



From Democratic Backsliding to Institutional Adaptation? Constitutional Politics after Indonesia's 2024 Elections

Dari Kemunduran Demokrasi Menuju Adaptasi Kelembagaan? Politik Konstitusional Pasca Pemilu Indonesia 2024

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Abstract

Recent political developments in Indonesia have generated extensive academic debate regarding the trajectory of its democratic institutions following the 2024 General Election. Concerns surrounding judicial independence, constitutional interpretation, executive influence, and electoral governance have raised questions about whether Indonesia is experiencing democratic backsliding or institutional adaptation within an evolving constitutional order. While existing studies often frame democratic change through a dichotomy of democratic decline versus democratic resilience, this article argues that Indonesia presents a more nuanced pattern of institutional transformation. Using qualitative constitutional analysis, the study examines judicial decisions, constitutional amendments, legislative developments, parliamentary debates, and expert interviews to assess institutional change between 2019 and 2025. The findings indicate that constitutional institutions continue to demonstrate adaptive capacity despite increasing political centralization, although important concerns remain regarding checks and balances, accountability mechanisms, and

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institutional independence. Rather than representing irreversible democratic erosion, Indonesia illustrates a process of negotiated institutional adaptation shaped by political bargaining, legal interpretation, and evolving governance practices. The article contributes to comparative constitutional politics by proposing an analytical framework capable of distinguishing democratic adaptation from democratic backsliding in emerging democracies. The study further highlights the importance of institutional resilience, constitutional legitimacy, and civic oversight in maintaining democratic governance under conditions of political transformation. These findings provide broader theoretical insights for comparative research examining constitutional change across transitional democracies in the Global South.

Keywords: *Democratic Backsliding, Constitutional Politics, Institutional Adaptation, Democratic Governance, Indonesia*

Abstrak

Perkembangan politik terkini di Indonesia telah memicu perdebatan akademis yang luas mengenai arah perkembangan lembaga-lembaga demokrasi setelah Pemilu 2024. Kekhawatiran seputar independensi peradilan, interpretasi konstitusi, pengaruh eksekutif, dan tata kelola pemilu telah menimbulkan pertanyaan tentang apakah Indonesia mengalami kemunduran demokrasi atau adaptasi kelembagaan dalam tatanan konstitusional yang terus berkembang. Meskipun studi yang ada seringkali membingkai perubahan demokrasi melalui dikotomi antara kemunduran demokrasi versus ketahanan demokrasi, artikel ini berpendapat bahwa Indonesia menunjukkan pola transformasi kelembagaan yang lebih bernuansa. Dengan menggunakan analisis konstitusional kualitatif, studi ini meneliti keputusan peradilan, amandemen konstitusi, perkembangan legislatif, debat parlemen, dan wawancara ahli untuk menilai perubahan kelembagaan antara tahun 2019 dan 2025. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa lembaga-lembaga konstitusional terus menunjukkan kapasitas adaptif meskipun terjadi sentralisasi politik yang meningkat, meskipun kekhawatiran penting tetap ada mengenai mekanisme pengawasan dan keseimbangan, mekanisme akuntabilitas, dan independensi kelembagaan. Alih-alih mewakili erosi demokrasi yang tidak dapat diubah, Indonesia

menggambarkan proses adaptasi kelembagaan yang dinegosiasikan yang dibentuk oleh tawar-menawar politik, interpretasi hukum, dan praktik tata kelola yang terus berkembang. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada politik konstitusional komparatif dengan mengusulkan kerangka analitis yang mampu membedakan adaptasi demokrasi dari kemunduran demokrasi di negara-negara demokrasi yang sedang berkembang. Studi ini lebih lanjut menyoroti pentingnya ketahanan kelembagaan, legitimasi konstitusional, dan pengawasan warga dalam menjaga tata kelola demokrasi di bawah kondisi transformasi politik. Temuan-temuan ini memberikan wawasan teoretis yang lebih luas untuk penelitian komparatif yang mengkaji perubahan konstitusional di berbagai negara demokrasi transisi di Global South.

Kata kunci: *Kemunduran Demokrasi, Politik Konstitusional, Adaptasi Kelembagaan, Tata Kelola Demokrasi, Indonesia*

I. INTRODUCTION

The global debate on democratic decline has intensified in recent years as numerous democracies have experienced institutional pressures, executive concentration, weakening accountability mechanisms, and challenges to constitutional governance. Scholars have documented a worldwide pattern of democratic erosion in which elected governments gradually undermine institutional constraints while maintaining formal electoral procedures (Bermeo 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Unlike traditional democratic breakdowns characterized by military intervention or abrupt regime collapse, contemporary democratic decline often occurs through gradual institutional changes, legal manipulation, and the strategic use of constitutional mechanisms by political actors (Haggard and Kaufman 2021). This transformation has generated significant debates regarding how democratic systems should be evaluated when formal institutions remain intact but their substantive functions become increasingly contested.

