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# **One year under Prabowo – consolidation of the oligarchy, collapse of environmental justice, and threat to public safety**

*This text is a significantly shortened translation of the WALHI publication: “Catatan kritis – satu tahun pemerintah Prabowo – Konsolidasi Oligarki, Ambruknya Keadilan Ekologis, dan Terancamnya Keselamatan Rakyat.” The original version is available at [https://www.walhi.or.id/uploads/WALHI\\_2025-2029/Dokumen/Catatan Kritis Satu Tahun Pemerintahan Prabowo 2025.pdf](https://www.walhi.or.id/uploads/WALHI_2025-2029/Dokumen/Catatan_Kritis_Satu_Tahun_Pemerintahan_Prabowo_2025.pdf).*

## **Introduction**

“Indonesia gelap” (English: “dark Indonesia”) is not just a hashtag but expresses the current situation in Indonesia under the leadership of President Prabowo and his Vice President Gibran. An increase in the number of ministries, policies that disregard the protection of human rights and environmental protection, and the revival of military dominance in the civilian sphere, reflect the current regression happening in Indonesia. In his speeches, Prabowo praises the constitution and the sovereignty of the people, although in actual fact he shows little regard for them.

Indonesia’s democracy keeps moving further away from the spirit of the constitution, as the first year under the Prabowo-Gibran administration has shown. Its political measures and the practice of governance bear signs of a military approach and have shown evidence of ambitions to strengthen the military. Under Prabowo and Gibran, the mistakes of the previous Joko Widodo administration are being continued. A policy of extractivism is being perpetuated and citizens’ rights to an intact and healthy environment are being neglected.

## **For the sake of economic growth: livelihoods are being mortgaged and a mountain of debt handed down**

Prabowo’s government has set an economic growth target of 8%.

In order to achieve the mentioned growth target, the government needs to continue increasing investments, particularly by expanding permits for the exploitation of natural resources and thereby inevitably causing a negative impact on the environment and social inequality.

This growth strategy also means an increase in production and consumption activities, which in turn will lead to the extraction and exploitation of natural resources. Meanwhile the economy does not take into account the balance between extraction and regeneration of nature.

The government is particularly focusing on expanding the processing and refinement (Hilirisasi) of minerals and forestry products in pursuing its growth targets and other national strategic projects are being pushed forward. Limits of environmental resilience are being ignored. In order to secure profits for the producers, consumption will have to be promoted, which in turn will further increase waste generation and the burden on the environment. This vicious circle accelerates the climate crisis and exacerbates the risk of ecological disasters.

In order to further boost the economy, the government considers consumption-driven, debt-financed public spending to be an effective measure. However, in 2025 alone, the Indonesian government had to repay debts amounting to 1,353.2 trillion rupiah (approx. 69 billion euros). [1] An economic growth target of 8% based on loans will foreseeably cause the mountain of debt to stealthily grow. Future generations will have to bear the burden of these debts and interests, which may leave them with little choice but to exploit natural resources even more intensely in order to repay the debt.

### **The growth of the state apparatus as a reflection of transactional politics**

The large cabinet formed by Prabowo reflects increasingly overt transactional politics: a policy of giving and taking in which posts and offices are exchanged for loyalty and support.

Never before in Indonesia's history has there been such a large cabinet, with a total of 48 ministries and 109 ministers and deputy ministers. Prabowo made this possible by amending Law No. 39 of 2008 and thus removing the upper limit on the number of ministries.

WALHI considers the expansion of the cabinet not only an expression of political greed but also a step backwards in bureaucratic reform. Each additional ministry means additional administrative offices, a larger civil service and an increase in sectoral

solid cross-sectoral coordination, not an additional load of bureaucracy. A government based on political transactions of this kind will create a bureaucratic state but not a state that serves its people. [2]

Behind the expansion and enlargement of the cabinet lies an increasingly apparent development: the continuation of extractivism in the name of food security, the energy sector and the expansion of processing industries. Two million hectares of indigenous forest are being cleared for rice fields and sugar cane for bioethanol as part of the Food Estate project in Merauke – a project that not only robs the indigenous population of their land, but also accelerates deforestation and the climate crisis.

A closer look at the structure of the ministries also reveals who benefits from this course of procedure. The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Marine Affairs has been subordinated to the Coordinating Ministry for Food, and thus nature and the sea now merely serve as suppliers of raw materials for large-scale industrial food projects. [3]

### **Free nutritious meals and nutrition policy**

One of Prabowo's key election promises was the programme for free nutritious meals (Makan bergizi gratis – MBG). However, the implementation of the programme has caused serious problems, ranging from budget cuts in other departments to more than 5,000 schoolchildren suffering food poisoning in various regions of the country and the promotion of a food policy based on large-scale land use. The budget for the MBG programme for 2025 was 71 trillion rupiah (approx. 3.6 billion euros), which was financed by cuts in the education and health budgets and the budget for economic functions.

Additionally, the government has earmarked 124.4 trillion rupiah (approx. 6.34 billion euros) for the Food-Estates programme in the 2025 draft state budget. [4] The priority here is developing new farmland and building dams and artificial irrigation systems. However, most of the food produced for the MBG programme is not sourced from small-scale farming and livestock breeding, nor is it based on local production. Considering the high budget for the MBG programme and the food storage facilities, and bearing in mind the poor implementation of the programme, one cannot help but suspect that the MBG programme is merely a modus operandi to legitimise land acquisition projects for the Food-Estates without lengthy approval procedures.

Food-Estates as a measure to achieve food sovereignty are already having a serious impact on the environment and human rights. The Food-Estate projects in Central Kalimantan, North Sumatra, and Merauke showcase the government's failure to maintain food sovereignty. In South Papua alone, 480,000 hectares of forest have been cleared for the creation of new rice fields and sugar cane plantations. The indigenous population of South Papua is threatened with the loss of their ancestral lands, local foods, traditional medicine, and even their identity in the name of large-scale food projects. [5]

### **Legalisation of palm oil cultivation in forest areas and lack of guidelines for remedying environmental damage**

Prabowo triumphantly announced to Parliament and the People's Assembly in a speech on August 15, 2025, that the state had confiscated 3.1 million hectares of illegal palm oil plantations in forest areas.

However, this repossession of illegal palm oil plantations in the name of forest area management was carried out in a completely arbitrary manner. The government subsequently exacerbated the situation by transferring 1 million hectares of the plantations to the company PT Agrinas Palma Nusantara, without any clear legal basis. [6]

The confiscation of illegal palm oil plantations in forest areas and the transfer of palm oil areas to Agrinas as a form of repatriation of assets are regulated by the Presidential Regulation (Perpres) 5/2025.

This presidential Regulation marks a new chapter in the retroactive legalization of illegal forest use, which is controlled by the PKH Task Force (Satuan Tugas Penertiban Kawasan Hutan, English: Task Force for the Regulation of Forest Areas) – a unit whose structure is largely determined by the military. Even the management of the state-owned company PT Agrinas is predominantly made up of high-ranking officers from the Indonesian armed forces.

According to observations by WALHI, measures to regulate forest areas have consistently created new problems instead of undertaking serious efforts to achieve

ecological restoration and the return of land to local populations. In many regions, the regulatory process fails to address the core issues. Citizens in several areas have even been coerced into paying levies or forced to cede their land under threat of violence. Populations that are merely trying to uphold their livelihoods are being criminalised by such measures. The state, which is supposed to represent the interests of its citizens, instead acts as an authority that oppresses the people.

The main problem with implementing PKH measures is not solely a question of legality but rather the lack of serious efforts to restore forest areas and implement the land rights of the population. There is no guarantee that areas that have been “regulated” will actually be ecologically regenerated or returned to indigenous or local communities. This despite the fact that these communities have always preserved the forest. The state appears to be focusing more on reorganising land ownership in the forestry sector than on enforcing justice. In view of the climate crisis and increasingly serious environmental destruction, such an approach is a dramatic step backwards.

### **Revision of the Minerba Law: Mining, transactions, and the population as victims**

Early in 2025, the House of Representatives, together with the government, passed an amendment of the Minerba Law, which regulates mineral and coal mining. WALHI considers this a turning point towards a model of natural resource management that is increasingly exploitative and undemocratic. The amendment of the law promotes liberalisation and privatisation, weakens state control, and disregards the principles of environmental justice and the right of communities to a safe living environment.

The political approach to the sector of raw materials and mining is not consistent. Without taking into account the ecological and social functions of the areas, mining permits are also being granted on small islands and in vulnerable coastal areas. The cases of Wawonii Island, Obi Island and Raja Ampat show how nickel mining destroys coral reefs, pollutes the sea, eliminates water sources and affects the health of the population. In addition, the amendment of the law reinforces the process of liberalisation and privatisation of natural resources. Research by WALHI and Auriga shows that 10 million hectares of mining land are controlled by companies, with 4.7 million hectares controlled by 55 corporate groups. The state only acts as a licensor while private companies collect the profits.

