

Securitized by Design: Indonesia Military Involvement in Food Estate Program in Papua 2020-2024

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Abstract

This article analyzes the underlying factors that led the Indonesian government under President Joko Widodo to designate the Ministry of Defense and the Military (TNI) as the lead authority for the Food Estate program in Papua between 2020 and 2024. This policy choice, particularly in the pilot project location of Merauke, is viewed as a significant phenomenon of remilitarization that threatens Indonesia's democratic quality. Employing the framework of Historical Institutionalism and the concept of Path Dependence, the research argues that the military's current involvement is not a spontaneous event but a consequence of unreformed institutional legacies from the authoritarian New Order era. The analysis concludes that the reliance on the military to implement the Food Estate in Merauke a strategically sensitive area due to its border location with Papua New Guinea deepens military participation in civilian sectors, increases the risk of massive Human Rights violations, and reinforces a destructive path dependence that actively undermines democratic control.

Keywords:

Food; Indonesia; Institutionalism; Military; Papua

Introduction

Towards the end of the 1990s, a group of International Relations scholars known as The Copenhagen School of Security Studies expanded the scope of security issues by shifting the dominance of traditional state security discourse to human security (non-traditional). Non-traditional security focuses on issues such as economic, environmental, food, energy, and other sectors. The United Nations (UN) adopted this thinking through the UN Development Programme in its 1994 "Human Development Report." This report contained several points, one of which was food security. Regarding food security, the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) indicates that Indonesia's score decreased from 60.9 to 59.5 in 2020. The UN agency focused on food issues, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), also stated that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a food crisis, prompting all countries to re-evaluate their national food security strategies. In 2020, the Indonesian government launched the Food Estate program as a national food barn development project, recognizing food security as part of national defence.

In this research, the researcher specifically focuses on the involvement of the Indonesia military in the Food Estate program in Papua from 2020 to 2024. Additionally, also focusing on Merauke as part of south Papua region chosen as Pilot project. This military involvement is represented by the presence of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) and the Ministry of Defense (Kementerian Pertahanan, Kemhan). This is evidenced by the establishment of the National Strategic Logistics Reserve Agency (BCLSN), managed by Kemhan. The BCLSN operates using TNI personnel and reserve components (Komcad). A similar program, but without massive military involvement, was run during the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) administration under the name Merauke Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE). The Joko Widodo administration continued MIFEE under the name Food Estate, involving the military as project implementers on the ground.

In this study, the researcher aims to focus on one problem: analysing the factors behind the Indonesian government's stance in involving military groups in the governance of Indonesian food security through the Food Estate program in Papua from 2020 to 2024. The research question are: (i) Why did the Indonesian government choose the Ministry of Defence, especially the Military, to take over the food estate program in Papua and (ii) why the Papua region was, especially Merauke, chosen as the starting point for the food estate project. The justification for positioning the Military, operating under the Ministry of Defence, as the main authority over the Papua *food estate* initiative requires a detailed examination of the decision-making trajectory. By mapping the stages, key participants, political dynamics, and available policy alternatives, one can ascertain the fundamental factors and motivations that led to the military's involvement. Similar research, such as that by Haripin (2019), argues that one of the reasons the military is heavily committed to involvement in government programs, particularly in the food sector, is because Indonesia is highly vulnerable to uncontrolled fluctuations and spikes in food prices. If this vulnerability is not addressed, it could lead to public unrest, thus creating political instability.

The involvement of the military in national food security governance potentially paves the way for the military to become re-involved in Indonesian civil affairs, which could threaten the continuity of democratic values. The urgency of this research focuses on the positioning of the Indonesian military as a group taking a role in national food governance, thereby creating an opportunity for a decline in democratic values that have been initiated and

implemented since the post-1998 reform era. Additionally, the selection of Papua as one of the Food Estate program areas is problematic because Papua is the region with the highest level of remilitarization in Indonesia. To uncover the complex interplay between political power, economic control, and civil-military relations in Indonesia's evolving context, this research employs a qualitative approach that combines in-depth exploration of social phenomena with extensive literature reviews and expert interviews.