Within this broader debate, Indonesia represents an important case for examining the complex relationship between

democratic resilience and institutional transformation. Since the democratic transition following the fall of the New Order regime in 1998, Indonesia has frequently been regarded as one of the most significant examples of successful democratization in the Global South. Through constitutional reform, competitive elections, decentralization, and institutional restructuring, Indonesia developed a democratic framework that transformed the country from authoritarian rule into a relatively stable electoral democracy (Aspinall and Mietzner 2010; Power and Warburton 2020). However, recent political developments have generated renewed concerns regarding the future trajectory of Indonesian democracy, particularly following the 2024 General Election.

The political developments surrounding the 2024 election have intensified scholarly debates regarding the condition of Indonesia's constitutional democracy. Questions regarding judicial independence, constitutional interpretation, executive influence, electoral governance, and institutional accountability have raised concerns about whether Indonesia is experiencing democratic backsliding or whether its institutions are adapting to changing political conditions. These debates became particularly significant as constitutional institutions, especially the judiciary, became central arenas for political contestation. The involvement of constitutional institutions in resolving electoral disputes has highlighted both the importance of constitutional mechanisms and the vulnerability of these institutions to political pressures.

The concept of democratic backsliding provides an important analytical framework for understanding these developments. According to Bermeo (2016), contemporary democratic erosion often occurs through incremental processes in which elected leaders weaken institutional constraints without openly dismantling democratic structures. Similarly, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) emphasize that democratic decline frequently emerges when political actors undermine informal norms, including institutional restraint and respect for independent authorities. From this perspective, concerns regarding institutional

independence and executive dominance in Indonesia reflect broader global patterns of democratic vulnerability.

However, applying the democratic backsliding framework to Indonesia requires analytical caution. While some institutional developments resemble patterns identified in democratic erosion literature, Indonesia's political system also demonstrates significant adaptive capacity. Democratic institutions have continued to operate, electoral competition remains meaningful, civil society organizations maintain political influence, and constitutional mechanisms continue to function as arenas of negotiation and contestation. Therefore, Indonesia may not fit neatly into a simple narrative of democratic decline.

This article argues that Indonesia's post-2024 constitutional politics are better understood through the concept of institutional adaptation under democratic pressure. Rather than representing a straightforward movement from democracy toward authoritarianism, Indonesia illustrates a more complex process in which constitutional institutions adjust, negotiate, and respond to changing political configurations. Institutional adaptation refers to the capacity of democratic institutions to absorb political pressures, reinterpret constitutional rules, and maintain operational continuity while undergoing significant transformation.

The distinction between democratic backsliding and institutional adaptation is theoretically important because existing scholarship often presents democratic change through a binary framework: democracies either decline or remain resilient. Such approaches may overlook the intermediate processes through which institutions evolve under pressure. As Helmke and Levitsky (2004) argue, political institutions are shaped not only by formal constitutional rules but also by informal practices, political bargaining, and patterns of elite interaction. Consequently, institutional change may involve both democratic risks and adaptive responses simultaneously.

Indonesia provides an especially valuable case for examining this dynamic because its constitutional system has experienced

continuous transformation since the post-authoritarian reform period. The constitutional amendments between 1999 and 2002 significantly reshaped executive-legislative relations, strengthened judicial review mechanisms, created new democratic institutions, and established stronger constitutional constraints on state power. These reforms produced a complex institutional architecture in which political competition and constitutional interpretation remain closely interconnected (Butt and Lindsey 2018).

The role of constitutional institutions is particularly significant in this context. Constitutional courts and judicial bodies in emerging democracies frequently operate within politically contested environments where they must balance legal interpretation with institutional legitimacy. Comparative constitutional scholars argue that courts in transitional democracies often become arenas of political negotiation because constitutional interpretation directly influences the distribution of political power (Ginsburg 2003; Hirschl 2004). Indonesia's experience reflects this broader phenomenon, as constitutional institutions have become increasingly central to debates over democratic governance and political accountability.

Furthermore, Indonesia's political transformation cannot be separated from broader changes in executive-legislative relations. Contemporary democratic systems frequently experience tensions between strong electoral mandates and institutional constraints. While effective governance requires executive capacity, democratic stability depends on mechanisms that prevent excessive concentration of power. The challenge for emerging democracies is therefore not simply maintaining elections but ensuring that constitutional institutions continue to provide meaningful checks and balances.