The amendment of the law is rather an expression of economic power consolidation at the expense of the environment and the rights of the population, than merely a regulatory change. WALHI demands a review of this policy and a strengthening of mechanisms of ecological protection and participation of citizens in the management of natural resources.

### **Hostage of the energy transition: corporate dominance and the continuation of the fossil fuel era**

The year 2025 was supposed to be a turning point for a fair and democratic energy transition in Indonesia. However, the government's policies are strengthening corporate dominance and prolonging dependence on fossil fuels. The energy transition is turning into a new sphere of exploitation and injustice instead of reducing emissions and supporting approaches to collective energy generation.

There was no significant commitment to phasing out fossil fuels or accelerating a justice-based energy transition throughout 2025. The issue was not a priority either during the 2024 elections, and the population was not significantly involved in energy planning. Public consultations were simply a formality, and decisions remained hierarchical ('top-down') – contradicting the principles of energy democracy and ecological justice.

The Prabowo government passed the National Electricity Supply Plan for 2025-2034. This plan envisions the construction of fossil fuel-fired power plants with a capacity of 16.6 GW, of which 10.3 GW is to come from gas-fired power plants. [7] This stands in striking contrast to the goal of independence and efficiency in energy consumption propagated by President Prabowo. Dependence on gas also carries the risk of rising emissions and a higher fiscal burden on the national budget, while a concrete roadmap for decommissioning old coal-fired power plants (PLTU) is still missing.

Many measures that are portrayed as contributing to the energy transition are in fact pseudo-solutions with aim of merely appearing to be sustainable. Geothermal projects, waste incineration plants, and the expansion of critical mineral mining are marketed as part of decarbonisation, but in reality cause serious social and environmental damage. The Muara Laboh geothermal project in West Sumatra led to crop losses and pollution

of the environment due to its proximity to settlements. In North Sumatra, the Sarulla geothermal project caused agricultural conflicts and loss of income for farmers. In Padarincang, Gede Pangrango, Ciremai, Baturaden, Dieng, Arjuno-Welirang, Lemongan, Wae Sano and Poco, resistance to geothermal projects is rising. Amidst the push for large-scale projects that are officially declared part of the energy transition, community-based approaches to renewable energy remain completely ignored. Yet it is precisely this model that places the population at the centre of fair and sustainable energy production. Financing programmes such as JETP and AZEC favour large corporations and high technology without providing specific funds for local initiatives.

Communities in regions such as East Nusa Tenggara and West Kalimantan that want to build communal solar power plants are often hindered by regulations, unclear land status and a lack of technical support. This inequality clearly shows that the energy transition in Indonesia is not being carried out in the interests of citizens but rather serves the economic and political interests of the elites.

### **The paradox behind Indonesia's climate commitments**

President Prabowo Subianto has repeatedly affirmed at international conferences that Indonesia is committed to taking concrete action to combat climate change. Among other promises, he has pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060 or sooner. In practice, however, the country's energy and development policies point in a different direction.



An opposite approach is evident in various recent regulations, such as Government Regulation No. 40 of 2025 on National Energy Policy and the Strategic Plan for Electricity Supply. With a share of 26–32 percent, fossil fuels continue to dominate the energy sector, and the government is planning to build additional gas and coal-fired power plants with a capacity of 16.6 gigawatts over the next ten years.

The government is promoting 'false solutions' such as biomass co-firing and carbon capture and storage (CCS/CCUS) technologies, which are intended to extend the life of coal-fired power plants instead of reducing emissions. A study by Forest Watch Indonesia notes that biomass as fuel for 52 coal-fired power plants could potentially cause deforestation of up to 4.65 million hectares. [8]

The approach to climate adaptation shows the same logical fallacy. The plan to build a giant sea wall in northern Java, for example, is being revived as a major adaptation project against sea level rise. WALHI has assessed this project to be a maladaptation that threatens the lives of coastal communities and accelerates the destruction of marine ecosystems.[9]

The Prabowo government's climate commitment has so far been purely declaratory in nature. It continues to view the climate crisis as a technocratic challenge rather than a crisis of justice. However, the declaration of commitment to climate protection will remain nothing more than diplomatic rhetoric on a global stage as long as climate policy is primarily subordinated to capital interests and the logic of economic growth.

### **The government's failure to deal with environmental disasters**

The government has failed to respond adequately to environmental disasters throughout Prabowo's first year of presidency. Environmental disasters have been occurring in the greater area of Jakarta (Jabodetabek) since early March of 2025, further exacerbating the ongoing ecological crisis. Both injustice and failed policies on natural resources - in residential areas and existing ecosystems - have led to this crisis of environmental destruction.

Uncontrolled exploitation of the environment is the main factor exacerbating this disaster. Forests in and surrounding the Puncak region have in several cases had to make way for settlements, villas and tourist destinations, despite their originally intended usage as watershed areas. WALHI West Java has recorded an increase in the level of environmental damage in this area from 45% to 65% over the past 5 years.

Without regard for ecological impact and carrying capacity, and without taking into account environmental impact assessments (AMDAL) in disaster-prone areas, land use

changes are oftentimes being approved. WALHI West Java emphasises that many permits for real estate and tourism businesses have been granted without thorough assessments. In addition, illegal sand and stone mining further deteriorates the condition of the soil, making it more vulnerable to erosion and landslides.

Unfortunately, President Prabowo's government does not consider ecological disasters to be a national problem that must be addressed at its root causes. Instead ecological disasters continue to be seen as events that can be resolved simply through the distribution of immediate and targeted aid. However, the evaluation of the causes underlying these disasters is still lacking in depth. The Prabowo government has shown no strategic efforts to prevent and manage ecological crises over the past year. On the contrary, fundamental problems of ecological disasters, such as investment- and exploitation-oriented resource policies, mismanagement in land use planning, environmentally damaging construction projects, and weak law enforcement are ignored by President Prabowo and Gibran's agenda, which aims for an economic growth of 8 %.

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[2] Kompas: Seberapa Besar Potensi Pembengkakan Anggaran karena Gemuknya Kabinet Prabowo?. <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/seberapa-besar-potensi-pembengkakan-anggaran-karena-gemuknya-kabinet-prabowo>

[3] WALHI: Penyelamatan Lingkungan dan SDA Rezim Prabowo Gibran di Tepi Jurang, <https://www.walhi.or.id/penyelamatan-lingkungan-dan-sda-rezim-prabowo-gibran-di-tepi-jurang>

[4] Tempo: Sri Mulyani Sebut Prabowo Akan Lanjutkan Food Estate, Alokasi Anggaran Mencapai Rp124,4 Triliun, <https://www.tempo.co/ekonomi/sri-mulyani-sebut-prabowo-akan-lanjutkan-food-estate-alokasi-anggaran-mencapai-rp-124-4-triliun-15048>

[5] WALHI, PSN Pangan dan Energi di Papua: Kekerasan Terbuka Negara Terhadap Lingkungan dan Masyarakat Adat Papua, <https://www.walhi.or.id/psn-pangan-dan-energi-di-papua-kekerasan-terbuka-negara-terhadap-lingkungan-dan-masyarakat-adat-papua>

- [6] Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, Menhan RI Saksikan Penyerahan Penguasaan Kembali Kawasan Hutan Tahap II Seluas 1 Juta Hektar, dan Penguasaan Taman Nasional Tesso Nilo, serta Kebun Kelapa Sawit Hasil Penguasaan Satgas PKH, <https://www.kemhan.go.id/2025/07/09/menhan-ri-saksikan-penyerahan-penguasaan-kembali-kawasan-hutan-tahap-ii-seluas-1-juta-hektar-dan-penguasaan-taman-nasional-tesso-nilo-serta-kebun-kelapa-sawit-hasil-penguasaan-satgas-pkh.html>
- [7] Muhammad Saleh: Salah arah peta jalan transisi energi Indonesia, <https://theconversation.com/salah-arrah-peta-jalan-transisi-energi-indonesia-257231>
- [8] Trend Asia: Membakar dan Menebang Hutan Bukan Solusi Energi Bersih, Tak Pantas Masuk Pendanaan JETP, <https://trendasia.org/membakar-dan-menebang-hutan-bukan-solusi-energi-bersih-tak-pantas-masuk-pendanaan-jetp>
- [9] WALHI: Tanggul Laut Raksasa, Solusi Palsu Krisis Iklim serta Percepat Kebangkrutan Ekologis Daratan dan Perairan Pulau Jawa, <https://www.walhi.or.id/tanggul-laut-raksasa-solusi-palsu-krisis-iklim-serta-percepat-kebangkrutan-ekologis-daratan-dan-perairan-pulau-jawa>

## **IEU-CEPA: Threats for human rights and the environment in Indonesia**

by Watch Indonesia!

