AL RISALAH: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah dan Hukum

VOLUME 26 NO 1, MAY 2026
P-ISSN: 2252-8334 / E-ISSN: 2550-0309
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https://doi.org/10.24252/al-risalah.vi.67799

Analysis of Indonesia's Democratic Backsliding After 2024 Using an Institutional Democracy and Elite Power Approach

Albar Adetary Hasibuan[1*], Sahlan Roy Martua Hasibuan[2], Akhir Saleh Pulungan[3], Lempang Hasibuan[4], Risna Rianti Sari[5]

[1]*E-mail: albarhasibuan@ub.ac.id*
[2]*E-mail : sahlanalhasby123@gmail.com*
[3]*E-mail : akhirsalehpulungan01@gmail.com*
[4]*E-mail : lempanghasibuan1029@gmail.com*
[5]*E-mail : risnariantisari@uin-malang.ac.id*
[1,2]*Brawijaya University Malang, Indonesia*
[3]*Institut Agama Islam Padang Lawas, Indonesia*
[4,5]*Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia*
*corresponding author

Article history:
Received in revised form: 11 April 2026
Acceptance date: 11 May 2026
Available online: 31 May 2026

Keywords:
Democratic Backsliding; Institutional Democracy; Elite Power; Political Oligarchy; Post-2024 General Election.

How to Cite:
Hasibuan, A. A., Hasibuan, S. R. M., Pulungan, A. S., Hasibuanu, L., & Sari, R. R. (2026). Analysis of Indonesia's Democratic Backsliding After 2024 Using an Institutional Democracy and Elite Power Approach. Al-Risalah Jurnal Ilmu Syariah Dan Hukum.
https://doi.org/10.24252/al-risalah.vi.67799

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Abstract

This study examines democratic backsliding in Indonesia after the 2024 general election using a qualitative case study approach. The findings show that democratic decline has occurred gradually through legal and institutional mechanisms rather than through abrupt authoritarian change. Although elections and constitutional procedures remain formally intact, substantive democratic quality has weakened due to declining civil liberties, expanding executive dominance, weakening parliamentary oversight, and increasing elite consolidation. Political and economic elites strengthened their influence through coalition expansion and policy coordination, reducing accountability and democratic competition. Indonesia's post-2024 trajectory therefore reflects characteristics of a hybrid democracy in which procedural democratic institutions continue to function while substantive accountability declines. Overall, this study concludes that Indonesia is experiencing gradual democratic erosion characterized by institutional weakening, executive expansion, and oligarchic consolidation.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, Indonesia has often been regarded as one of Southeast Asia's most successful cases of democratic transition following the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998. Political reforms strengthened electoral competition, decentralization, and institutional accountability, leading Indonesia to be recognized as one of the world's largest democracies in the Global South. Nevertheless, procedural continuity in democracy does not necessarily ensure substantive democratic consolidation. Recent political developments instead reveal growing symptoms of democratic backsliding within formally democratic institutions.[1,2]

Contemporary democratic scholarship suggests that democratic decline no longer primarily occurs through military coups or sudden authoritarian takeovers. Instead, democratic erosion increasingly unfolds gradually through constitutional and institutional mechanisms controlled by elected leaders. Levitsky and Ziblatt[3] argue that democratic institutions may formally persist while norms of accountability and checks and balances substantially deteriorate. Similarly, Bermeo[4] characterizes this process as executive aggrandizement operating within democratic procedures. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the trajectory of post-reform Indonesian democracy.

Following the 2024 election, concerns regarding the quality of democracy in Indonesia have intensified considerably. Several political controversies, including the Constitutional Court's ruling on candidacy requirements, the expansion of political dynasties, and allegations of executive intervention in state institutions, have generated widespread public criticism. In addition, restrictions on civil liberties through the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE) have raised concerns about the shrinking civic space. These conditions indicate increasing tensions between procedural legitimacy and substantive democratic accountability. Such developments reflect broader patterns of democratic backsliding in contemporary Indonesia.[5]

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[1] Larry Diamond, *Why Are There No Arab Democracies?* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0150.
[2] Marcus Mietzner, "Authoritarian Innovations in Indonesia: Electoral Narrowing, Identity Politics and Executive Illiberalism," *Democratization* 27, no. 6 (2020): 1021–36.
[3] Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (Crown Publishing Group, 2018).
[4] Nancy Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5–19, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012.
[5] Marcus Mietzner, "The Limits of Autocratisation in Indonesia: Power Dispersal and Elite Competition in a Compromised Democracy," *Third World Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2025): 153–69, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2024.2317970.