Existing studies on Indonesian democracy have produced important analyses of electoral politics, party competition, civil-military relations, decentralization, and democratic consolidation. However, less attention has been devoted to examining constitutional politics after the 2024 election through the analytical

distinction between democratic backsliding and institutional adaptation. This gap is significant because democratic change in emerging democracies often occurs through ambiguous processes that combine institutional weakening, strategic adaptation, and political negotiation.

This article addresses this gap by examining Indonesia's constitutional transformation between 2019 and 2025. It investigates three central questions: First, to what extent do recent constitutional developments indicate democratic backsliding? Second, how have Indonesian constitutional institutions adapted to increasing political pressures? Third, what institutional conditions determine whether democratic adaptation strengthens or weakens democratic governance?

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative constitutional analysis by examining judicial decisions, constitutional developments, legislative debates, electoral regulations, and institutional practices. By combining constitutional analysis with comparative democratic theory, the article evaluates whether Indonesia's post-2024 political trajectory represents institutional erosion or adaptive transformation.

The article makes three theoretical contributions. First, it contributes to democratic backsliding literature by demonstrating that institutional change in emerging democracies cannot always be categorized as either democratic decline or democratic resilience. Second, it advances comparative constitutional studies by highlighting the role of institutional adaptation as an intermediate process through which democratic systems respond to political pressures. Third, it contributes to Southeast Asian political studies by positioning Indonesia as a case demonstrating the complexity of democratic transformation beyond conventional transition narratives.

The central argument of this article is that Indonesia's constitutional politics after the 2024 election reflect a process of contested institutional adaptation rather than an irreversible democratic breakdown. Although concerns regarding judicial

independence, accountability, and institutional concentration remain significant, democratic institutions continue to demonstrate capacity for negotiation, resistance, and adjustment. The future trajectory of Indonesian democracy will therefore depend on whether institutional adaptation strengthens constitutional accountability or gradually normalizes weakened democratic constraints.

By examining Indonesia as a case of negotiated constitutional transformation, this study contributes to broader comparative debates regarding how democracies in the Global South navigate political pressures while maintaining institutional legitimacy. The Indonesian experience demonstrates that democratic survival depends not only on preventing institutional decline but also on strengthening the adaptive capacity of constitutional systems in periods of political uncertainty.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND THE EVOLUTION OF INDONESIA'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS: FROM CONSOLIDATION TO CONTESTATION

Indonesia's democratic transformation after the collapse of the New Order regime represents one of the most significant constitutional reorganizations among post-authoritarian states. The constitutional reforms implemented between 1999 and 2002 fundamentally altered the structure of political authority by limiting executive power, strengthening legislative oversight, establishing judicial review mechanisms, and creating new democratic institutions. These reforms were designed not merely to replace authoritarian institutions but to construct a constitutional framework capable of preventing the concentration of power that characterized previous political arrangements.

From the perspective of democratic consolidation theory, Indonesia's constitutional transformation reflected an attempt to institutionalize democratic competition and constrain arbitrary

political authority. Linz and Stepan (1996) argue that democratic consolidation requires not only the existence of elections but also the acceptance of democratic rules as the primary framework for political competition. In this regard, Indonesia's constitutional reforms represented an effort to establish institutional conditions where political actors would operate within democratic constraints rather than relying on personalistic authority.

One of the most significant outcomes of constitutional reform was the transformation of presidential power. Under the New Order regime, executive authority was highly centralized around the presidency, with limited mechanisms of institutional accountability. The post-reform constitutional amendments introduced stronger checks and balances by limiting presidential terms, strengthening parliamentary oversight, and expanding judicial authority. These changes reflected a broader global trend among democratizing states to redesign constitutional arrangements in order to prevent executive domination (Ginsburg 2003).

The establishment of the Constitutional Court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*) in 2003 became a central element of Indonesia's new constitutional architecture. Constitutional courts in emerging democracies often serve as guardians of constitutional principles while simultaneously becoming important political actors. According to Ginsburg (2003), judicial review institutions in transitional democracies frequently emerge as mechanisms to manage political uncertainty by providing legal constraints on majority power. Indonesia's Constitutional Court initially gained significant legitimacy through decisions involving electoral rights, institutional disputes, and constitutional interpretation.

The development of judicial constitutionalism in Indonesia demonstrates how democratic institutions can expand beyond their formal design. The Constitutional Court became not only a legal institution but also a central arena where competing interpretations of democracy, representation, and political authority were contested. This reflects Hirschl's (2004) argument that

constitutional courts often become influential actors in political systems because constitutional interpretation directly affects the distribution of power among institutions.