Literature Review

This literature review section will be focused on civil-military relations in both Southeast Asia and Indonesia. From the western world point of view, normally the military sees enemy invasion as a basic threat and fundamental mission is only to secure territorial defense. But Southeast Asia countries military often perceives common threats was and still coming from internal of the country. In terms of national development, Southeast Asian armies often involved as internal security forces that gives them broaden authorization to taking part in non-military threats (Croissant, 2018).

The history of civil-military relations in Southeast Asia is unique to each country, shaped significantly by colonial experiences and marked by common intra-state conflicts, including small-scale combat and brushfire conflicts, since World War II. Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar exemplify the unique military involvement in the region's politics: Myanmar's politics show complete military junta domination with civilians totally excluded, while Thailand has experienced twenty-two military coup attempts, half of which were successful, since the abolition of its absolute monarchy in the late 1930s. Indonesia itself experienced comprehensive military control for 33 years (1965-1998) during Soeharto's presidency, bolstered by technocratic support. Despite the transition after 1998, Indonesian democracy has never been fully restored, as the military's reforms have been evident in only a limited number of areas. Major improvement of reducing hegemonic power of Indonesia military only when separating between national police with the armed forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) in 1999. According to Kosandi (2020), military reform lead the military itself to become a professional institution which avoids intervening in politics and also avoids participating in business activities.

In Indonesia, the new law that established in 2002 making clear separation between internal security and external defense (Reza, 2017). Law No. 3 of 2002 on National Defense adheres to the concept of Total People's Defense and Security System (Sishankamrata) which has simplified national defense components into three parts, first TNI as the main component. Secondly, civilians reserve components that undergo basic military training and are ready to be mobilized if needed to strengthen national defense in facing military threats. Thirdly, the supporting components consist of various elements that can be used to enhance the strength and capabilities of both the main and reserve components such as defense industry, logistic support, and telecommunication companies. The newly enacted Law No. 34 of 2004 encourages military involvement in operations other than war (OOTW) (Operasi Militer Selain Perang, OMSP). These operations include providing humanitarian aid to natural disaster victims, assisting the national police in combating terrorism, and helping manage refugees. This law also grants significant power to both the president and parliament, as they are authorized to provide legal approval for the military to engage in non-militaristic activities. The development of these new laws delivered a significant blow to Indonesia's democratization process after 33 years under Soeharto's militaristic regime. In fact, the civilian government in power when these legal products were enacted tended to disregard the aspirations and criticisms from civil society organizations.

Over the last decade, during the civilian leadership of Joko Widodo, civil-military relations in Indonesia have experienced significant turbulence due to various phenomena. There have been many instances where civilian control was shifted to the military in matters not entirely related to militaristic affairs. Some of these include the involvement of retired TNI/Police personnel in partisan politics and political campaigns, the filling of public positions by retired TNI/Police personnel, the rise of civilian militarism, and military involvement in food security programs. According to Gunawan (2024), the greatest concern regarding the increasing influence of the military over civilian affairs is triggered by the stance and legitimacy provided by Joko Widodo's administration, rather than being solely driven by factions within the Indonesian military itself. His administration appointed retired high ranked military official such as Prabowo Subianto, Luhut B. Panjaitan, Moeldoko and Fahrul Razi (Kosandi, 2020). Beyond the increase in Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) activities, one of the most pivotal moments was the debate surrounding the 2023 revision of the Military Law. This

draft law once again touched upon the involvement of active military personnel holding civilian positions in non-defense institutions. This issue is also attributed to the military's poor internal management of its senior officers' career progression system, leading to limited promotion opportunities that then extend into civilian institutions.