After nine years of negotiations, Indonesia and the European Union finally signed the Indonesia–European Union Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IEU-CEPA) on 23 September 2025. This Agreement provides new export opportunities for Indonesian companies: customs duties will be largely abolished or significantly reduced. In future it will be possible to export non-crude oil products (non-migas) to over 90 per cent of the EU market duty free. It also provides for a duty-free quota for palm oil, which could lead to a 20 per cent increase in imports to the EU.[1]

For the European Union, the Agreement is part of a strategic agenda to reduce its dependence on the United States and China by diversifying its trade and security relations globally. Through IEU-CEPA, the EU aims to secure access to important raw materials such as nickel, which are irreplaceable in the so-called green energy transition and the implementation of the European Green Deal. The Agreement is also intended to promote the energy transition in Indonesia and increase the technological support from Germany needed for the transition. The focus is on bioenergy, biofuels and geothermal energy. However, the implementation of energy transition projects is often criticised by environmental and human rights organisations as many supposedly green projects cause considerable environmental damage and violate human rights.

Human rights and environmental organisations such as FERN, WALHI and Indonesia for Global Justice consider IEU-CEPA to be an agreement that is primarily driven by economic interests based on a 'business-as-usual' approach, in which trade clearly takes precedence over social and environmental justice. There are no signs of modern approaches such as partnerships at eye level or of sustainable economic approaches such as the circular economy. Despite repeatedly expressing their demands, trade unions and civil society organisations representing indigenous and local communities were denied substantial participation in the negotiations and the drafting of the Agreement.

Environmental and human rights organisations warn that IEU-CEPA could further exacerbate ecological damage and human rights violations in Indonesia. By increasing imports of raw materials such as nickel, copper and gold, the EU would indirectly

support Indonesian mining projects, which are often associated with land grabbing, environmental pollution and violence, particularly in the West Papua region. The existing data is alarming: in 2024, annual deforestation reached its highest level since 2021, with 261,575 hectares of forest lost. [2] At the same time, the number of land and agricultural conflicts has risen dramatically under Joko Widodo's presidency. In 2024, at the end of his ten-year tenure, 3,234 conflict cases affecting around 1.8 million families were pending.[3]

NGOs such as WALHI point out that Prabowo's government has adopted an increasingly militarised style of governance, particularly since the TNI Reform Law came into force, granting the military extended functions in state development projects. Several legislative changes, including the 2020 Omnibus Law, the revised 2022 Penal Code and accelerated amendments to the Mining Law in 2025, have further undermined environmental and resource protection.

At the same time, some NGOs, such as CELIOS, are trying to use the Agreement as leverage to push for legal and corporate reforms in Indonesia. They assume that access to the EU market is determined not only by tariffs, but also by established sustainability expectations. For example, IEU-CEPA requires both parties to comply with the Paris Climate Agreement. And the EU also has to comply with its own laws - the EU Supply Chain Directive (CSDDD), the Anti-Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the EU Supply Chain Act are of particular relevance. Under the EUDR, products - especially if from agricultural and raw materials sectors - must not be associated with deforestation, forest degradation and correlating human rights violations. Under the CBAM, exporters of high-emission products are obliged to disclose the carbon footprint along their supply chains and, if necessary, to pay compensation. The resulting economic benefits for Indonesia would increasingly depend on compliance with binding EU regulations. However, even the EU is gradually abandoning its commitment to environmental protection and human rights as shown by the weakening and postponing of the EU Supply Chain Act and the Anti-Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) in 2025.

## **Indonesia's economy vs. human rights and the environment**

Human rights and environmental protection are inextricably linked: fundamental human rights cannot be realised without a safe, clean and healthy environment, and conversely, a sustainable environmental policy is not possible without respect for and enforcement of human rights. In Indonesia, however, both areas are systematically subordinated to economic interests.

Ecosystems that are not only indispensable for biodiversity but also fulfil central social, cultural and economic functions for the surrounding communities are being destroyed by large-scale conversions of forests into plantations, mining areas and industrial production zones. Permits are often granted without adequate consultation with indigenous communities and local populations.

The human rights commission Komnas HAM writes in its annual report for 2024 that, as in previous years, agricultural conflicts were among the most frequently submitted complaints in 2024. A total of 505 such complaints were submitted (out of a total of 2,625 complaints). The parties most frequently accused (146 complaints) were companies, followed by local governments with 97 complaints.[4] In 2020 alone, the environmental organisation JATAM documented 45 mining conflicts. Most of these concerned environmental pollution and destruction (22 cases), followed by land grabbing (13 cases), the criminalisation of mining critics (8 cases), and dismissals (2 cases). In at least 13 cases, the military or police were directly involved in land grabbing, criminalisation or intimidation. [5]

Palm oil – one of the EU's key export products – has a significant negative impact on the environment and human rights. The documented cases concern environmental destruction, land conflicts, exploitative labour practices, the destruction of local communities' livelihoods, non-transparent pricing for palm fruits, and child labour. Millions of hectares of forest have been destroyed in Indonesia for palm oil plantations, and the areas continue to grow.

Nickel is a key raw material for the global energy transition and is therefore one of the most sought-after mining products in Europe at present. Much of the nickel is exported to meet the growing demand for batteries for renewable energies, including electric vehicles. Indonesia has the world's largest nickel reserves and the industry in the

country has grown enormously: since 2016, the number of nickel smelters has risen from two to over 60. Exports of nickel products are expected to reach a value of around 38–40 billion US dollars in 2024. The negative social, human rights, and environmental impacts of nickel mining in Indonesia are numerous.

Nickel mining and processing pollutes rivers and waterways and destroys fish habitats that are crucial for local food security. Labour rights are systematically violated in the nickel industry, exposing workers to serious health and safety risks. Women are additionally affected by gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment and reproductive health risks from toxic substances.

Land acquisition for nickel mines often involves land grabbing and minimal or no compensation. Those who resist are intimidated, attacked, or criminalised. The police or military are often deployed to enforce land seizures and suppress protests. The Hongana Manyawa, one of Indonesia's last nomadic groups, have lost 80% of their ancestral land to nickel mining on Halmahera. In addition, eleven members of the indigenous Maba Sangaji community (East Halmahera district, North Maluku province) were convicted for defending their ancestral land and protesting against the nickel mining activities of PT Position, which destroyed the community's land and water sources.

### **Certifications and government control without effect**

Since Indonesia's reform era, there have been various approaches to curbing human rights violations and environmental destruction. Many civil society organisations and social movements have successfully fought against land grabbing, deforestation and environmental pollution. Independent trade unions are emerging to demand greater social justice. Companies have responded to growing criticism from civil society with voluntary certification systems, which however only cover up the lowering of standards in government regulations. Certificates in the palm oil sector, such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) or the Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) for example, state that large monocultures and structural discrimination and exploitation on plantations are sustainable.

Equally problematic are audits and certifications in industrial forestry, which are often not independent and free of conflicts of interest. The assessment of PT Korintiga Hutani

by PT Mutuagung Lestari (Mutu International) for example led to a positive certification result despite documented border conflicts, land disputes, environmental pollution and biodiversity impacts. A study by CELIOS (2024) shows that Japan holds the majority of shares in PT Korintiga Hutani. PT Mutuagung Lestari has also maintained close ties with the Japanese market and the Japanese government for decades. These institutional links undermine the credibility of certification and reveal fundamental weaknesses in the governance of forestry audit mechanisms. [6]

The Indonesian government has repeatedly emphasised that it will take state measures in line with its duty to protect under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). In 2023, the Presidential Regulation No. 60/2023 with its National Strategy for Business and Human Rights (Stranas BHAM) was adopted, which was to be implemented through a three-year action plan (2023–2025). However, the implementation report presented in September 2025 is alarming: economic activities in the area of forest and land use, particularly nickel mining, continue to systematically violate the rights of local communities, indigenous peoples, and workers. The fact that the action plan ends after three years without follow-up measures raises fundamental questions about the sincerity of the state's commitment.

In 2025, risk-based business licensing (PP Perizinan Berusaha Berbasis Risiko) was introduced. This regulation does not contain any human rights considerations, no explicit reference to the legal bases relating to economy and human rights, and no provisions on human rights risks. This is possible because there is no legal obligation to align this licensing policy with the National Strategy for Business and Human Rights (Stranas BHAM). From the perspective of the hierarchy of norms, it is rather Stranas BHAM that is required to align its regulations with this government ordinance. This constellation illustrates that the political will to align economic governance with human rights standards remains extremely weak.

Overall, the list of human rights violations continues to grow because existing certification systems and national regulations are insufficient. Neither freedom from deforestation nor the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), nor coherent coordination between economic, environmental, and forestry policies with human rights standards are integrated. As a result, certifications and regulations often remain cosmetic measures that mask structural problems rather than solving them.

## **Laws promoting the economic exploitation of natural resources**

In some cases, laws even give companies leeway to continue violating human rights and causing environmental destruction. Law No. 6/2023 on job creation (Omnibus Law) created a legal framework that severely curtails the democratic rights of the population in the environmental sphere. Rights to information, participation, and access to environmental justice have been reduced or completely abolished – for example, by removing the possibility of raising objections in the context of environmental impact assessments (AMDAL). In addition, environmental permits are no longer a prerequisite for business licences, which reduces the criminal and civil liability of companies and significantly limits the population's opportunities for legal recourse.