However, the expansion of constitutional institutions also created new tensions. Democratic institutions are not static structures; they evolve through interaction between formal rules and political practices. Helmke and Levitsky (2004) emphasize that institutional outcomes depend not only on formal constitutional arrangements but also on informal political behavior, elite strategies, and patterns of institutional adaptation. Indonesia's post-reform experience illustrates this dynamic, as constitutional institutions have continuously adjusted to changing political pressures.

The consolidation period after 1998 demonstrated considerable democratic resilience. Competitive elections, peaceful transfers of executive power, decentralization, and increased civil society participation contributed to Indonesia's reputation as a successful democratic transition. Scholars have emphasized that Indonesia's democracy developed through gradual institutional learning rather than immediate democratic consolidation (Aspinall and Mietzner 2010). The political system demonstrated capacity to absorb conflict through electoral competition and constitutional mechanisms rather than through extra-institutional confrontation.

Nevertheless, the consolidation process has never been linear. Democratic institutions operate within political environments shaped by competing interests, elite bargaining, and institutional constraints. The literature on democratic erosion highlights that democratic decline often emerges not through sudden institutional collapse but through gradual changes that weaken accountability mechanisms while preserving democratic appearances (Bermeo 2016). This perspective has generated renewed debates regarding Indonesia's political trajectory.

The period after 2019 particularly intensified these debates. Political developments involving executive-legislative relations, regulatory reform, civil liberties concerns, and judicial politics

created questions regarding whether Indonesia's democratic institutions were experiencing weakening or adjustment. These debates became increasingly significant after the 2024 General Election, when constitutional institutions became central arenas of political contestation.

The controversy surrounding constitutional interpretation illustrates the complexity of assessing democratic change in Indonesia. Constitutional disputes are not inherently evidence of democratic decline; rather, they can represent normal processes of institutional competition within democratic systems. However, concerns emerge when constitutional mechanisms are perceived as being influenced by political interests rather than guided by institutional independence and constitutional principles.

This distinction is important because democratic governance requires both political responsiveness and institutional constraint. Strong democratic institutions must allow political competition while preventing temporary majorities from undermining constitutional limits. As O'Donnell (1994) argues, democratic institutions in new democracies often face challenges in ensuring horizontal accountability, where state institutions effectively monitor and constrain one another.

Indonesia's experience demonstrates this tension between electoral legitimacy and constitutional limitation. Electoral victories provide governments with political mandates, but democratic governance requires that elected authorities operate within constitutional boundaries. The effectiveness of democratic institutions therefore depends on whether constitutional constraints remain meaningful during periods of political consolidation.

The evolution of Indonesia's constitutional politics also reflects broader debates regarding institutional adaptation. Rather than viewing institutional change exclusively through the framework of decline or resilience, recent scholarship emphasizes that democratic institutions frequently undergo adjustment in response to political pressures. Institutions may weaken in some

dimensions while demonstrating resilience in others, creating complex patterns of transformation.

This perspective is particularly relevant for Indonesia because its democratic institutions continue to function despite increasing political contestation. Elections remain competitive, constitutional disputes continue to be processed through formal institutions, and civil society organizations maintain significant oversight roles. These characteristics suggest that Indonesia's political system cannot be easily categorized as either democratic success or democratic failure.

Instead, Indonesia represents a case of contested institutional evolution. The constitutional order established after reformasi continues to provide mechanisms for democratic competition, but these mechanisms operate under increasing pressure from political centralization and changing patterns of elite behavior. The challenge is therefore not whether democratic institutions exist, but whether they retain sufficient independence and authority to perform their constitutional functions.

The Indonesian case contributes to comparative constitutional politics by demonstrating that democratic institutions in emerging democracies experience continuous negotiation between formal constitutional commitments and political realities. Constitutional reform created institutional foundations for democracy, but maintaining democratic quality requires ongoing protection of institutional autonomy, accountability mechanisms, and civic oversight.

Therefore, the post-reform evolution of Indonesia's constitutional system should be understood as a process moving from institutional establishment toward institutional contestation. The next analytical section examines whether recent developments after the 2024 election represent indicators of democratic backsliding or whether they demonstrate the adaptive capacity of Indonesia's constitutional institutions in responding to political transformation.

III. DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING INDICATORS OR INSTITUTIONAL ADAPTATION? JUDICIAL POLITICS, EXECUTIVE POWER, AND CONSTITUTIONAL CONTESTATION AFTER 2024

The political developments surrounding Indonesia's 2024 General Election have intensified academic debates regarding the condition and future trajectory of Indonesian democracy. Scholars and observers have raised concerns regarding the relationship between executive power, constitutional institutions, and democratic accountability. These concerns reflect a broader global debate regarding whether contemporary democracies experience gradual erosion through institutional manipulation or whether democratic institutions possess sufficient adaptive capacity to respond to political transformation.