When investigating the military's involvement in Indonesia's food estate program from 2020 to 2024 for this research topic means that its timeframe is intrinsically linked to the military's engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. According to Honna (Honna, 2023), participation Indonesia armed forces in non-military areas such as health or food security issues potentially have a negative impact on democracy environment especially when soldier ordered for domestic policing. Prior studies concerning military engagement in the civilian or non-military domain typically converge on two broad perspectives: professional commitment and the propensity toward authoritarianism. Regarding the Indonesian military's involvement in handling the COVID-19 pandemic, Honna offers a distinct answer beyond those two perspectives. Honna (2023) argues TNI works for non-military roles are motivated by inter-service rivalry and the quest for organizational stability.

Previous literature on civil-military relations in Indonesia doesn't adequately portray the Indonesian military as a player within the capitalist economic system. Additionally, most prior research hasn't fully acknowledged that the military always maximizes its influence on achieving economic profit. Since the New Order era, Robinson has already pointed out how the military involves itself in capitalist economic settings. Hakim (2025) added even after new order era that the military, either individually or institutionally, still finds ways to be involved in economic activities.

Over the last decade, the Joko Widodo administration initially positioned itself as a representative of civil society, having democratically won the presidency in both the 2014 and 2019 general elections. However, since 2014, Joko Widodo has continuously legitimized the military's accumulation of wealth through the expansion of its territorial command structure, thereby allowing access to resources, whether legally or illegally (2017). During his leadership, Joko Widodo authorized the military to broaden its territorial structure by establishing two new regional military commands (Kodam), one of which is in West Papua (Chauvel, 2019). The military justified this addition to counter the Papuan freedom movement, despite the

group's presence in West Papua not being particularly significant. Therefore, the expansion of territorial commands, especially in West Papua, is closely linked to the military's ongoing economic interests.

The formation of Indonesian civil-military relations during its democratic shift was a political struggle where the interactions of three sectors between military, civilian, and civil society elites established the extent of the military's political presence. Currently, academic opinion is split regarding the military's status. One school of thought asserts that Indonesian military reform is either complete or actively achieving professionalization. The opposing view maintains that the military strategically resists full reform, using informal power plays to influence security policy and negotiating acceptable limits to maintain its political clout.

Methods

This research adopts a qualitative method for political science research which aims to explain “why” questions about a set of contemporary events. Qualitative research is purposely to describe a set of nonstatistical, or non-numeric data and processes used to gather data about social phenomena (McNabb, 2020). Qualitative research does not use data just for simple explanations or description rather than want to create subjective understanding also for critical analysis as well. Qualitative research methods usually use an inductive approach with a theory-generating approach. Qualitative research methods seek to understand social phenomena and tend to avoid generalization to other phenomena. Qualitative research methods in terms of strategies can be grouped into three forms. These are explanatory research, interpretive research, and critical research. In this research, explanatory research is chosen because it is used to collect fundamental information, contributing factors, and influence a social phenomenon that might have various results.

This explanatory research design uses case study methods which require collection of data from multiple sources based on development of theoretical framework either as theory testing or/and theory building to use for analysis. The case study methods process involves several phases starting from formulating good research questions, interpreting answers to these questions, building a theoretical framework, selecting cases, applying theoretical ideas to cases through document analysis, interviews and field observations. Then the final part is drawing and analyzing conclusions. This research will use secondary data. The secondary

data will be collected through literature studies including books, reports, journals, magazines, newspapers, and focus group discussion. The literature studies will focus on civil-military relations and democratization in Indonesia. Some works also concerning the Indonesia human rights aspect especially in Papua. This research Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) begin with selected subject-matter experts. Unlike individual interviews, the FGD format encourages interactive dialogue between civil-military specialists and expert on Papua.

Findings and Discussion

Historical Institutionalism

The theoretical approach used in this research employs new (Peters, 2019). This approach is generally categorized as a new approach within the discipline of political science. New institutionalism also pays attention to aspects of individual behavior, ideas, conflict, and even economic and political structures.

