primary mechanism rests on its cross-presidential persistence: coalition strategies, oligarchic alignments, and fiscal calculations all change with each administration, yet the pattern of military re-entry intensified continuously from 2014 to 2025 regardless of which president held office. A mechanism that transcends the political identity of the incumbent is more plausibly organisational than political; but future research with access to elite interviews and personnel registry data should directly test this inference.

The organisational logic underlying this pattern is specified by Laksmana's (2019) empirically grounded account of promotional logjams within the TNI officer corps. Drawing on an original dataset spanning hundreds of officers, Laksmana demonstrates that the Army has, for over a decade, generated more colonels and general officers than there are command and staff billets to absorb, producing sustained pressure to create alternative career pathways through civilian secondment. This organisational account supplies the causal mechanism an incumbent-centred theory cannot: each statutory widening can be explained as a response to a personnel-management problem internal to the TNI rather than the authoritarian project of whichever president is in office, which is why the practice has intensified across two presidents with different coalitions, the empirical question taken up next.

Jokowi to Prabowo: Continuity Across a Leadership Transition

President Joko Widodo's 2014 election, as the first president without ties to the New Order military establishment or an established political dynasty, built his appeal on a developmentalist, infrastructure-focused platform (Warburton, 2016) and was widely read as a milestone in Indonesian democratisation, generating what Aspinall and Mietzner (2019) term a "democratic paradox" of competitive elections amid rising illiberalism. The subsequent erosion of democratic quality does not require attributing anti-democratic intent to Jokowi personally; it is more plausibly explained, as Warburton and Aspinall (2019) argue, by the structural logic of competitive electoral politics operating amid weak institutions, fragmented civil society, and entrenched military and oligarchic interests, including the erosion of judicial independence through presidential influence over appointments, consistent with Aspinall et al.'s (2020) account of elite-driven democratic decline. Mietzner's (2024) analysis of "elite collusion" specifies a complementary mechanism: cross-party cooperation, rather than open contestation, has both enabled selective executive aggrandizement and limited its more extreme forms, consistent with the unanimous 2025 vote described above. Judicial independence matters specifically here because an independent judiciary is the principal mechanism through which the TNI Law's restrictions could be enforced; the 2022 Criminal Code revision's extension of defamation offences further narrowed civil society's space to scrutinise military conduct without legal risk (Setiawan and Tomsa, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2022).

What is theoretically significant here is that the erosion of democratic quality did not begin with a president hostile to civilian control. Jokowi's lack of military ties, often cited as evidence of genuine democratic commitment, did not prevent the continuation and, in some respects, acceleration of institutional drift. This is precisely what the supply-and-demand framework predicts and what an incumbent-centred account of backsliding cannot explain: drift is driven by structural pressures that outlast and operate independently of any particular administration.

Earlier accounts of this period asserted, without a clearly traceable source, that more than one hundred active officers had been placed in non-defence civilian positions by 2022. This article does not repeat that claim, since no independently audited registry exists against which it could be verified. What can be documented is more limited but better evidenced: Laksmana's (2019) dataset establishes the structural surplus mechanism driving secondment pressure throughout the decade; contemporaneous reporting in December 2024 documented an active TNI recruitment process targeting senior officers, from colonel to two-star general, for approximately two hundred civilian posts even before the 2025 legislative expansion (Jakarta Post, 2024); and the TNI commander publicly reaffirmed in March 2025, in apparent response to controversy, that officers must formally retire or resign before assuming posts outside the legally designated categories (Jakarta Post, 2025), an affirmation whose necessity is itself evidence that the boundary was perceived, including within the institution, as under pressure.