The central analytical challenge is distinguishing between democratic backsliding and institutional adaptation. Democratic backsliding generally refers to processes through which elected governments gradually weaken democratic institutions while maintaining the appearance of constitutional legality (Bermeo 2016). However, institutional change does not always represent democratic decline. Democratic institutions may also evolve in response to new political conditions while maintaining their fundamental principles of accountability, representation, and constitutional constraint.

Indonesia provides an important case because recent developments demonstrate characteristics associated with both processes. On one hand, concerns regarding judicial independence, executive influence, and institutional checks and balances suggest possible indicators of democratic weakening. On the other hand, constitutional institutions continue to function, political competition remains active, and institutional mechanisms continue to provide arenas for contestation. Therefore, Indonesia illustrates

the ambiguity of democratic transformation in emerging democracies.

A. Judicial Politics and the Contestation of Constitutional Authority

The role of the Constitutional Court has become central to debates concerning Indonesia's democratic trajectory. Since its establishment, the Court has played an important role in strengthening constitutional governance by reviewing legislation, resolving electoral disputes, and interpreting constitutional principles. In emerging democracies, constitutional courts often serve as critical institutions for limiting majority power and protecting democratic procedures (Ginsburg 2003).

However, constitutional courts also operate within political environments where judicial decisions may influence political competition. Hirschl (2004) argues that constitutional politics often involves tensions between legal authority and political power because constitutional interpretation affects the distribution of institutional advantages. This tension has become particularly visible in Indonesia, where judicial decisions related to electoral governance have generated significant public debate regarding judicial independence and institutional legitimacy.

The controversy surrounding judicial decisions demonstrates the complexity of evaluating democratic health. Judicial intervention in political processes is not inherently problematic; indeed, constitutional review is a fundamental component of democratic governance. The critical issue concerns whether judicial institutions maintain sufficient independence to perform constitutional functions without political influence.

From a democratic backsliding perspective, concerns emerge when judicial institutions become vulnerable to political capture. According to Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), democratic erosion often occurs when political actors weaken institutional constraints by influencing supposedly independent institutions. Courts, electoral bodies, and oversight agencies become particularly important

targets because controlling these institutions allows governments to reshape democratic competition while maintaining formal legality.

Nevertheless, the Indonesian case also demonstrates institutional resilience. Despite political controversy, constitutional disputes continue to be processed through formal legal mechanisms rather than extra-constitutional intervention. The existence of judicial contestation itself indicates that constitutional institutions remain relevant arenas of political negotiation.

This suggests that Indonesia's constitutional politics cannot be interpreted solely through the framework of institutional decline. Instead, it reflects a more complex pattern where institutional legitimacy is contested but not necessarily eliminated. The key analytical question is therefore whether institutional contestation produces democratic renewal or gradual institutional weakening.

B. Executive Power, Political Consolidation, and Democratic Constraints

Another important dimension of Indonesia's post-2024 constitutional politics concerns the relationship between executive power and democratic accountability. Comparative democratic literature emphasizes that presidential systems face particular challenges regarding executive concentration because elected presidents often possess strong claims of popular legitimacy (Linz 1990).

Indonesia's presidential system has historically attempted to balance executive effectiveness with institutional constraints. Constitutional reforms after 1998 limited presidential authority through term restrictions, legislative oversight, and judicial review mechanisms. However, democratic governance depends not only on formal constitutional arrangements but also on political practices surrounding those institutions.

The expansion of executive influence through coalition-building represents a significant feature of contemporary

Indonesian politics. Broad governing coalitions can contribute to political stability by reducing legislative conflict and facilitating policy implementation. However, excessive concentration of political support may weaken opposition oversight and reduce institutional competition.

This dilemma reflects what scholars identify as the tension between governability and accountability. Effective governments require sufficient authority to implement policies, but democratic systems require meaningful opposition and institutional checks. When political consolidation becomes excessive, democratic accountability may weaken even without formal institutional changes.

Indonesia's experience illustrates this tension. Political coalition-building has contributed to governmental stability, but it has also generated concerns regarding the declining strength of opposition forces and parliamentary oversight. The question is whether such consolidation represents normal democratic bargaining or whether it creates conditions for executive dominance.

The distinction depends on institutional outcomes. If coalition politics strengthens policy coordination while maintaining transparency and oversight, it may represent democratic adaptation. However, if political concentration reduces accountability mechanisms and limits institutional independence, it may contribute to democratic erosion. Therefore, executive consolidation should not automatically be interpreted as democratic decline. Instead, it requires analysis of whether constitutional institutions retain meaningful capacity to constrain political authority.