Proponents of the new institutionalism generally hold the view that studying institutions is crucial because institutions are one of the factors that influence the emergence of an event, policy, or major change in political phenomena.

Hall and Taylor (1996) divide this new institutionalist approach into three types: historical institutionalism, rational choice of institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism. The historical institutionalism approach is considered unique because it incorporates aspects of ideas, individual behavior, and structural influence within political interactions, involving institutions as a factor that can influence a political phenomenon.

In contrast to Rational Choice Institutionalism, which emphasizes the rational choices of actors, or Sociological Institutionalism, which focuses on culture and norms, historical institutionalism places time and history as key variables. Historical institutionalism defines an institution broadly, encompassing both formal rules (constitutions, laws) and informal norms/procedures (political customs, organizational culture) that constrain and direct the actions of actors.

Regarding the time period, Historical Institutionalism recognizes the Critical Juncture as a relatively brief period of time where the level of uncertainty is very high, and political actors

have greater-than-usual freedom to make fundamental institutional choices. This moment is often triggered by a crisis, revolution, war, or regime collapse. After institutions are established during a Critical Juncture, the mechanism of Path Dependence begins to operate, which explains why those institutions endure overtime. One of the main components of Historical Institutionalism is Path Dependence, which means that decisions or institutional formations made in the past will create a self-reinforcing developmental path that is difficult to change in the future due to the high cost of switching paths.

Critical Juncture Militer Indonesia

Since its inception, the military has held a unique position within the state due to its instrumental role in securing Indonesia's independence from the Dutch. The Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) was officially established on October 5, 1945, to defend the independence of the Republic, which had been proclaimed on August 17, 1945, two days after Japan surrendered to the Allies.

The origins of the Indonesian military stem from the pro-independence militia formations organized by Indonesian nationalists following the Japanese surrender in 1945. A key figure in the nascent Indonesian military was the charismatic and legendary General Sudirman. Most officers, including Sudirman and Suharto, came from the PETA (*Pasukan Sukarela Tentara Pembela Tanah Air* - Volunteer Army of Defenders of the Homeland), which was a territorial army formed by Japan during the occupation. Some of these officers had also previously received military training in the KNIL (*Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indische Leger* - Royal Netherlands East Indies Army). Ethnically, the pro-independence militia formations were dominated by the Javanese ethnic group and were predominantly Muslim. Following Indonesia's independence in 1945, these military formations became the main pillar in fighting external threats, such as the Dutch military aggression, and simultaneously internal threats, such as the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) rebellion in Madiun in 1948.

In 1958, a high-ranking Indonesian military official, Army Chief of Staff General A.H. Nasution, introduced the concept of the Middle Way (*Jalan Tengah*), which became the initial foundation for the understanding of the military's Dwifungsi (Dual Function). Nasution argued that the military or armed forces should neither be merely a tool of civil society, as in

Western countries, nor a military junta regime dominating the state, but rather a people's force working alongside other civilian forces.

After Suharto and the military took power in 1966, *Dwifungsi* became the official policy. Starting in 1966, the New Order (*Orde Baru*) era began, and the government enacted a series of laws to define the military's position and role in civilian, governmental, and national affairs. The military was granted control over representation in parliament, and both active and retired military officers could serve in positions within the cabinet, civil administration, and state-owned enterprises. Under *Dwifungsi*, the military was not only permitted but required to take an active part in politics to ensure political stability and central control. The Reform movement of 1998 sought to end this domination by returning the military to its core duties. The *Dwifungsi* doctrine was abolished, and the defense institution was separated into the National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Indonesian National Police (Polri). The TNI was assigned to defense and state security affairs, while the police were given authority over public order and safety. However, these changes did not automatically resolve all underlying issues.