The Omnibus Law also forms the basis for Government Regulation No. 23/2021 on forest management, which grants far-reaching privileges to National Strategic Projects (PSN). These include simplified location and environmental permits, exemptions from spatial planning regulations, easier use of protected forest areas and fiscal incentives. The concept of 'multiple use of forests' allows companies to carry out several commercial activities with just one permit, which increases the risk of accelerated ecosystem degradation, deforestation and biodiversity loss.

The revision of the Mining Act (UU Minerba) further exacerbates the situation. Provisions on permits and mining areas are increasingly being used to prosecute indigenous groups and local communities if they oppose mining projects. General procedural regulations such as the Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP) facilitate coercive measures by state security forces and are often used in cases that can be classified as 'anti-SLAPP' ('strategic lawsuits against public participation') because they are specifically designed to intimidate and suppress public participation.

The new Military Law of 2025 also expands the powers of the military (TNI) in the civilian sphere, particularly in natural resource management projects. The deployment of the military in forest areas or strategic resource projects increases the risk of land conflicts, displacement of indigenous communities and environmental damage. Prioritising the security of economic projects over long-term environmental protection also promotes militarisation in the environmental sector.

## **From guidelines to actual sustainability**

There is currently a significant discrepancy between the situation in Indonesia with regard to human rights and environmental protection and the requirements of the IEU-CEPA. Indonesia's national regulations do not comply with international standards for the protection of forests and human rights. Existing regulations sometimes favour practices that lead to human rights violations and environmental damage, particularly in projects classified as National Strategic Projects (PSN). Certification and audit systems are structurally weak, only partially transparent, and not free from conflicts of interest. Under these circumstances, there is a risk that the sustainability requirements of IEU-CEPA will only exist on paper and that the intended goals will not be achieved.

Against this backdrop, the Indonesian NGO CELIOS points to a series of necessary reforms that the Indonesian government could implement to strengthen compliance with human rights, and environmental and climate standards in the context of IEU-CEPA. Existing laws and regulations must be reviewed and developed in a coherent manner. These include, in particular, the implementing regulation on forestry (PP Penyelenggaraan Kehutanan) and the regulations on risk-based business licensing (PP Perizinan Berusaha Berbasis Risiko), the design of which has so far favoured special regulations for national strategic projects, the de facto legalisation of deforestation and the systematic consideration of human rights risks. CELIOS also points to the need to underpin fiscal instruments such as a CO<sub>2</sub> tax with robust monitoring, reporting and verification systems and to design certification and audit systems in the forestry sector in such a way that they are independent and can actually contribute to the enforcement of the law. Overall, the aim is to better align economic, environmental, and forestry policy decisions with Indonesia's human rights obligations, including ensuring FPIC principles, effective grievance mechanisms, and protection of activists from criminalisation.

Even though the European supply chain law has been watered down, companies remain fundamentally committed to protecting human rights, the environment, and the climate. The supply chain directive still requires risks to be analysed and remedied along the entire value chain. This includes, for example, the negative impacts of business models and climate-damaging emissions.

If properly involved, international and Indonesian NGOs can play an important role by documenting human rights and environmental violations, creating transparency, and highlighting the interests of local communities and indigenous peoples. They will act as an important corrective force, demanding coherent action from the Indonesian government and stakeholders and institutions in the EU to ensure that instruments such as the CSDDD, EUDR and CO<sub>2</sub> border adjustment are not only formally in place, but are also implemented in a binding and verifiable manner.

[1] <https://thediplomat.com/2025/10/has-the-eu-sacrificed-human-rights-to-economic-expediency-in-indonesia/>

[2] <https://news.mongabay.com/2025/02/surge-in-legal-land-clearing-pushes-up-indonesia-deforestation-rate-in-2024/>

[3] <https://en.tempo.co/read/2051794/why-did-agrarian-conflicts-in-indonesia-escalate-under-jokowis-presidency>

[4] <https://www.komnasham.go.id/users/timredaksi-1aae53b6b4/KOMNASHAM/document/Laptah Komnas HAM RI 2025 web 3 Agst 2025.pdf>

[5] <https://www.tempo.co/politik/jatam-nasional-catat-ada-45-konflik-tambang-sepanjang-2020-545633>

[6] <https://celios.co.id/ieu-cepa-transition-toward-an-anti-deforestation-and-low-carbon-regime/>

[7] Die Empfehlungen von CELIOS lassen sich im Detail in ihrer Publikation „IEU-CEPA: Transition Toward an Anti-Deforestation and Low-Carbon Regime“ nachlesen: <https://celios.co.id/ieu-cepa-transition-toward-an-anti-deforestation-and-low-carbon-regime/>

## **Indonesia's Technocratic Activism**

Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir

During President Prabowo Subianto's first year in office as a strongman leader, protests grew in response to ongoing anti-democratic laws and policies. The government's response also turned increasingly ugly, resulting in thousands of unlawful arrests and hundreds of detentions awaiting trial. The arrests have continued since the August 2025 protests that sparked riots. The protesters, many of whom mobilised spontaneously without leaders, were overwhelmed by repression and caught up in legal battles to free their friends. Many unknown protesters detained by the police likely lacked legal representation and faced threats and violence from investigators. This is one of the drawbacks of opposition movements without organisational structures.

Yet, this limitation has not yet led to any real collective initiative to create a more coherent social force linked to a political entity capable of competing within the formal political arena. Existing movement parties are struggling to expand their social base and establish themselves as viable tools for channelling discontent. The Labour Party, in particular, relies on patronage networks to survive, allowing conservative co-option and thereby constraining the space for progressive elements to exert influence. Conversely, the Indonesian Green Party (Partai Hijau Indonesia, PHI), still struggling to secure verification as an electoral contestant, remains overly dependent on segments of the educated middle class, a social stratum that is generally less organised and more inclined towards political disengagement.

Meanwhile, most civil society activists remain reluctant to form or join existing movement parties aimed at seizing control of the state, partly due to concerns about co-optation. The state and the formal political arena are often perceived as corrupt and morally compromised environments, which discourage direct engagement. Ironically, the government is still expected to act with good intentions and to be responsive to societal needs. When expectations are unmet, the problem is typically attributed to technocratic issues of mismanagement and incompetence rather than to the power structure. In fact, the state is likely to remain exclusionary when progressive forces fail to engage in a direct power struggle in the formal political arena.

## **Technocratic activism**

A technocratic perspective, prevalent among civil society activists, contributes to maintaining an apolitical stance towards the state. This view renders political problems as matters of mismanagement, implying that meaningful change can be achieved simply by replacing incompetent officials or by redesigning institutions and regulations. The technocratic view is also problematic, as it overemphasises institutional capacity—or the lack thereof—suggesting the government has the goodwill to solve the problem and that unresolved issues are due to incompetence.

Prabowo's flagship economic programmes that misallocate state funds and his chaotic disaster management responding to the devastating floods on Sumatra Island, for instance, are framed merely as issues of government incompetence or the state's failure to handle crises, rather than as political matters pertaining to the power structure.

In fact, the messy handling of crises continues to happen repeatedly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the government initially ignored scientific advice and refused to acknowledge the pandemic as a serious threat. This was not simply due to a lack of competence but to the government's lack of interest in addressing it, as the resulting chaos often created opportunities for the accumulation of capital and power.

Similarly, social programmes like free nutritious lunches (MBG) are driven largely not by genuine concern for addressing malnutrition or improving welfare. Instead, they often serve as political tools to build patronage networks, distributing rents to business and political allies to secure loyalty. The messy handling of devastating floods on Sumatra Island also reflects pragmatic calculations by the ruling elites aiming at maximising returns from disasters, especially infrastructure development during reconstruction, rather than incompetence.

The continued enactment of contentious laws that contradict civil liberties and the excessive police crackdowns are also not simply problems of lawmakers' incompetence or law enforcers' lack of a rights perspective. Rather, they arise from a system in which access to public institutions serves primarily as a tool for private accumulation of power and wealth.

Hence, the multitude of crises exacerbated by Prabowo's administration stems from deeper structural problems intrinsic to Indonesia's exclusionary state, rather than merely technocratic failures. 'Exclusionary' means that state institutions and actions largely marginalise the aspirations and interests of broader society, particularly the Lower classes, while privileging those of select political-economic elites. This exclusionary nature is an outcome of entrenched predatory interests that, despite democratisation, remain unchallenged.

### **Moving beyond technocratism?**

While technocratism is not only insufficient but also allows the exclusionary state to remain unchallenged, meaningful change necessitates that civil society organise itself into a coherent political force capable of reshaping power structures through direct engagement in the formal political arena. However, this endeavour is inherently challenging, given multiple constraints, including restrictive electoral regulations that limit the participation of new political parties and the broadly apolitical stances that inhibit political engagement and collective mobilisation.

To participate in the election, a new political party must first undergo administrative and physical verification. The 2017 election law stipulates that a political party must establish representative offices across various levels: 100% at the provincial level, 75% at the regency or city level, and 50% at the district level. There are also barriers posed by the 4% parliamentary threshold and the 20% presidential threshold. Although the 2024 Constitutional Court ruling has removed the presidential threshold, only verified parties are eligible to nominate candidates. To meet these requirements, a new political party needs to rent or acquire numerous offices and recruit hundreds of thousands of verified members, which would entail an investment of billions of rupiahs.