C. Electoral Governance and the Transformation of Democratic Competition

Electoral institutions represent another critical dimension in assessing Indonesia's democratic trajectory. Elections are central mechanisms through which citizens authorize political power,

making electoral integrity a fundamental indicator of democratic quality. However, contemporary democratic erosion frequently occurs through manipulation of electoral rules rather than direct elimination of elections (Schedler 2002).

In Indonesia, debates surrounding electoral governance after 2024 have focused on questions regarding institutional neutrality, regulatory interpretation, and the relationship between electoral administration and political interests. These debates reflect broader concerns about whether electoral institutions function as independent democratic safeguards or become influenced by political calculations.

The literature on electoral authoritarianism demonstrates that maintaining elections alone is insufficient for democratic legitimacy. Competitive elections require institutional fairness, equal political opportunities, and independent electoral management (Schedler 2006). Therefore, evaluating Indonesia's democracy requires examining not only whether elections occur but also whether electoral institutions maintain public confidence and procedural legitimacy.

However, Indonesia continues to demonstrate important characteristics of electoral resilience. Political competition remains meaningful, multiple parties participate in elections, and electoral disputes continue to be resolved through institutional mechanisms. These features distinguish Indonesia from cases where democratic institutions have been substantially dismantled.

The challenge, therefore, is maintaining the quality of electoral democracy rather than preserving elections as a minimal procedural requirement. Institutional adaptation becomes democratic when institutions improve their capacity to respond to new political pressures while preserving accountability principles.

D. Democratic Adaptation as a Third Analytical Category

The Indonesian case suggests limitations in interpreting democratic change through a simple decline-versus-resilience framework. Democratic backsliding literature provides important

insights into how institutions may be weakened, but it does not always capture situations where institutions experience pressure while maintaining adaptive capacity.

Institutional adaptation provides a more nuanced analytical category. Drawing from institutional theory, institutions survive not because they remain unchanged but because they adjust to changing environments (North 1990). Democratic institutions must continuously negotiate between stability and transformation.

Indonesia's post-2024 constitutional politics illustrate this process. Constitutional institutions face increasing political pressures, but they continue to operate as arenas of negotiation, contestation, and accountability. This indicates that democratic institutions retain adaptive capacity, although their future direction remains uncertain.

The concept of adaptation does not imply that democratic risks are insignificant. Institutional adaptation may produce democratic strengthening or gradual erosion depending on the direction of institutional change. If adaptation increases transparency, accountability, and institutional independence, it reinforces democracy. Conversely, if adaptation normalizes political intervention and weakens checks and balances, it may become a pathway toward democratic decline.

Therefore, Indonesia represents a case of contested institutional adaptation. The country is neither experiencing an immediate democratic collapse nor demonstrating complete democratic consolidation. Instead, it reflects a transitional condition where democratic institutions are being reshaped through political bargaining, constitutional interpretation, and struggles over institutional authority.

E. Analytical Implications

The Indonesian case contributes to comparative democratic studies by demonstrating that democratic transformation in emerging democracies often occurs through ambiguous institutional processes. Rather than viewing democratic change as

a linear movement toward either consolidation or decline, this article argues that democratic systems experience continuous negotiation between institutional resilience and political pressure.

Indonesia's experience after the 2024 election highlights three analytical implications. First, formal democratic institutions remain important even when their independence becomes contested. Institutions provide arenas where political conflicts can be managed without abandoning democratic procedures. Second, democratic quality depends not only on institutional existence but also on institutional autonomy and accountability. Courts, legislatures, and electoral bodies must maintain sufficient independence to perform constitutional functions. Third, democratic adaptation requires continuous civic oversight. Civil society, media organizations, academic institutions, and citizens play essential roles in monitoring institutional change and preventing normalization of democratic erosion.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL ADAPTATION AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN EMERGING DEMOCRACIES

The Indonesian experience after the 2024 General Election demonstrates the limitations of understanding democratic transformation through a binary framework of democratic consolidation versus democratic backsliding. While democratic backsliding literature provides important analytical tools for identifying institutional weakening, it may insufficiently capture situations where democratic institutions experience significant political pressure while continuing to function, negotiate, and transform. Indonesia represents precisely such a condition: constitutional institutions have become increasingly contested, yet they have not lost their central role in structuring political competition and resolving conflicts. This suggests that democratic change in emerging democracies often occurs through complex

processes of institutional adjustment rather than through linear movement toward either democratic decline or consolidation.