International democracy-monitoring institutions have also documented a decline in Indonesia's democratic quality. Freedom House[6] reports stagnation in civil liberties and political rights, particularly in relation to freedom of expression and institutional independence. The Economist Intelligence Unit continues to classify Indonesia as a flawed democracy because of persistent weaknesses in accountability and political culture. Likewise, the V-Dem Institute[7] identifies symptoms of electoral autocratization through institutional weakening and the concentration of executive authority. These findings demonstrate that democratic erosion increasingly occurs incrementally within formally democratic systems.

From an institutional perspective, democratic sustainability depends heavily on the strength and independence of political institutions. North[8] conceptualizes institutions as rules that constrain political behavior and prevent abuses of power. Hadiz and Robinson[9] further argue that inclusive institutions are essential for broadly distributing political authority within democratic systems. When institutional autonomy deteriorates, oversight mechanisms become ineffective and democratic accountability weakens. Consequently, democracy becomes increasingly vulnerable to executive domination and the concentration of power.

Democratic institutions such as legislatures, judicial bodies, and electoral commissions function as mechanisms of checks and balances within democratic governance. However, democratic backsliding often emerges when these institutions become politicized and lose their autonomy. Haggard and Kaufman[10] explain that executive actors frequently exploit institutional weaknesses to consolidate power gradually. Similarly, Boese et al.[11] identify institutional erosion as a central indicator of autocratization processes. Therefore, institutional weakening constitutes a critical dimension in explaining contemporary democratic decline.

Nevertheless, institutional explanations alone remain insufficient for comprehensively explaining democratic decline. Democratic backsliding is also closely

[6] FreedomHouse, "Freedom in the World 2024: The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict" (Freedom House, 2024).
[7] V-DemInstitute, "Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot," 2024.
[8] Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[9] Richard Robison and Vedi R. Hadiz, "Reorganising Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in an Age of Markets" (London, 2004).
[10] Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, "The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 27–41.
[11] Vanessa A Boese et al., "State of the World 2021 : Autocratization Changing Its Nature ? Nature ?," *DEMOCRATIZATION* 29, no. 6 (2022): 983–1013, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2069751.

associated with the concentration of political and economic power among elites. Michels,[12] through the "iron law of oligarchy," argues that political organizations tend to centralize authority within small elite groups. Winters[13] further demonstrates that oligarchic actors can effectively adapt within democratic systems while preserving their influence. As a result, formal democratic procedures may coexist with unequal distributions of political power.

In the Indonesian context, oligarchic structures have persisted and adapted within post-authoritarian democratic institutions. Hadiz argues that democratization in Indonesia did not eliminate oligarchic domination but instead reorganized elite power through democratic mechanisms. Political elites continue to utilize political parties, economic resources, and patronage networks to maintain their influence. Consequently, electoral democracy often operates alongside elite consolidation and unequal political competition. This condition illustrates the persistence of oligarchic politics within Indonesia's democratic system.[14]

The interaction between institutional weakening and elite consolidation has become increasingly visible in post-2024 Indonesia. Political elites not only benefit from weak institutions but also actively shape institutional arrangements to preserve their authority. Waldner and Lust[15] argue that democratic erosion frequently involves strategic collaboration between elites and institutional actors. In Indonesia, increasing political centralization, dynastic politics, and the weakening capacity of opposition forces indicate a restructuring of democratic power relations. These dynamics demonstrate that democratic backsliding involves both structural and actor-centered dimensions simultaneously.