One legacy of the New Order era's militarization that remains to this day is the territorial command doctrine (*Komando Teritorial, Koter*), represented by the existence of 12 Military Area Commands (*Komando Daerah Militer - Kodam*) (Supriatma, 2013). The *Kodam* was initially developed primarily to confront internal threats at the provincial level from communist and separatist rebellions and later became a state tool for suppressing regional unrest. During the New Order regime, the *Kodam* were used to maintain Suharto's power and monitor the activities of religious organizations, student organizations, labor unions, and other non-governmental organizations that could potentially become sources of anti-regime resistance.

Additionally, the *Kodam* were expected to integrate with the local civilian population in the same region as the *Kodam* headquarters. However, in areas like Aceh and Papua, this approach ironically made the situation more unstable. It is not uncommon for *Kodam* in various regions across Indonesia to take a position opposed to civil society during agrarian conflicts between civilians and the state or large corporations, such as the case involving the *Kodam Bukit Barisan*.

The political problems in Papua became increasingly complex when, in 2016, the Indonesian government decided to establish the Kasuari Military Regional Command (Kodam Kasuari). According to Victor Yeimo in a WALHI report, the deployment of non-organic TNI personnel to Papua in the last three years totaled 21,000, and this data has not yet been accumulated with TNI and Police personnel who were already stationed in Papua before 2019. According to Supriatma in Aidulsyah (2026) adds that the ratio of the population in Papua to security personnel is 97:1. Therefore, one police officer or soldier is equivalent to 97 Papuan citizens. In contrast, the national ratio is 296:1. Consequently, Papua has become the region with the highest level of remilitarization in Indonesia.

Militarization of the Food Sector in Papua Through MIFEE 2010-2013

The national food estate development program is not the first major program focused on strengthening food security. Previously, during the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) era, the government launched the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) program, announced in 2010, which aimed to cover up to one million hectares of land in Merauke, West Papua (currently South Papua) (Ginting & Pye, 2013) .

Through the MIFEE program, the Indonesian government targeted a food production output by 2020 of 1.95 million tons of rice, 2.02 million tons of corn, and 167,000 tons of soybeans. MIFEE was also supported by legal measures based on government regulations, including Presidential Decree (Kepres) No. 05/2007 concerning the Acceleration of Development in Papua and West Papua, Government Regulation (PP) No. 39/2009 regarding Special Economic Zones which designated Papua as one of the strategic locations for national development, and PP No. 18/2010 concerning Food Agriculture. Through MIFEE, the Indonesian government invited various private companies, both domestic and foreign, to invest capital in sectors related to energy and food. The presence of the MIFEE program on Papuan land, particularly Merauke, threatened the cultural food values of the indigenous Papuan people who consume Sago as their staple food.

MIFEE posed a serious threat to the local community (McDonnell, 2021). This was because indigenous communities received substantially lower compensation payments for the relinquishment of inherited land rights that were part of their cultural heritage. All these

problems were further complicated by land acquisition processes that were non-transparent, full of intimidation, and security threats due to the presence of the military. MIFEE is an example of the global phenomenon of land grabbing. Whether carried out by state actors, domestic companies, or international companies, they framed Merauke as seemingly empty land that could be maximized as a production site for fuel and food. However, the MIFEE project, along with other *Land Grabbing* phenomena, also demonstrates the involvement of the military in the existing business-political relations in Indonesia, particularly in Papua. The *Land Grabbing* phenomenon within the large MIFEE project shielded itself behind Law No. 21/2001 concerning Special Autonomy (*Otonomi Khusus - OTSUS*) for the provinces in Papua (Ito et al., 2014).

This is especially true when regional governments, such as the one in Merauke, contributed to the marginalization of local indigenous communities by granting location permits for concessions to business groups investing in MIFEE. This became highly problematic because these concession permits were generally issued without involving the consent of the local indigenous communities, leading to the loss of their communal customary land rights (Dewi, 2016). The recognition of customary land granted by the Indonesian government, along with regulations related to the conversion of communal customary land into state ownership, ironically became a door to facilitate business groups in gaining economic access to participate in the large MIFEE project. Furthermore, and most importantly, MIFEE also utilized military apparatus with the goal of maintaining regional stability against any potential disruption to the smooth running of the project. The MIFEE phenomenon reaffirms the argument that the Indonesian government, from the New Order era up to the Reform era, has continuously maximized the function of the military in Papua as a securitization actor under the pretext of building security stability to ensure flexibility for business groups to invest their capital on Papuan land.