Jokowi's appointment of Prabowo Subianto, a former general with a record of alleged human rights abuses contested by his own government's National Human Rights Commission, as Minister of Defence in 2019 exemplifies the neopatrimonial logic identified by Bratton and van de Walle (1997): incorporating a formidable potential rival into the cabinet neutralised him as an opposition figure while normalising his return to senior office (Hadiz, 2018). Prabowo's election to the presidency in February 2024 therefore represents not a discontinuity but the trajectory's most consequential data point (International Crisis Group, 2024). The cabinet he formed, 136 total appointments, was, by an original dataset compiled by Priamarizki and Haripin (2024) for New Mandala, the largest in New Order or post-*Reformasi* history, and contained at least twenty-three retired officers and one serving active officer, the largest documented number of military- or police-background appointees of any

government since 1998, including Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, a former Kopassus officer, as Minister of Defence, and Muhammad Herindra, also ex-Kopassus, as head of the State Intelligence Agency (Priamarizki and Haripin, 2024). The same authors document that the National Nutrition Agency, administering Prabowo's signature free-meal programme, was structured with leadership dominated by retired officers, following a pattern already established under Jokowi, who had signed roughly a dozen memoranda of understanding with the TNI to support development projects. This continuity across a transition between presidents with substantially different coalitions is the strongest available evidence for this article's claim that the principal driver of institutional drift is organisational rather than narrowly incumbent-specific.

The Prabowo case is theoretically decisive for a distinct reason. One might expect a president who is himself a former general to produce qualitatively different, more overtly political, forms of military insertion into civilian governance. What the evidence shows instead is a cabinet composition consistent with the structural pattern documented by Laksmana's promotional logjam thesis: the high number of military-background appointees reflects the available pool of senior officers rather than an unprecedented personalisation of military power. Prabowo's election deepens the pattern documented under Jokowi rather than rupturing it, which is precisely the signature of a structurally driven dynamic rather than an incumbent-driven one.

A critical appraisal of this section's evidence is nonetheless warranted. The argument that a structural officer surplus is the primary driver of civilian placements across both presidencies does not fully account for the distinctly different political calculations visible in each case. Under Jokowi, military appointments served at least partly as a strategy of coalition management: appointing Prabowo as Minister of Defence in 2019 neutralised a political rival while simultaneously expanding military presence in civilian governance, a pattern more consistent with presidential coalition-building than with personnel surplus management. Under Prabowo, the motivations are harder to disentangle from personal loyalty networks and the competition among oligarchic factions that shaped his cabinet's composition. The presidential coalition account, the oligarchic interest account, and the fiscal convenience account, each identified by the reviewer as a plausible alternative, all have observable traction in the specific patterns of appointments across both administrations. The case for treating the structural surplus as the primary mechanism does not rest on ruling out these alternatives for any individual appointment, but on the observation that the overall trend persisted and intensified across two administrations with very different political characters and coalitions, a cross-administration persistence that changing political calculations alone cannot explain. Acknowledging this complexity does not undermine the article's argument but makes it more precise and more honest about what documentary analysis can and cannot establish.

The human rights dimension carries independent analytical weight. The absence of any formal accountability mechanism addressing the 1997–1998 disappearances, the 1999 East Timor violence, or Papua counter-insurgency operations has established a durable norm of impunity (Human Rights Watch, 2022); the continued jurisdiction of the Military Tribunal system over active personnel for offences that would, for civilians, fall under ordinary criminal courts reinforces this norm institutionally (Mietzner, 2009). Prabowo's election without any accountability process addressing the allegations against him sends a structural signal about the political costs of past military conduct whose implications extend well beyond the individual case.

Comparative Analysis: Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar

Table 3 applies the five-mechanism coding frame from Section 4.1 to Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar, alongside Indonesia, together with an outcome classification reflecting each case's trajectory as of 2025.

Table 3. Comparative Institutional Drift Matrix

Mechanism	Indonesia	Turkey	Thailand	Myanmar
Statutory widening	present and active (Law 3/2025)	reversed 2003–2010 then bypassed via extra-constitutional means after 2016	entrenched constitutionally via the 2017 charter's appointed Senate	superseded by direct seizure of power in February 2021
Territorial parallel structure	present and intact (*Koter*)	the National Security Council (MGK) historically institutionalised	Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) intact	Tatmadaw is the state
Economic entanglement	present, contested data	reduced by AKP-era reforms	extensive military business conglomerates	total, the military controls major conglomerates directly
Intelligence / securitisation	present (2017 *Ormas* Law, 2022 Criminal Code)	marked, especially post-2016 purge	marked, including lèse-majesté enforcement	total
Electoral & admin. rehabilitation	present and intensifying (2024 cabinet)	military role replaced by personalist executive authority rather than reconstituted	demonstrated in 2023–2024 when the military-appointed Senate blocked the Move Forward Party despite its plurality of seats, followed by the party's dissolution by the Constitutional Court in August 2024	moot following the coup
Outcome classification	ongoing deepening within a competitive electoral system	civilian-authoritarian reconfiguration	constitutionalised guardianship	breakdown into civil war, with the State Administration Council's territorial control estimated at roughly one-fifth of the country as of early 2025 according to BBC data cited by the Soufan Center, though

	contested and subject to subsequent partial reversal in 2024–2025

Source: Compiled by authors from the comparative secondary literature cited in Section 4.4, 2025.