These electoral regulations have become increasingly restrictive since the first democratic elections in 1999, allowing powerful politico-business elites to maintain their dominance. The opportunity to seek legal challenges through judicial review has also diminished, as most legal avenues are now under the control of ruling predatory elites, especially since the 2020 Constitutional Court law.

This inherent structural constraint helps explain why many civil society activists are reluctant to build an alternative political vehicle or to engage in organised, direct

intervention in the state, preferring instead to advocate for technocratic reforms. While numerous activists have entered the formal political arena to promote change from within, they have typically done so individually and sporadically rather than under a collective mandate from movement organisations. As a result, civil society cannot hold them accountable, allowing these activists to prioritise their personal upward mobility over their initial ideals and links to the movements.

Some progressive elements of civil society have attempted to build movement-based political parties aimed at transcending technocratic activism, but most have failed, while others, such as the PHI, are still struggling to expand their organisations and social bases. Meanwhile, the Labour Party, co-founded by some left-wing trade unions, is trapped in conservative co-option due to being dominated by a faction that sees aligning with the ruling predatory elites as a survival strategy. These challenges have prevented them from being regarded as an effective vehicle for mediating the aspirations of discontented citizens.

### **No way out?**

While most civil society activists, reluctant to engage in direct political intervention, tend to advocate a technocratic approach, citizens who feel alienated from formal political representatives often resort to populist figures with charismatic appeal or to spontaneous street protests.

Yet, relying on individual populist leaders often leads to disappointment. Former President Jokowi Widodo, for instance, was initially seen as a democratic saviour from Prabowo's authoritarian threat but ultimately defied those expectations. Without a strong political party linked to a coherent progressive social force, such leaders are prone to becoming entangled in the corrupt system they are expected to reform.

Meanwhile, street protests alone, especially when spontaneous and leaderless, have apparent limitations. While some spontaneous protests have successfully ousted corrupt executive leaders, as observed in Nepal and Bangladesh in 2025 and in Indonesia in 1998, the absence of leadership in the movement may only create a power vacuum, which is likely to be filled by the most organised political forces, including the military.

Given the limited options, the most viable way to transform power structures is to take control of state power—either through organised revolutionary action or through elections. This can be done by building new movement-based political parties or by strengthening existing ones. Where strong democratic mechanisms and robust internal accountability are established, the risks of co-option and corrupt leadership can be substantially mitigated. Withdrawing from the formal political arena and maintaining an anti-political stance only leaves the exclusionary nature of the state unchallenged.

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# The Resurgence of Military Dominance in Indonesia

Frans Ari Prasetyo

In March 2025, Indonesia passed an amendment to the National Military Law No. 34/2004 (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, RUU-TNI). This legislative move is viewed by civil society and human rights organizations as a regression toward Suharto’s era of “New Order”—a military dictatorship that lasted for 32 years until his ousting in 1998. The 1998 reformation movement (reformasi) triggered a period of political and social transformation, characterized by the rise of an elite democracy, a new oligarchy, the emergence of religious populism, the gradual resurgence of the military and police influence, and a façade of civilian supremacy.

The amendment of the TNI Law was supported by President Prabowo, who was elected in 2024. Prabowo is a former special forces commander involved in military operations in Aceh, Papua, and Timor-Leste, including the abduction of activists and students during the reformasi. Human rights groups accuse him of abuses under the country's late dictator, former President Suharto, who was also his father-in-law.

The TNI Law amendment establishes a framework for the integration of active military personnel into 14 civilian institutions (with a proposed increase to 19) without the prerequisite of retirement or resignation from the military. This development yields 19 million new



Photo by Andriana TJ (Bandung, 20 March 2025) with permission.

employment opportunities for military personnel within the civilian sector. Prior to the revision, there were already 2,600 active-duty officers serving in civilian roles. Experts have fiercely debated the TNI Law, with several articles causing particular concern. For instance, Article 7 of the law allows the military to undertake additional tasks as determined by the president to support national development and conduct military operations other than war, including assisting in tackling cyber threats and

peacekeeping, as well as protecting national interests abroad. This provision significantly expands military jurisdiction into areas traditionally managed by civilian institutions.

According to Article 47, the military is permitted to serve in ministries or other institutions in accordance with the president's policy. In the previous legislation, there were 10 civilian roles for which active soldiers were eligible—this is increased to 14. Furthermore, Article 53 pertains to the extension of the retirement age for soldiers at all rank levels. The retirement age limit for non-commissioned officers and enlisted personnel is 55 years, while officers up to the rank of colonel have a retirement age limit of 58 years, previously 53. The retirement age limit for four-star generals, who hold the highest rank, is 63-65 years, increased from 60 years.

The legislative process preceding the law's passage was characterized by marked haste. Deliberations were conducted over the course of less than a month in a luxury hotel rather than the parliamentary offices, resulting in a significant deficit of public participation. The passing of the TNI Law was led by the Speaker of the House, Puan Maharani. She is the granddaughter of Sukarno—Indonesia's first president, who was overthrown by the New Order military—and the daughter of the chairman of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). Although the PDI-P is nominally the opposition following the 2024 election battle favoring Prabowo, their facilitation of this law suggests a political alignment.

Through this amendment, the military implicitly conveyed its view that post-Reformasi civilian supremacy had failed to produce effective governance, development, and international credibility, thereby serving as a justification for renewed military involvement beyond its traditional defense role. In 2019, the Jokowi Government issued the Presidential Regulation No. 37 on TNI Functional Position, which indirectly revived the *Dwifungsi* (Dual Function) doctrine. First formulated by General Nasution in 1958, *Dwifungsi* legitimized the military's role in both national defense and socio-political governance. After the 1998 reformation, *Dwifungsi* was abolished, and the Armed Forces (ABRI) was split into TNI (military) and POLRI (Indonesian National Police). The amendment of the TNI Law is a clear attempt to revive this dual function and violates Members of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR—the legislative branch) Decree No.

VI/2000 that mandates the separation of TNI and POLRI. Following this amendment, the revision of the Police Law is expected to be the next priority, taking precedence over long-awaited reforms such as the Asset Forfeiture Bill for corruptors, which has stalled for nearly 20 years.

During Jokowi's second term (2019-2024), Prabowo managed a budget of IDR 700 trillion (approx. USD 43 billion) during his five years as Defense Minister. As president, the defense budget for 2025 alone will reach IDR 372.3 trillion (approx. USD 22.5 billion). Prabowo's intention to restore and expand the military's involvement in public affairs beyond defense has created a lack of impartiality, which has been marked by widespread abuses and impunity. Following the passage of the TNI Law, the Ministry of Defense under the Prabowo administration established a "civilian public cyber operations system" with a budget of IDR 100 billion (USD 6.2 million). The unit is tasked with countering perceived threats to national sovereignty by monitoring and targeting individuals or groups whose views are considered to undermine public trust in the military and the government.

Furthermore, Prabowo's flagship campaign of free nutritious meals (Makan Bergizi Gratis, MBG) is targeting 82.9 million school students and pregnant women with a budget of USD 4 billion per annum and is facilitated by the military, which provides logistical support. The government may select the military as the vendor for this initiative due to its ability to meet the stringent standards set by the National Nutrition Agency. The initiative has been implemented in numerous regions, including Papua, where the military has been engaged in the distribution of the MBG program in primary schools.

Papua is a region of ongoing military conflict, and Prabowo led the military operations in Papua during the New Order. Furthermore, after the enactment of the TNI Law, the Military District Command in Merauke, Papua, made a request to the local government for data and location regarding the whereabouts and identities of Papuan students. The government and military view the activities of Papuan students with suspicion, regarding them as a potential front for the Free Papua Movement. This surveillance extends to Java as well; in one case, military personnel entered an Islamic university in Semarang ostensibly to attend an academic discussion, only for them to demand data on the attendees.

In addition, Prabowo has initiated an ambitious “food estate” project across the forest areas in Papua, with the aim of ensuring food security. It is noteworthy that a similar project has previously failed in Kalimantan. Consequently, in addition to overseeing military operations in Papua, he is well-positioned to play a pivotal role in the region's rice supply chain, particularly regarding the farmer trading and cooperative system. This is of particular importance given the prevailing practice of middlemen manipulating the supply chain to the disadvantage of farmers. Notably, Prabowo served as the chairman of the national farmers’ organization, HKTI (Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia), from 2004 to 2015. It is understood that he also plans to increase the number of Military Regional Commands (Kodam) from 15 to 37 across Indonesian territory by 2025.

### **Militarization of Education**

During the amendment process of the TNI Law, several universities in Indonesia established collaborative relationships with the TNI. These partnerships provide national defense education and physical training for students. Critics argue the primary objective is political consolidation against universities to prevent criticism of the state and suppress student movements. This reminds of the "Normalization of Campus Life" policies (NKK/BKK—Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus/Badan Koordinasi Kemahasiswaan) of the New Order regime in 1978, designed to depoliticize students and force them into academic confinement.