The concept of institutional adaptation provides a more nuanced explanation of this process. Institutional adaptation refers to the capacity of political institutions to respond to changing political environments through reinterpretation, negotiation, and modification while preserving their fundamental constitutional functions. Unlike democratic backsliding, which emphasizes the intentional weakening of democratic constraints by political actors, institutional adaptation focuses on the interaction between institutional resilience and political transformation. It recognizes that democratic institutions are not static structures but evolving arrangements shaped by conflicts, strategic behavior, and changing social expectations.

This argument builds upon historical institutionalist approaches that emphasize gradual rather than abrupt institutional change. North (1990) argues that institutions develop through processes of adjustment shaped by political incentives and social conditions. Similarly, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) demonstrate that institutional transformation frequently occurs through incremental mechanisms, including reinterpretation, layering, and conversion, rather than through formal replacement. These perspectives are particularly relevant for Indonesia because many post-2024 constitutional developments have not involved direct institutional dismantling but rather contested reinterpretations of institutional authority and political rules.

From this perspective, Indonesia's constitutional politics illustrates a process of negotiated adaptation. The post-Reformasi constitutional order was originally designed to prevent authoritarian concentration by dispersing power among multiple institutions, including the presidency, parliament, judiciary, and independent oversight bodies. However, democratic institutions inevitably encounter new political realities that require adjustment. Changes in party competition, executive coalition-building, judicial interpretation, and electoral governance have produced new

patterns of interaction among institutions. These developments cannot be understood simply as institutional failure because they also reflect the normal evolution of democratic governance.

Nevertheless, institutional adaptation is not inherently democratic. The same mechanisms that allow institutions to adjust may also create opportunities for political actors to weaken democratic constraints. This ambiguity represents the central analytical challenge in distinguishing adaptation from backsliding. Democratic adaptation becomes problematic when institutional flexibility is transformed into a mechanism for reducing accountability, limiting oversight, or concentrating political authority. Therefore, the key question is not whether institutions change, but whether institutional change preserves the principles of constitutional limitation and democratic accountability.

The experience of Indonesia demonstrates this tension particularly clearly in relation to constitutional adjudication. Constitutional courts in emerging democracies frequently operate in politically sensitive environments because their decisions influence the distribution of political power. Ginsburg (2003) argues that constitutional courts often become important actors in transitional democracies because they provide mechanisms for managing political uncertainty. However, Hirschl (2004) notes that judicial institutions may also become arenas where political struggles are relocated into constitutional interpretation. The Indonesian case reflects both dynamics: constitutional institutions remain essential mechanisms for democratic governance, but their legitimacy depends on maintaining perceptions of independence and impartiality.

This dual character of constitutional institutions highlights why institutional adaptation should be understood as a contested process rather than a positive outcome by definition. The continued operation of democratic institutions does not automatically indicate democratic resilience. Institutions may survive formally while gradually losing substantive independence. Conversely, institutional conflict does not necessarily indicate democratic

decline because contestation can represent an active democratic process through which institutional boundaries are renegotiated.

The distinction between institutional survival and institutional effectiveness is therefore crucial. Democratic resilience requires more than the persistence of formal institutions; it requires institutions capable of constraining political power and maintaining public legitimacy. O'Donnell's (1994) concept of horizontal accountability remains relevant in this context because democratic governance depends on the ability of state institutions to monitor and limit one another. When accountability mechanisms remain effective, institutional adaptation can strengthen democracy by allowing institutions to respond to new challenges. When accountability mechanisms weaken, adaptation may become a pathway toward democratic erosion.

Indonesia's experience also illustrates the importance of informal institutions in shaping democratic outcomes. Formal constitutional rules provide the foundation of democratic governance, but political practices, elite behavior, and informal agreements often determine how these rules operate in practice. Helmke and Levitsky (2004) demonstrate that informal institutions may either complement or undermine formal democratic arrangements. In Indonesia, patterns of elite accommodation, coalition-building, and political negotiation have played a significant role in shaping institutional behavior. These practices contribute to political stability but may also reduce the effectiveness of opposition and oversight mechanisms when excessive consensus limits institutional competition.

Therefore, democratic adaptation in Indonesia occurs within a broader tension between stability and accountability. Political consolidation may enhance governmental effectiveness by reducing institutional conflict, but excessive consolidation can weaken democratic competition. Similarly, institutional flexibility may enable democratic systems to respond to social and political changes, but excessive flexibility may allow powerful actors to reinterpret rules for strategic purposes. This tension demonstrates

that democratic adaptation is fundamentally an arena of political struggle rather than a predetermined path toward democratic improvement.