Despite the growing body of literature on democratic backsliding, previous studies still tend to analyze institutional decline and elite domination separately. Institutional approaches generally focus on constitutional erosion without adequately explaining how elites exploit institutional vulnerabilities. Conversely, elite-centered studies often overlook how institutional transformation facilitates elite consolidation. Furthermore, empirical studies specifically examining democratic backsliding in Indonesia after 2024

[12] Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1911).
[13] Jeffrey A. Winters, *Oligarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[14] Robison and Hadiz, "Reorganising Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in an Age of Markets."
[15] David Waldner and Ellen Lust, "Unwelcome Change : Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding," *Annual Review OfPolitical Science* 21 (2018): 93–113.

remain limited. This condition indicates an important theoretical and empirical gap in the contemporary literature on Indonesian democracy.[16,17]

This study addresses these limitations by integrating institutional democratic theory with elite power analysis within a single analytical framework. Unlike previous studies, this research conceptualizes democratic backsliding as a reciprocal interaction between institutional weakening and elite consolidation. Institutional erosion creates opportunities for elite domination, while elite actors simultaneously reshape institutions to maintain political control. Through this integrative framework, the study offers a more comprehensive explanation of democratic decline in contemporary Indonesia. Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in systematically linking structural institutional factors with elite-centered political dynamics.[18,19]

This research also contributes empirically by focusing specifically on Indonesia's post-2024 democratic trajectory, which reflects significant political transformation and institutional contestation. By incorporating recent political controversies, institutional developments, and patterns of elite consolidation, the study provides updated empirical insights into contemporary Indonesian democracy. More broadly, this research contributes to comparative discussions on democratic backsliding in developing democracies. The findings are expected to strengthen theoretical debates regarding institutional fragility and elite domination within democratic systems. Thus, this study offers both theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature on democratic backsliding.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine democratic backsliding in Indonesia following the 2024 general election. A case study approach is appropriate because it enables an in-depth analysis of institutional and political dynamics within a specific national context.[20] The study draws on North's[21] institutional theory and Acemoglu and Robinson's[22] framework of inclusive and

[16] Mietzner, "Authoritarian Innovations in Indonesia: Electoral Narrowing, Identity Politics and Executive Illiberalism."
[17] Haggard and Kaufman, "The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding."
[18] Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[19] Winters, *Oligarchy*.
[20] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Sage Publications, 2018).
[21] North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*.
[22] Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press., 2006).

extractive institutions. In addition, Winters'[23] theory of oligarchy is used to explain patterns of elite domination within democratic governance.

The research focuses on the institutional dynamics of Indonesian democracy after the 2024 election, particularly the interaction among executive, legislative, and judicial institutions. Rather than using statistical sampling, the study applies purposive sampling to select relevant documents and data sources.[24] The selection process was based on relevance, credibility, and consistency with post-2024 political developments. These criteria ensured that the selected materials adequately reflected indicators of democratic backsliding.

Primary data consist of government regulations, Constitutional Court decisions, parliamentary documents, policy reports, and official state statements issued between 2024 and 2026. Secondary data include reports published by Freedom House (2024),[25] the Economist Intelligence Unit (2024), and the V-Dem Institute (2024),[26] as well as Scopus-indexed journal articles and academic books. The study specifically selected documents addressing elections, judicial independence, political parties, and institutional restructuring. These materials were considered essential for understanding institutional weakening and the consolidation of elite power.

Data were collected through document analysis and a systematic literature review. Following Bowen (2009),[27] document analysis was used to examine both the content and political context of official documents and academic sources. The study was conducted during the 2025–2026 period, with particular attention to Indonesia's post-election political transition. The analytical focus centers on national political institutions and their democratic interactions.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, consistent with qualitative research principles.[28] To maintain analytical consistency, the study employed a document analysis framework based on several key indicators, including institutional independence, the effectiveness of checks and balances, the protection of civil liberties, political competition, and the concentration of elite power. These indicators were adapted

[23] Winters, *Oligarchy*.
[24] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2015).
[25] FreedomHouse, "Freedom in the World 2024: The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict."
[26] V-DemInstitute, "Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot."
[27] Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027.
[28] J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Yogyakarta: Sage Publications, 2018).

from democratic measurement frameworks developed by Freedom House, the Economist Intelligence Unit, and the V-Dem Institute (2024).

Data analysis employed both content analysis and thematic analysis techniques. Content analysis was used to examine policy substance and institutional decisions,[29] while thematic analysis identified recurring themes related to elite influence and democratic decline.[30] The analytical process followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).[31] Documents were coded according to institutional themes, political actors, and democratic indicators.

To ensure validity and reliability, the study applied source triangulation by comparing official documents, democracy reports, and academic literature.[32] Consistency across multiple sources strengthened interpretive credibility and minimized potential bias. Peer-reviewed publications and internationally recognized democracy indices were prioritized to enhance reliability. The study also employed an inductive-deductive analytical approach to align empirical findings with the theoretical framework.