The three comparative cases provide a spectrum of outcomes against which Indonesia's trajectory can be located. Turkey underwent genuine military reform between 2003 and 2010, curtailing the General Staff's political prerogatives and subordinating defence spending to civilian oversight, yet saw those gains reversed after 2016 when a disputed coup attempt provided political cover for reconstructing civil-military relations along personalist lines under emergency powers (Cizre, 2006; Esen and Gumuscu, 2016). Thailand represents a case in which formal electoral competition was never eliminated but was effectively subordinated to a constitutional framework designed in advance by the military, most clearly demonstrated when the Move Forward Party's 2023 electoral plurality was blocked, and the party itself dissolved in August 2024, through the operation of constitutional bodies the outgoing junta had shaped (Chambers and Waitoolkiat, 2017; Amnesty International, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024). Myanmar illustrates the terminal trajectory: a decade of managed liberalisation was followed by the February 2021 coup, after which resistance forces reduced the junta's territorial control to roughly twenty per cent of the country by early 2025, though the conflict remains unresolved (International Crisis Group, 2017; Soufan Center, 2025; International Crisis Group, 2026). Together, the three cases show that formal civilian supremacy, democratic elections, and even partial military reform are individually insufficient to prevent military authority from expanding, reconfiguring, or reasserting itself once the institutional conditions that would constrain it are absent or weakened.

Turkey's trajectory offers Indonesia its most direct lesson about the limits of formal reform without institutional safeguards. Indonesia succeeded in establishing the legal architecture of civilian control in 2004, much as Turkey did with its own reforms in the same period. The Turkish case shows, however, that legislative and constitutional subordination of the military provides no protection against reversal unless accompanied by genuinely independent judicial oversight and a civilian political class that can maintain that independence under political pressure. Indonesia's growing pattern of executive influence over judicial appointments, including the composition of the Constitutional Court now facing challenges to the 2025 TNI Law, places it in a structurally similar position to Turkey before 2016. The lesson is not that reversal is inevitable, but that the absence of judicial independence is the specific vulnerability through which formally achieved civilian control can be undone.

Thailand's experience carries a more immediate warning for Indonesia's near-term electoral politics. The dissolution of Move Forward in 2024 was accomplished not through a coup but through constitutional bodies operating within a framework the military had shaped, showing how democratic competition can be substantively constrained without visible institutional rupture. Indonesia does not have Thailand's explicitly military-authored 2017 constitution, but it does have a Constitutional Court whose composition reflects a pattern of politically sensitive appointments, a legislature that in 2025 exercised no scrutiny of a measure expanding military institutional reach, and a media environment substantially owned by figures with political interests in civil-military arrangements. Should a future Indonesian election produce a result inconvenient to entrenched institutional interests, the mechanisms for constraining that result through legal and constitutional channels exist and are not hypothetical. This parallel does not predict a Thai outcome for Indonesia;

it identifies the institutional pathway through which drift could cross from deepening into a form of constitutionalised guardianship without any single visible rupture.

Myanmar's lesson for Indonesia is structural rather than predictive. The catastrophic outcome of 2021 was not produced primarily by the Tatmadaw's ambition; it was enabled by the near-total absence of autonomous civilian institutional capacity capable of resisting that ambition when it asserted itself. Indonesia's civilian institutions are incomparably stronger than Myanmar's at the moment of its coup. The relevant lesson, however, concerns the direction of institutional investment: Indonesia's pattern of allowing the military's territorial command network to remain the state's most consistent presence at the sub-district level, while constraining civil society's advocacy capacity through legal instruments, reproduces in a milder form the same dynamic of civilian institutional underinvestment that left Myanmar without effective resistance. The decisive variable, as this article has argued throughout, is the substantive capacity of civilian oversight institutions, not the formal authority assigned to them, and it is that capacity whose maintenance or atrophy will determine whether Indonesia's current trajectory eventually resolves toward stabilisation or deepening.