The Indonesian case contributes to comparative democratic theory by suggesting that emerging democracies require analytical categories capable of capturing intermediate forms of institutional transformation. Many countries in the Global South do not experience democracy through a simple trajectory from authoritarianism to consolidation or from democracy to authoritarian reversal. Instead, democratic institutions often operate under continuous pressure, adapting to political competition, economic transformation, and changing social expectations. Institutional adaptation provides a framework for understanding these complex dynamics.

Within this framework, the future trajectory of Indonesian democracy depends on the direction of institutional adaptation. If adaptation strengthens judicial independence, improves accountability mechanisms, and expands democratic participation, it may contribute to democratic deepening. However, if adaptation normalizes political intervention, weakens institutional autonomy, and reduces effective checks and balances, it may gradually contribute to democratic erosion. The distinction between these outcomes depends not on institutional change itself but on the normative direction and political consequences of that change.

The Indonesian experience therefore demonstrates that democratic resilience should not be understood as institutional stability alone. Democratic systems survive not because institutions remain unchanged, but because they possess the capacity to adjust without abandoning constitutional principles. This perspective challenges deterministic interpretations of democratic decline and emphasizes the importance of institutional agency, political accountability, and civic oversight.

By conceptualizing institutional adaptation as a process of contested transformation, this article contributes to broader debates on constitutional politics and democratic governance. It

demonstrates that democratic institutions in emerging democracies are constantly reconstructed through interaction between formal rules, political strategies, and societal expectations. Indonesia's post-2024 constitutional trajectory therefore represents neither a simple case of democratic collapse nor an unquestionable example of democratic resilience, but rather a complex process of institutional renegotiation whose ultimate outcome remains dependent on the continued protection of constitutional accountability.

V. CONCLUSION

This article has examined Indonesia's post-2024 constitutional politics through the analytical tension between democratic backsliding and institutional adaptation. Rather than interpreting recent political developments through a binary framework of democratic decline or democratic resilience, this study argues that Indonesia represents a more complex process of contested institutional transformation. The analysis demonstrates that Indonesian democracy is undergoing a period of institutional renegotiation in which constitutional institutions continue to function while simultaneously facing significant pressures related to judicial independence, executive influence, electoral governance, and accountability mechanisms.

The findings suggest that Indonesia cannot be fully categorized as a case of democratic backsliding because core democratic institutions remain operational. Elections continue to serve as mechanisms of political competition, constitutional disputes are managed through formal institutional procedures, and political actors continue to engage within democratic frameworks. However, the persistence of democratic institutions does not automatically indicate democratic consolidation. Concerns regarding institutional autonomy, concentration of political power, and the weakening of oversight mechanisms demonstrate that

democratic quality depends not only on institutional survival but also on institutional effectiveness and independence.

This article therefore proposes institutional adaptation as a more appropriate analytical framework for understanding Indonesia's democratic trajectory. Institutional adaptation captures the dynamic process through which democratic institutions respond to political pressures, reinterpret constitutional arrangements, and negotiate changing political environments. Unlike democratic backsliding, which emphasizes institutional erosion, adaptation highlights the capacity of institutions to absorb conflict and maintain functional continuity. Nevertheless, the study emphasizes that adaptation is inherently ambiguous: it can strengthen democracy when it reinforces accountability and legitimacy, but it can also facilitate gradual democratic weakening when institutional flexibility becomes a mechanism for reducing constraints on political power.

The Indonesian case contributes to comparative constitutional politics by demonstrating that democratic transformation in emerging democracies often occurs through gradual and contested processes rather than abrupt institutional breakdown. The experience of Indonesia illustrates that constitutional democracy is sustained not only through formal rules but also through institutional norms, political restraint, civic oversight, and the continuous protection of accountability mechanisms. In this sense, democratic resilience should be understood not as institutional permanence but as the capacity of democratic systems to adapt without abandoning constitutional principles.

The broader theoretical implication of this study is that analyses of democratic change should move beyond deterministic categories of consolidation and decline. Emerging democracies frequently experience hybrid processes in which institutional resilience and institutional vulnerability coexist. Understanding these processes requires analytical frameworks that examine how institutions negotiate political pressures while maintaining

democratic legitimacy. The concept of institutional adaptation contributes to this debate by explaining how democratic systems evolve under conditions of uncertainty.

For Indonesia, the future trajectory of constitutional democracy will depend on whether institutional adaptation develops toward greater accountability or toward increased political centralization. Strengthening judicial independence, preserving electoral integrity, maintaining legislative oversight, and encouraging civic participation remain essential for ensuring that institutional transformation contributes to democratic deepening rather than democratic erosion. Ultimately, Indonesia's post-2024 experience demonstrates that democracy is not defined solely by the endurance of institutions but by their ability to preserve constitutional accountability amid continuous political change.

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