Through this methodology, the study seeks to explain the relationship between institutional fragility and the consolidation of elite power in Indonesia's democratic backsliding after 2024. The analysis highlights how weakening democratic institutions intersect with oligarchic interests in policymaking processes. The study contributes theoretically by integrating institutional and elite power perspectives in the analysis of contemporary Indonesian politics. It also provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying democratic erosion in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Patterns of Democratic Backsliding After the 2024 Election

The findings indicate that Indonesia's democratic decline after the 2024 election has unfolded gradually through institutional and legal mechanisms rather than through abrupt authoritarian transformation. Although elections and constitutional procedures

[29] Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018).
[30] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2008): 77–101.
[31] Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Sage Publication, 2014).
[32] Norman K. Denzin, "Triangulation 2.0," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 6, no. 2 (2012): 80–88, https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689812437186.

remain formally intact, the substantive quality of democracy has weakened. Declining civil liberties, reduced accountability, and weakening institutional independence reflect a pattern of executive aggrandizement within a formally democratic system.[33,34]

Several international indices confirm this democratic deterioration. Freedom House (2025) reports declining scores in freedom of expression and media independence. Similarly, the V-Dem Institute (2025) categorizes Indonesia as experiencing electoral autocratization, while the Economist Intelligence Unit (2025) continues to classify Indonesia as a flawed democracy. These indicators suggest that democratic erosion increasingly operates through legal and constitutional mechanisms rather than overt authoritarian practices.

Political power also became increasingly concentrated after 2024. Major political parties, including Gerindra, Golkar, Demokrat, and PAN, joined the governing coalition, thereby weakening effective parliamentary opposition. As a result, legislative oversight became increasingly procedural and less critical of executive policymaking.[35]

Democratic decline is further reflected in controversies surrounding Constitutional Court decisions, electoral regulations, and restrictions on civic expression. Public protests and student demonstrations throughout 2024 revealed growing concerns regarding institutional neutrality and democratic safeguards. These developments indicate that democratic erosion has become increasingly institutionalized within formal political and legal processes.[36]

Indicator	Pre-2024 Condition	Post-2024 Condition	Empirical Basis
Civil Liberties	Relatively stable	Declining	Freedom House (2025)
Judicial Independence	Moderately independent	Increasing political intervention	V-Dem (2025)
Parliamentary Oversight	Functioning but limited	Weakened by coalition dominance	Coalition analysis

[33] Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding."
[34] Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg, "A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New about It?," *Democratization* 26, no. 7 (2019): 1095–1113, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1582029.
[35] Marcus Mietzner, "Elite Collusion in Indonesia: How It Has Both Enabled and Limited Executive Aggrandizement," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 712, no. 1 (2024): 223–34, https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162241309436.
[36] Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.

Political Competition	Competitive multiparty system	Increasing elite concentration	Electoral analysis
Media Freedom	Partially free	Growing pressure on criticism	Freedom House (2025)
Executive Power	Relatively constrained	Increasingly dominant	Policy analysis

The table demonstrates measurable democratic deterioration after 2024 across multiple institutional dimensions. The most significant changes involve declining institutional independence and expanding executive dominance. Although democratic procedures remain operational, substantive accountability and political competition have weakened considerably.[37][38]

2. Institutional Weakening and Executive Expansion

The findings reveal a significant expansion of executive power after 2024 through coalition dominance and institutional alignment. Although legislative institutions continue to function formally, their oversight capacity has weakened substantially. Parliamentary deliberation increasingly serves procedural legitimacy rather than substantive policy evaluation.[39]

Institutional weakening is evident across several sectors. Judicial institutions faced criticism regarding their neutrality in politically sensitive cases, while parliamentary oversight declined because of limited opposition influence. Regulatory policymaking also became increasingly aligned with executive preferences, thereby reducing institutional autonomy and balance.[40]

The broad governing coalition contributed to stronger executive coordination and short-term political stability. However, this arrangement simultaneously reduced institutional competition within the democratic system. Democratic institutions increasingly functioned as mechanisms of elite accommodation rather than independent structures of accountability.[41]

Policy analysis further demonstrates that legal and procedural legitimacy has frequently been used to justify controversial institutional adjustments. This pattern