Militarization of the Food Sector in Papua Through Food Estate 2020-2024

When the large-scale MIFEE project during the SBY administration failed to achieve its targeted food production, the government of Joko Widodo (2014-2024) began preparing a similar program but focused specifically on the issue of food through the Food Estate program. The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, which raised potential concerns regarding

food security, became one of the initial rationales for formulating the Food Estate policy. This large-scale Food Estate project during the Joko Widodo administration was implemented in Central Kalimantan and Papua. Initially, President Joko Widodo involved the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) to help map out strategic areas deemed suitable for the Food Estate program. However, later the Ministry of Defense, under Minister Prabowo Subianto, was also involved in developing the Food Estate program, using the rationale that food security is an integral part of building national resilience.

Since the end of 2020, the Military has been involved in clearing forests in Central Kalimantan province with the aim of establishing a 640-hectare cassava plantation (Walhi, 2021). This situation became more complex when the location of the cassava plantation developed by the military was outside the area recommended by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK). This moment provides justification that the Ministry of Defense (Kemhan) and the military were opportunistic in maximizing their role to be involved in the Food Estate program. The military, through the BCLSN (an entity operating under Kemhan), took on a role by sending its officials to meet with various regional heads in the context of land-use conversion for inclusion in the Food Estate program (Pusaka, 2021b).

Specifically in Papua, Kemhan selected Merauke as one of the Food Estate project areas in 2021, covering an area of 179,211 hectares (Pusaka, 2021a). The land was divided into two large blocks: the western part in Merauke Regency and the eastern part adjacent to the border of Papua New Guinea. The Merauke area was projected for cassava cultivation. This move by Kemhan became increasingly problematic because the Merauke area contains indigenous communities who had previously successfully resisted a sugarcane plantation project in 2013 under the MIFEE program. Furthermore, there are doubts that Kemhan had obtained the necessary consent for land transfer from the local indigenous community groups.

Trapped in Dwi Fungsi as Path Dependence

In the last decade of the Joko Widodo administration, civil-military relations have deteriorated, marked by various phenomena associated with the decline in democratic quality and the military's increasing involvement in purely civilian affairs. This trend is demonstrated, in part, by the Joko Widodo government allowing the House of

Representatives (DPR) to proceed with the revision of the law governing the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) in May 2024. During its 18th Plenary Session of the 2023–2024 Sitting Period, the DPR approved the Draft Law on Amendments to Law Number 34 of 2004 concerning the TNI to become a DPR initiative bill (Haripin, 2025). The planned revision has, in fact, been met with widespread rejection from various civil society groups, given that its substance does not aim to strengthen the TNI reform agenda but rather to further weaken it. The revision of the TNI Law promotes an expansion of the military's role beyond its authorized boundaries as an instrument of state defense. This expansion fundamentally contradicts the 1998 TNI reform mandate, which stipulated that the TNI must be regulated to comply with the values of a democratic state, the rule of law, and the guarantee of human rights.

The phenomenon of military involvement in civilian affairs during the Joko Widodo administration can be understood as a form of path dependence related to the failure or incompleteness of full military reform after the New Order era. This can be explained through several arguments. Firstly, through the mechanism of Path Dependence, the Indonesian Military maintains the territorial command system in various regions, especially Papua, with the addition of a Military Regional Command (Kodam) in the Papua region granting a comparative advantage in terms of assumed flexibility and significant power. The Joko Widodo administration views this military advantage as a guarantor and driver for the secure flow of logistics distribution and as a force multiplier for accelerating various large-scale state projects shielded under the name of National Strategic Projects (Proyek Strategis Nasional, PSN) (Gunawan, 2024).