Moreover, following the inauguration of 961 regional heads (mayors, regents, and governors) after the 2024 regional elections, as well as the inauguration of 48 ministers and officials, Prabowo organized a retreat at the Military Academy Camp in Magelang for his cabinet in February 2025, continuing into April-May. Participants were required to adhere to a strict schedule, including sleeping in military tents, wearing uniforms daily, and undergoing light physical military training.

The passing of the TNI Law reinforces Indonesia's reluctance to ratify the 1998 Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court, which has been adopted by 123 nations. This decision is driven by apprehensions that past perpetrators of gross human rights violations may face legal consequences. This issue is particularly salient in the context of President Suharto, a former general of the 32-year New Order regime with many

allegations of human rights violations during his dictatorship. President Prabowo could potentially face legal action for his alleged involvement in military operations in the New Order era and disappearances during the Reformasi movement. Moreover, the TNI Law contradicts the recommendations put forth by the Centre for Civil and Political Rights, the Universal Periodic Review, and the UN Convention Against Torture, which has been ratified by Indonesia and requires states to ensure military accountability and the protection of civil rights.

In addition to being an integrated part of the free meal program, TNI will enter the business of drug research, production, and distribution starting with the revitalization of many laboratories. The Bill Gates Foundation is making Indonesia a testing ground for tuberculosis and malaria vaccines as well as nutritional supplements for pregnant women. These initiatives support Prabowo's broader agenda, including the food estate projects that provide genetically modified seeds and fertilizers, thereby fostering dependency among farmers—effectively creating a "Green Revolution 2.0" in Indonesia.

The military works closely with state-owned companies. For example, the Bukit Barisan Military Command in Sumatra has entered a collaborative relationship with the state-owned palm oil company "PT Agrinas Palma Nusantara." The military acts as a security provider, ensuring the uninterrupted production of Indonesia's foremost export commodity. This occurrence will likely be replicated in the plantations of prominent palm oil tycoons. Moreover, this collaboration facilitates the entry of biochemical agriculture investors into the plantation sector, opening new investment opportunities following the food sector.

This TNI law has also served as a basis for the military to practice public enforcement of criminal laws, a domain that constitutionally falls under the authority of the police. Additionally, high-ranking retired military generals from the New Order to the present day are attempting to impeach the civilian vice president. The military has transgressed the established boundaries between military and civilian spheres, prompting protesters to demand that it return to the barracks and remain there except in circumstances of war.

## Protests against the new TNI law

Protests were held in almost 70 cities across Indonesia from March 20 to 27, 2025, with protesters demanding the following: Repeal the TNI Law; Reject dual function; Return the military to the barracks; Disband the territorial command; Prosecute generals who violate human rights, including Prabowo;



Photo by Andriana TJ (Bandung, 20 March 2025) with permission.

Withdraw the military from Papua; Abolish the military reserve component and the conscription plan; Stop the use of “buzzers” (cyber police that spread disinformation); Disband military courts; Try military prisoners in civilian courts; Stop military involvement in civilian-public spaces, reject militarization through development, and fight fascism and militarism.

In Bandung, on 20 March 2025, protests in front of the West Java House of Representatives brought together university and secondary school students, student organizations, labor unions, artists, and members of the general public. Towards evening, the situation descended into chaos with protesters burning barriers and throwing firecrackers, stones, and Molotov cocktails towards the office. The police initially did not respond, but later it led to a chaotic chase between the “Black Bloc” groups and unidentified police officers. Many protesters hid in clothing stores, restaurants, banks, or private offices until morning, fearing arrest and violence. The atmosphere remained tense within a 2 km radius. The chaos also resulted in significant destruction to public facilities; a bank was burnt down, and a military residence near the bank was damaged.

The following day, the situation stabilized, and in the afternoon the masses congregated once more in the same location for the same protest. Notably, this iteration of the protest did not result in any confrontations, and the authorities adopted a strategy of non-intervention, effectively allowing the crowd to disperse autonomously. This

approach proved effective. On 23 March, the crowd was smaller and only engaged in speeches and performance art. After this, no further protests have occurred in Bandung; however, sporadic demonstrations have persisted in various cities, exhibiting a pattern of intermittent simultaneity and sequential occurrence, extending up to 27 March. Subsequent civil initiatives focused on initiating a judicial review of the TNI law at the Constitutional Court. Individuals, civil society organizations, and students from several universities in Indonesia submitted dozens of judicial review applications.

### **Learning from Bandung and the experience of West Java**

Bandung is the capital of the province of West Java and is a large Indonesian military base. It contains all the main facilities of the military, including places for military education and training, warehouses, two military airports, including national aircraft companies (e.g., PT Dirgantara Indonesia), and national weapons factories (e.g., PT Pindad).

Bandung is also the place of an OMSP (Military Operation Other Than War) project. In 2018, President Jokowi issued Presidential Regulation No. 15 on Accelerating Pollution and Damage Control in the Citarum Watershed—the Citarum Harum (Citarum Fragrant) Project. This regulation was decentralized through Governor Regulation 28/2019. The Citarum River deserved emergency attention—it ranks among the world's dirtiest rivers and causes flooding throughout southern Bandung. Stretching 297 km with a 6,614 km<sup>2</sup> basin, it serves 26 million people while absorbing pollution from hundreds of factories, mostly textiles.

As a result, the Special Task Force PPK Citarum was established, covering 23 sectors across the Citarum watershed. Each sector is overseen by a commander from the West Java Military Command III Siliwangi. In total, the military deployed approximately 7,000 soldiers, including 1,400 assigned specifically to upstream and nursery areas along the river between 2018 and 2025. The program operated with a budget of IDR 8 trillion (USD 5 billion), financed through loans from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

Bandung's militarization predates the TNI Law. Mayor Ridwan Kamil (2013–2018) pioneered military-civilian collaboration to manage the city and public spaces, working with TNI, police, civil service police, and both nationalist and religious fundamentalist mass organizations. In 2016, without genuine urgency, the mayor declared a civil

emergency. This enabled the TNI to commence a 'civil order' operation in public spaces, city parks, and streets. The TNI cleaned up and displaced street vendors and informal sector workers from Gasibu Sunday Market and in the town squares area (alun-alun), while securing the eviction operation like the one at Urban Kampong Tamansari.

The author witnessed this violence personally. In Cikapayang, Dago, approximately 50 soldiers from Military Command III Siliwangi attacked the Perpustakaan Jalanan (Street Library) collective, of which the author is a member. The soldiers arrived in military trucks and were visibly armed, giving the impression of a combat operation rather than a civilian law-enforcement intervention. Perpustakaan Jalanan has operated since 2010 as a grassroots street library that opens every weekend in public spaces. The initiative has since been replicated nationwide and is currently active in approximately 70 cities across Indonesia.

In 2016, then-Mayor of Bandung Ridwan Kamil (2013–2018) declared a civil emergency in response to rising street crime and publicly framed Perpustakaan Jalanan as a threat to public order. Consequently, the municipal government, in conjunction with the police and military forces, initiated a series of street operations. However, due to inadequate coordination amongst the relevant parties, the military carried out a violent dispersal of the street library's activities. This incident had a detrimental effect on the Indonesian military's reputation in both domestic and international public opinion and damaged Ridwan Kamil's relationship with Military Command III Siliwangi.

During this period, Ridwan Kamil proposed the introduction of a mandatory military-oriented curriculum for junior and senior high schools and suggested the development of a 52-hectare military-owned property for agro-tourism purposes in the Cinambo district. The proposal to incorporate the military into the school curriculum was not realized following the Perpustakaan Jalanan incident. However, Governor Mulyadi later implemented a similar measure by introducing a mandatory six-month military camp residency program for senior and vocational high school students.

Military integration accelerated dramatically under Governor Dedi Mulyadi (2024–2029), a key Gerindra party politician—Prabowo's party. Even before the TNI Law was passed, Mulyadi formalized OMSP cooperation with the military, clearly anticipating and preparing for the law's passage. This cooperation spans public infrastructure, such as

roads, bridges, water channels, electricity networks, waste management, food security, and improvement of slum areas to disaster management.

The initial phase of this militarization initiative entails the deployment of school students who are regarded as problematic by the educational institution and their parents to military encampments. A similar approach will be employed with civilians, particularly those who are considered problematic by their social milieu, even in the absence of criminal activity. Negative public sentiment becomes a panopticon that can plunge everyone into military barracks; after all, the new Criminal Code can criminalize virtually any civilian. This is civilian silencing through the most masculine means—violence guided by a populist militarist agenda.

West Java's gubernatorial regulation on military camp education has received support from the Prabowo cabinet, including Human Rights Minister Natalius Pigi and Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Abdul Mu'ti, a senior figure from one of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations, Muhammadiyah. The latter has proposed integrating TNI-led instruction into universities and schools. These policies, however, directly contravene existing legislation on education, human rights, and child protection.