[37] FreedomHouse, "Freedom in the World 2024: The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict."
[38] V-DemInstitute, "Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot."
[39] Thomas B. Pepinsky, "Cleavages, Institutions, and Democracy in Indonesia: The 2024 Elections in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 44, no. 3 (2025): 345–65, https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034251349467.
[40] North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*.
[41] Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

reflects broader trends of democratic erosion in hybrid regimes, where democratic procedures are maintained while institutional constraints gradually weaken.[42]

3. Elite Consolidation and Oligarchic Networks

The findings demonstrate that democratic weakening after 2024 is closely associated with elite consolidation. Political and economic elites strengthened their influence through coalition expansion, strategic appointments, and policy coordination. This process increased political stability among elites while simultaneously narrowing substantive democratic competition.[43]

Business networks and political actors maintained substantial influence within post-2024 governance structures. Political financing and policymaking became increasingly concentrated among interconnected elite groups. Consequently, democratic institutions formally persisted but increasingly operated within exclusive political networks.[44]

Elite consolidation emerged in three principal forms. First, economic elites gained stronger influence over policymaking through strategic access to government institutions. Second, broad coalition dominance weakened effective parliamentary opposition. Third, political parties became increasingly centralized around small leadership circles, thereby limiting internal democratic competition.[45]

Importantly, oligarchic consolidation did not emerge through overt authoritarianism. Instead, elite dominance operated through democratic institutions such as elections, coalition bargaining, and legislative processes. Indonesia therefore reflects a procedural democracy characterized by increasingly concentrated elite power.[46]

Discussion

The findings indicate that democratic backsliding in Indonesia after 2024 resulted from the interaction between institutional weakening and elite consolidation. Institutional erosion reduced constraints on executive authority, while elite dominance accelerated the decline of accountability and political competition. These processes mutually reinforced one another in a cumulative manner.

The Indonesian case supports recent scholarship arguing that democratic erosion often occurs through legal and constitutional mechanisms rather than through coups or abrupt authoritarian rupture. Executive expansion after 2024 relied heavily on coalition

[42] Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*.
[43] Winters, *Oligarchy*.
[44] Robison and Hadiz, "Reorganising Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in an Age of Markets."
[45] Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*.
[46] Pepinsky, "Cleavages, Institutions, and Democracy in Indonesia: The 2024 Elections in Comparative Perspective."

dominance and procedural legitimacy. As a result, democratic institutions remained formally intact while their substantive functions weakened.

The findings also reinforce debates on oligarchic democracy in Southeast Asia. Broad coalition accommodation reduced conflict among dominant elites while simultaneously narrowing democratic contestation. Political influence became increasingly concentrated within interconnected networks of party elites, business actors, and state institutions.

Another important finding concerns the transformation of parliamentary politics after 2024. The exceptionally large governing coalition weakened opposition capacity and reduced substantive legislative deliberation. Parliament increasingly functioned as a mechanism of elite coordination rather than as an institution of democratic oversight.

Indonesia's post-2024 trajectory also reflects characteristics commonly associated with hybrid democracy. Civil liberties remain constitutionally protected; however, pressures on media independence, civil society criticism, and institutional neutrality have intensified. Democratic decline therefore occurs incrementally through cumulative institutional adjustments rather than through overt authoritarian change.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Indonesia's democratic backsliding after 2024 is characterized by executive expansion, institutional weakening, and oligarchic consolidation. Although democratic procedures continue to operate formally, substantive accountability and political inclusiveness have weakened significantly. Indonesia therefore illustrates a gradual transformation toward a more centralized and elite-dominated democratic order.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that democratic backsliding in Indonesia after the 2024 election has occurred gradually through institutional and legal mechanisms rather than through abrupt authoritarian change. Although democratic procedures remain formally intact, substantive democratic quality has weakened, as reflected in declining civil liberties, weakening institutional independence, expanding executive power, and reduced parliamentary oversight. Broad coalition dominance has also concentrated political power and weakened effective opposition.

The findings further indicate that democratic decline after 2024 is closely linked to elite consolidation and oligarchic networks. Political and economic elites strengthened their influence through coalition expansion and policy coordination, reducing accountability and democratic competition. Overall, Indonesia's post-2024 trajectory reflects a hybrid democracy characterized by institutional weakening, executive expansion, and increasing elite domination.

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