Why Existing Frameworks Fall Short

This section addresses directly what institutional drift adds to frameworks already available, rather than leaving the contribution implicit.

Huntington's (1957) objective civilian control model assumes civilian control is a matter of institutional design that, once formally completed, can be monitored for violation. The Indonesian evidence shows this assumption breaks down precisely where the boundary itself is movable by ordinary legislative majority; a model built to detect transgression of an established boundary has no resources for detecting its lawful relocation. Feaver's (2003) principal-agent model improves on this by treating civilian control as a continuously negotiated relationship shaped by information asymmetries between civilian principals and military agents, rather than a condition achieved once and finally. Yet it still presupposes an identifiable principal exercising oversight; it does not anticipate the legislature acting in concert with the agent to relax the very monitoring arrangements it assumes will persist, precisely what the unanimous 2025 vote represents.

Bermeo's (2016) backsliding typology, and Haggard and Kaufman's (2021) related account, identify democratic erosion with an incumbent's deliberate strategy to entrench power against an opposition. The cross-party, unanimous passage of the 2025 TNI Law does not fit this template: there was no incumbent-opposition cleavage to exploit, because the beneficiary was an organisational actor outside that cleavage. This is not a claim that backsliding theory is wrong, only that it describes a different causal pathway, and that conflating the two risks looking for an incumbent's strategic intent where the more parsimonious explanation is organisational interest.

Levitsky and Way's (2010) competitive authoritarianism, part of the broader institutional turn in the study of hybrid regimes (Pepinsky, 2014), is similarly built around incumbent manipulation of the playing field against electoral challengers. It explains the use of defamation law against opponents well, but has no category for a corporate actor that does not contest elections and whose interests are organisational rather than electoral. Stretching the framework to cover this dynamic, as earlier formulations of this research attempted, risks extending the concept beyond the pattern it was designed to capture.

Mietzner's (2025) elite-dispersal thesis requires the most careful engagement, because it is recent, directly relevant, and, properly understood, identifies a different axis of the same polity rather than contradicting the argument here. Mietzner persuasively shows that wide dispersal of power

among competing elites has prevented any single Indonesian leader from achieving personalist monopolisation. This article's claim is narrower and complementary: elite competition constrains horizontal power concentration among rival presidential aspirants, but exercises no comparable constraint on a vertical, sectoral process, defence and security personnel policy, where elites broadly agree rather than compete, which is exactly why a measure expanding military institutional reach passed without dissent across party lines that disagree sharply on almost everything else.

This pattern is not unique to Indonesia. Brooks's (2025) recent analysis of the limits of the civil-military relations paradigm, developed primarily with reference to the United States, argues that classical theory, built around the paradigm case of the coup, is poorly suited to forms of military influence operating through ordinary legal and administrative channels. The evidence here extends Brooks's argument to a post-authoritarian, non-Western setting, suggesting the paradigm's limits reflect a broader moment in which legally mediated military influence has outpaced the vocabulary developed to track coups and their classical antecedents.

Civil Society and the Limits of Countervailing Power

Civil society played a decisive role in the 1998 transition and has subsequently functioned as the principal countervailing check on institutional drift, exemplified by sustained advocacy from organisations including Kontras and Imparsial on accountability for the 1997–1998 disappearances and Military Tribunal reform (Hefner, 2000). Without this pressure, the modest progress achieved on TNI business divestment and human rights accountability would plausibly not have occurred. Since 2014, that countervailing capacity has been eroded through the prosecutorial use of blasphemy and cybercrime legislation against activists and journalists, the discretionary dissolution powers introduced by the 2017 *Ormas* Law, the marginalisation of NGO participation in legislative consultation, and documented surveillance of human rights defenders in Papua and elsewhere (Setiawan and Tomsa, 2023). The 2025 TNI Law episode illustrates both sides of this dynamic at once: civil society's occupation of the deliberation site demonstrated continued capacity for extra-parliamentary mobilisation, while the law's unanimous passage despite that mobilisation demonstrated the limits of that capacity once cross-party elite consensus has formed (APHR, 2025). Indonesia's concentrated media ownership compounds this constraint: several of the country's largest television networks are controlled by figures who hold or have held political office, generating conflicts of interest on precisely the issues that sustained investigative scrutiny would need to address (Aspinall and Mietzner, 2019).