Militarization has been further extended through Dedi Mulyadi's collaboration with Bandung's elected mayor, M. Farhan, for the 2024–2029 period, notably via the establishment of the Anti-Thug Task Force. This initiative targets gangsters, mass organizations deemed anti-Pancasila (Indonesia's state ideology), religious fundamentalism, left-wing radicalism, right-wing chauvinism, and far-right nationalism—the latter two of which maintain well-documented connections with elements of the TNI and the police.

This task force formalizes military-police collaboration in the name of public security. Establishing relationships with Military Command III Siliwangi serves paramount importance for Bandung and West Java as a territorial command strategy in civilian areas—both political and geographic. Additionally, it serves as a mutual protection racket and political bulwark.

Consequently, the TNI no longer operates merely as dwifungsi but as a multifunctional force extending its reach across nearly every aspect of civilian life and governance—from education to food to environment to political control.

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# **The Stake of Indonesia's Politico-Administrative Decline amidst the Restructuring of Power Relations between Prabowo and Jokowi**

Defny Holidin

The first year of Prabowo-Gibran's administration has been filled with a series of policy agendas that are unsurprising yet still shocking. They are considered unsurprising because some programs were campaigned for during the 2024 election season, ranging from VAT (value-added tax) rate adjustments to free nutritious meal programs. However, all of them remain shocking because the use of public resources has accelerated significantly, as if to compress the realization of campaign promises for five years into just the first year. However, nothing has disturbed the public and social media discourse more than the differing interpretations of the political positions of Prabowo and Jokowi (Joko Widodo): some consider them to be in conflict, while others consider them to be part of the same oligarchy. The ambiguity of their relationship can perhaps be explained by the accelerated use of public resources mentioned above.

This article aims to review the persistence of changes in the political-administrative landscape during the Prabowo-Gibran administration (2024-2029) as a way of reading the big picture of the situation that has occurred in the past year. Rather than reviewing the situation on a case-by-case basis or targeting specific actors, whether in the August demonstrations, the pros and cons of national legislation, or environmental destruction in the name of food security, this article attempts to connect patterns between scattered events that are simultaneously manifested in reality and fill the pro and con public spaces. The argument in this article targets the implications of these events as an attempt by the Prabowo camp and the Jokowi camp (which has been dubbed the Solo club) to restructure their competitive power relations with each other, not in a zero-sum game scenario, through the mobilization of administrative resources. This constellation is facilitated by a democratic institutional framework that has not been consolidated since the beginning of the 1998 reform and was not mature before it was finally eroded by Jokowi's new post-democracy regime since the end of his first term in power ahead of the 2019 elections.

## **Pattern-Matching across Phenomena**

One of the common logical consequences of a new administration is the continuation of governance from the previous administration through regulatory and budgetary

mechanisms. In line with this logic, the end of the Jokowi-Ma'ruf administration (2019-2024) will result in turmoil during the first 100 days of the Prabowo-Gibran administration. This is marked by a series of policy breakthroughs surrounding state finances, ranging from the correction of the VAT rate from 11% to 12% for certain types of goods/services to the efficiency of the state budget of Rp306.69 trillion based on Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025. The latter has eroded the subsistence needs of ministries/non-ministerial institutions and implementing units, as well as cutting transfer funds from the national to local governments. Meanwhile, the cabinet structure is escalated, consisting of 108 ministers, deputy ministers, and ministerial-level officials, with the remaining 28 being special staff, special envoys, and special advisors. National strategic projects (Proyek Strategis Nasional, PSN) continue to run, including the operation of the Chinese loan-funded Whoosh high-speed train and the Pantai Indah Kapuk (PIK 2) project by a private company, which has been designated a PSN by seizing land from communities on the coast of Banten.

Many explanations justify the above efficiency policy. The most prominent is its justification as a new administrative effort to compensate for the budget deficit caused by the financing of Jokowi's flagship projects, in the form of national strategic projects and mainstream infrastructure development. When the Free Nutritious Meals (Makan Bergizi Gratis, MBG; often being dubbed Makan Basi Gratis or the Free Stale Food, due to its poor quality and delivery) program was introduced, the direction of this budget reallocation became clearer, with all its subsequent justifications. Even so, the government also recorded a government budget surplus deposited at Bank Indonesia, the result of the accumulation of SILPA (budget surplus), enabling the Ministry of Finance to disburse more than Rp200 trillion to state-owned banks (himbara) at the end of the third quarter of 2025. Nevertheless, at the end of the first year, the administration was unable to increase money circulation in the community and, therefore, failed to boost economic growth until the end of 2025.

The failure of fiscal compensation was also not saved by the reallocation of the budget for the construction of the Nusantara Capital City (Ibukota Negara Nusantara, IKN) project amounting to Rp100 trillion in early 2025 as a result of the swelling of the MBG realization needs, which was originally budgeted at Rp71 trillion. For 2026, this budget swelled in line with the expansion of its target recipients to Rp335 trillion. This requirement was met by diverting Rp223 trillion from the education budget and the rest

from the health sector, economic functions, and others. The deforestation of tropical forests in Papua adds to the ecological damage without any clear signs of the promised food security outcomes from this program, especially after its previous failure in Kalimantan when President Prabowo was still the Minister of Defense in the Jokowi-Ma'ruf administration.

The tug-of-war over the budget described above shows that there has been a breakdown in fiscal discipline due to operational efficiency in the form of radical budget cuts that have disrupted the functioning of government. This operational efficiency is not accompanied by allocative efficiency in the sense of cost-effectiveness, but merely involves cutting expenditure without any corresponding reduction in the output and impact of fiscal policy, let alone the provision of contingency budgets, such as emergency disaster funds. Until ecological disasters such as floods and landslides in a number of provinces in Sumatra in December 2025 caused losses of more than Rp 50 trillion, the government remained silent without reallocating the 2025 budget towards post-disaster recovery. Nor did it cut the MBG funds, which reached more than Rp1 trillion per day, even though as of early November 2025, there was still a budget surplus of around Rp30 trillion.

The absence of financial sanctions against logging and mining companies linked to ecological damage in Sumatra was followed by performative public fundraising actions by some ministers. What is worse than the absence of sanctions is the supporting regulatory framework, in the form of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, which weakens policy concerns on environmental preservation and conservation by annulling the requirement for environmental impact assessments (analisis mengenai dampak lingkungan, AMDAL), as well as undermining the bargaining position of workers in industrial relations. Both this fundraising and the proliferation of permits for forest encroachment and mining activities in upstream areas and dense forest cover raise long-standing questions about the deficit of public accountability in governance since Jokowi came to power.

This accountability deficit was also the focus of public discourse when Daya Aganata Nusantara (Danantara Indonesia Sovereign Fund) was inaugurated as an institution managing public funds in the form of assets and capital, including dividends earned by

state-owned banks, because part of its financial posture was supported by state financial participation. This institution, which was formed by and is responsible to the President, is a sovereign wealth fund managed under a superholding governance structure, making the Indonesia Investment Authority (INA) mediocre because it only manages co-investment funds. Only ex officio coordinating ministers and ministers in the fields of state finance, state-owned enterprises, and the State Secretariat serve on the supervisory board, which is an extension of the president. Danantara is also directly accountable to the President.

Although there are a number of state supervisory agencies that sit on the Supervisory and Accountability Committee, its nature is more ad hoc, with limited oversight of state-owned enterprises managed by Danantara. The composition of this committee is a mixture of supervisory agencies under the jurisdiction of the president (the internal control agency/BPKP, financial transaction surveillance and audit/PPATK, the Police/POLRI, and the Attorney General/Kejakung), non-structural agencies not directly under the president (the Corruption Eradication Commission/KPK), and a high state agency at the presidential level (the State Financial Audit/BPK). Even so, the oversight and accountability mechanism for Danantara does not operate directly because it requires multiple layers of approval from the House of Representatives (DPR) and ultimately returns to the President.

In addition to budgetary politics, the proxy for all of the above events is not the political parties but the state apparatus, specifically the Indonesian Army (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) and the Police (Kepolisian Republik Indonesia, POLRI). The separation of the two from the arch-institution under the armed forces (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia, ABRI) was one of the most prominent attributes of the 1998 reform debut, following the fall of Suharto's New Order regime. However, it was precisely at this point that an administrative imbalance between the two occurred. While the TNI is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defense (Kemenhan), despite remaining accountable to the President, the POLRI is a separate entity without ministerial jurisdiction and is directly accountable to the President. Nevertheless, traces of the involvement of both institutions have always been present in the implementation of various PSNs, not to mention the continued violence by POLRI and TNI personnel, such as those that occurred during and after the August 2025 demonstrations and the armed conflict with the Papuan people.

## **From Proxies to Escalating Clash in the Power Relations**

Competitions—if not conflict—between the TNI and POLRI are often perceived by the public as symbolic institutional opposition between Prabowo and Jokowi. However, the ambiguity of the relationship between the two divides public opinion as to whether one of them are in the same political camp or has broken ranks. Each opinion has an empirical basis to justify it. Here, we need a further lens to find the mechanism that makes the alliance or conflict between the two exist through the use of their respective proxies.