Secondly, as a president from a civilian background, Joko Widodo has not demonstrably fulfilled the post-New Order military reform mandate, particularly concerning the military justice system, which continues to reinforce military impunity after 1998. Any steps taken by the Indonesian government to involve the Military in the civilian sphere carry a high potential for Human Rights (HAM) violations because the Military feels secured by its immunity from civilian jurisdiction. This further creates the stigma that the military possesses power that cannot be shaken except by the President himself. Therefore, the Joko Widodo administration actually utilizes this immunity so that the military not only acts as a bodyguard for National

Strategic Projects but also fulfills the need for a non-political party-political alliance (Haripin et al., 2025).

Thirdly, following the collapse of the New Order, civilian governments, such as the Joko Widodo administration, still perceive Papua as a region whose development can only be driven by military sector mobilization, thus showing virtually no change from the previous New Order era (Sebastian et al., 2018). Consequently, the incomplete military reform means the state continues to maximize military participation in Papua, despite the potential for increasingly massive HAM violations. The Indonesian government views military involvement as the main key to accelerating National Strategic Projects in Papua, which requires the involvement of local governments and indigenous tribal communities. In practice, the increasingly massive military presence in Papua encourages the involvement of local government as justification for seizing land rights from indigenous Papuan communities. This creates a situation where friction and conflict between the military and the indigenous Papuan communities serve as a justification for the further deployment of military personnel.

In line with the historical institutionalism approach, path dependence related to the Indonesian Military's intervention in civilian sectors, particularly the food sector has been normalized through critical junctures spanning from the Old Order, New Order, and even up to the current Reform era (*Reformasi*). Although the Reform era redesigned the pattern of civil-military relations in Indonesia, there are certain limitations and aspects that have become part of this path dependence, which subsequently encounters resistance to change, especially in the Papua region. The appointment and involvement of the Military in the Food Estate program in Papua serves as a strong finding within this path dependence. Due to the failure to reform the security sector, military intervention persists in various forms and encourages further militarization, such as stimulating the presence of military units in rural Papua.

Merauke as Starting Point (Again)

The eastern part of Merauke city directly borders the country of Papua New Guinea. This location serves as the Indonesian government's justification for making Merauke the main site for deploying a large number of military troops, primarily under the pretext of protecting Indonesia's eastern border. Consequently, the people of Merauke have experienced

continuous intimidation for decades due to the presence of the military along the border. Not only does this military presence cause fear among the Merauke community through intimidation, but various forms of discrimination, sexual harassment, and the seizure of access to food sources also occur because of the massive escalation of military deployment in the Merauke area.

Conclusion

This research set out to analyze the factors and motivations behind the Joko Widodo administration's choice to appoint Kemhan and TNI as the main executor of the Food Estate program in Papua, particularly in the pilot project location of Merauke. By applying the lens of Historical Institutionalism, specifically focusing on the mechanism of Path Dependence, the study confirms that this policy decision is not an isolated event but rather a symptom of deeper, unresolved structural issues stemming from the 1998 Critical Juncture. The findings demonstrate that the Indonesian government is currently Trapped in Dwi Fungsi as Path Dependence, utilizing the military's institutional resources for civilian developmental ends. In essence, the Food Estate program in Papua highlights that the quality of civilian control in Indonesia remains volatile and dependent on the institutional choices of the executive. The Joko Widodo administration, by prioritizing short-term developmental and political stability over the long-term consolidation of democratic norms and institutional reform, actively chose the path dependence set by the unreformed military structures. This not only contradicts the 1998 reform mandate but also poses a profound threat to the continuity of democracy by normalizing the military's pervasive role in civilian life.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Kemenristekdikti for the funding support for this research through the Kemenristekdikti regular fundamental research grant scheme for the year 2025.

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