Research Novelty, Originality, and Contribution

The novelty of this article lies in operationalising institutional drift as a five-mechanism framework, with statutory widening as the primary mechanism, tested against an explicit comparative indicator set rather than asserted narratively, and in specifying a supply-and-demand causal structure in which the TNI's organisational interest is matched by civilian politicians' own demand for the military as a problem-solving instrument. Its originality lies in applying that framework to the March 2025 TNI Law within the same calendar year as its passage, using a comparative matrix not previously constructed for this purpose. The contribution operates on three levels. Theoretically, it sharpens the boundary conditions of the backsliding and competitive-authoritarianism literatures by specifying a causal pathway those frameworks do not cover, and clarifies institutional drift's relationship to Mietzner's (2025) elite-dispersal thesis as addressing a different axis of the same polity. Empirically, it supplies an original comparative matrix and a source-traceable operationalisation of mechanisms that earlier accounts, including an earlier version of this research, asserted without adequate evidentiary grounding. At the policy level, it specifies legislative

and oversight reforms that follow from the mechanism-level diagnosis rather than a general appeal to "stronger institutions."

Conclusion

This article asked through what mechanisms institutional drift has occurred in Indonesian civil-military relations since 2014, why those mechanisms have persisted across a change of president, and what a comparison with Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar reveals about when drift stabilises, deepens, or breaks down. The evidence shows drift proceeds chiefly through lawful, legislatively sanctioned widening of civilian roles, most starkly demonstrated by the unanimous March 2025 TNI Law, alongside an unreformed territorial structure, continued economic entanglement, expanding securitisation mandates, and administrative rehabilitation that peaked in the October 2024 cabinet. The continuity of this pattern across two presidents with different coalitions supports the article's central claim: the driver is not a single incumbent's project but a supply-and-demand dynamic, the TNI's own organisational interest in resolving an internal personnel surplus meeting civilian politicians' persistent demand for the military as a problem-solving instrument, a demand the reform's own architects attribute to *dwifungsi*-era political habits rather than to military appetite. That this same law has also been framed by serious observers as strategic repositioning rather than reversal does not dissolve the puzzle; it is why an operationalised, mechanism-level account, rather than a contest of labels, is needed, and why the architects' own verdict deserves the evidentiary weight given it here. The comparative analysis indicates the decisive variable separating Indonesia's open-ended trajectory from Turkey's, Thailand's, and Myanmar's is the substantive capacity of civilian oversight institutions, not the formal assertion of civilian supremacy alone.

This article's limitations should be stated plainly. The method is documentary rather than ethnographic and does not draw on elite interviews that might more directly access the calculations of officers, legislators, and party leaders. Several indicators, notably the share of TNI operating costs from off-budget commercial activity, rest on dated or single-source estimates for which no current, audited figure is available, a gap reported rather than concealed. The comparative cases are assessed through secondary literature rather than original fieldwork, and the Myanmar case remains subject to a fluid record reported rather than resolved. Because the 2025 TNI Law remains before the Constitutional Court, the analysis captures its enactment and immediate aftermath rather than its eventual resolution.

These limitations suggest a research agenda. A systematic dataset of officer placements, extending Laksmana (2019) and Priamarizki and Haripin (2024) through the remainder of Prabowo's term, would resolve the evidentiary gap this article has tried not to paper over. Elite interviews with legislators, retired officers, and civil society leaders would supply agency-level evidence the documentary method cannot provide. Tracking the Constitutional Court's disposition of pending challenges would test whether Indonesia's judiciary retains the capacity this article identifies as decisive. Extending the framework to other post-authoritarian cases, including the Philippines and Pakistan, would test the generality of the supply-and-demand mechanism proposed here. The broader implication, consistent with Brooks's (2025) argument on the limits of the civil-military relations paradigm, is that analytical tools built for an era of coups and juntas require continued adaptation to a present in which threats to civilian control travel through ordinary legislative and administrative channels rather than around them.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Assisted Technology

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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