The assumption that the two were in harmony and on the same side found grounds for reconciliation after the 2019 election. Prabowo, who had been a competitor in the 2014 and 2019 elections, later joined President Jokowi's cabinet in his second term (2019-2024) for the sake of national unity—or so he claimed. After Jokowi's third term failed to materialize, the two joined forces in the 2024 election with Prabowo as the presidential candidate and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's eldest son, as his running mate. Although Gibran appears alienated in cabinet meetings led directly by Prabowo and in diplomatic interactions with partner countries, Prabowo's seasonal personal visits to Jokowi seem to affirm a simple relationship.

Within the institutional sphere, the formation of Prabowo-Gibran's 136-member cabinet accommodates half of Jokowi's old team. For this purpose, Law 39/2008 on state ministries was amended by Law 61/2024, which revised the upper limit on the number of cabinet ministers. This revision of the law was passed shortly before Prabowo-Gibran was inaugurated and took office. Outside the executive branch, the launch of Danantara Indonesia placed Jokowi on its Advisory Board alongside former president Yudhoyono. Many would not doubt that this is an indication that Jokowi holds a special place in the eyes of President Prabowo.

Regardless of the facts above, the alleged conflict between Prabowo and Jokowi is not without reason. Compared to the possibility of an alliance between the two, inferences from other facts actually show that the battlefield between them is more diverse. Among various public policies, the counterproductive relationship between the TNI and the POLRI is a field of conflict between the two, not merely symbolic but actually having fundamental roots, which are becoming increasingly apparent.

When referring to the TNI vs. POLRI proxy, the constellation is not as simple as Prabowo's military background vs. Jokowi's civilian association. Although individuals with a military background are still the preferred choice in national leadership succession, the candidate's portfolio remains the determining factor. Prabowo is not a figure who represents the reliability of those with a military background, given that he was once dismissed from the military, went into exile abroad, and is still overshadowed by allegations of human rights violations. This explains his position as the underdog in the 2009 election, when he was paired with Megawati Sukarnoputri. The same was true in the 2014 and 2019 elections, when he was paired with a figure who had been a public official and had the support of a large coalition against Jokowi's camp. Jokowi, on the other hand, was once hailed as a protagonist representing ordinary citizens from the lower-middle class without strong ties to the oligarchic elite. The reality of Jokowi's ten-year presidency has proven otherwise, with his eldest son even accompanying Prabowo in the 2024 presidential election.

The presence of Luhut Panjaitan, a veteran military officer who had a distinguished career during the New Order era and who, after the reform, became the kingmaker behind Jokowi's political camp, is a sign of the blurring of the conflict between the TNI and the POLRI when referring to the personal background of Prabowo vs. Jokowi. Thus, although political personification is common in Indonesia, neither of them adequately reflects the proxy in the TNI vs. POLRI conflict, but it must be seen in the context of the institutional relationship between the two.

Looking back to the early days of reform after President Suharto's New Order Regime was dismantled, the conflict between the TNI and POLRI is linked to changes in the institutional setting of the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI). The TNI and POLRI entities were separated, in line with the dissolution of ABRI as a unified entity. The military-style professionalism of the TNI has narrowed its scope of action, confining it to the barracks and putting an end to all business activities managed by military units. The mandate for TNI reform in Law 34/2004 is contrary to the dual function doctrine of ABRI since the dissolution of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) in 1965-1966. This situation meant that the TNI was not as free as before, when it was a component of the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, MPR) and even held various civilian public positions under the executive branch in

ministries/non-ministerial institutions and local government, in line with the merger of military territorial command units with local government administrative jurisdiction at that time.

The fate of POLRI actually experienced greater freedom after separating from the TNI. This freedom did not mean that they could occupy any public office, but rather that they could maintain their civilian character. In the first decade of reform, POLRI remained true to its role as a law enforcement agency, regardless of its performance level, and did not occupy public office, except after retirement or resignation from active membership. While the TNI's territorial command area is limited to defense command matters, the civilian-based POLRI has become an integral part of regional and local leadership coordination, together with key local government officials.

The fiscal consequences of the aforementioned institutional settings are inevitable. While POLRI enjoys a full budget in the security sector, TNI must share the defense sector budget with the Ministry of Defense, even though the TNI has been divided into three branches since its inception: the army, navy, and air force. POLRI, which performs security functions, is also attached to the budget for securing local government activities. Beyond that, it is common for regulatory and supervisory functions related to traffic and citizens' good behavior to be incorporated into POLRI along with budgetary functions, in the form of non-tax state revenue (*pendapatan negara bukan pajak, PNBP*), such as the proceeds from the processing of driver's licenses (SIM), vehicle registration certificates (STNK), motor vehicle ownership certificates (BPKB), police clearance certificates (SKCK), etc. None of these matters is handled by the TNI, even though it is common practice to use TNI personnel to secure development projects by government agencies and even those managed by private actors, which are often disguised as other TNI roles in military operations other than war (*operasi militer selain perang, OMSP*), which should have a limited scope.

When Jokowi took power, the mainstreaming of POLRI in government administration was more than just a law enforcement tool. While the disproportionate allocation of budgets between the security and defense sectors and the variation in sources of revenue have actually been going on for a long time, riding on the agenda and instruments of administrative reform, Jokowi seized the opportunity for reform to steer the POLRI towards its role as a tool for maintaining power.

With the enactment of Law 19/2019, after being inaugurated for his second term, President Jokowi shifted the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, KPK), which was originally a state auxiliary body, an independent institution outside the government, to be under the domain of the executive branch. The KPK's performance, which had previously been formidable under the Yudhoyono Administration (2004-2009 & 2009-2014), became underperforming, compensated by the elevation of the role of POLRI in combating corruption throughout Jokowi's second presidential term. President Prabowo appears to be competing with this trend by mainstreaming the role of the Attorney General's Office (Kejaksaan Agung, Kejaksaan) in similar efforts, such as handing over the results of the KPK's red-handed capture operations (operasi tangkap tangan, OTT) to Kejaksaan for follow-up after a year of Prabowo-Gibran's administration. The security of the Kejaksaan office in 2025 by the TNI, which should have been carried out by the police, has increased compared to before, especially after the conflict between the Attorney General's Office and the police (POLRI) came to the fore from mid to late 2024, beginning with the arrest of members of the police special anti-terrorism detachment (Densus) 88 by the Attorney General's Office while they were tailing a Deputy Attorney General for Special Crimes (Jampidus) and the subsequent response by the police mobile brigade (Brimob) convoy.

It was during Jokowi's era that active members of POLRI held public positions outside the realm of law enforcement without any prior revision of the legal-formal basis. This effort was then counterbalanced by President Prabowo through the revision of Law No. 34/2004 on the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) into Law No. 3/2025 as a point of compromise between political factions among his supporters, without negating or reducing the scope of the TNI's role. The new TNI Law did not legalize TNI business activities but provided a legal basis for expanding the role of active TNI members to occupy fourteen civilian public positions. This differs from the ability of POLRI members to engage in business activities under applicable terms and conditions, which only requires POLRI Chief Regulation 9/2017, enacted under the Jokowi administration. However, in reality, under the Prabowo administration, the TNI's business role has not only continued in the implementation of national strategic projects (PSN) for food security, which extend from Kalimantan to Papua, but has also become the backbone of the management of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program under the National Nutrition Agency (Badan Gizi Nasional, BGN).

The supremacy of POLRI seems to remain persistent. Although at the end of 2025, the Constitutional Court (Mahkamah Konstitusi, MK), through its decision No. 114/PUU-XXIII/2025, prohibited active police officers from holding civil service office, POLRI has responded by creating a counter interpretation with the Police Regulation (Perpol) 10/2025. This Perpol even opens the door for active members of POLRI to hold seventeen civil service positions, more than what is permitted for TNI members under the new TNI Law. This Perpol not only violates Indonesian National Police Law 2/2002 but also the Civil Service Law, both taken into effect by Law 30/2023, and even more so in the previous, more reformist version: Law 5/2014. President Prabowo has the opportunity to curb the POLRI's actions by issuing a government regulation (Peraturan Pemerintah, PP) as a follow-up to the Constitutional Court's decision, with concrete implementation to follow.

## **Conclusion**

Conflict between political elites and oligarchic factions is nothing new in any country's politics, especially Indonesia, which has not only failed to consolidate democracy but has also reversed course toward the consolidation of autocracy. However, in the escalating power struggle between former President Jokowi's camp and President Prabowo's camp, in his first year in power (2024-2025), Prabowo appeared to maintain a personal relationship with Jokowi but built an institutional and policy framework that competed with the institutional and policy settings inherited from his predecessor.

The phenomenon elucidates that the dynamics of inter-elite relations that jeopardize the fate of the political-administrative system are the result of Prabowo's efforts to restructure power relations with Jokowi and his cronies, who remain in Prabowo's cabinet. It is interesting to note that this phenomenon also marks the misuse of administrative reform instruments so that the democratic institutional setting prompts a foundation for the practice of a power state (Machtstaat), rather than a constitutional state (Rechtsstaat).

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**Sources of images used in the banner (from right to left)**

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