

The Draft Law on the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Dynamics of Civil-Military Relations: Implications for Democracy and Civilian Supremacy in Indonesia

Hamzah Jamaludin¹, Nurul Fadhilah²

¹Widyapuri Mandiri College of Social and Political Sciences, Indonesia.

²Sriwijaya University, Indonesia.

E-mail: hamzahjams29@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research examines the dynamics of civil-military relations in post-Reform Indonesia, with a focus on the latest Draft Law (RUU) on TNI, which has the potential to threaten the principle of civilian supremacy and expand the role of the military in the civilian sphere. Through a qualitative approach and document study method, this research analyzes various provisions in the TNI Bill and compares them with similar regulations in countries that have undergone civil-military relations reform, such as Turkey, Chile and Thailand. The results show that although the bill aims to strengthen the TNI in the face of national threats, some provisions that expand the role of the military risk weakening civilian control and opening up opportunities for the militarization of politics. Therefore, this study recommends strengthening civilian oversight through independent institutions, updating military accountability mechanisms, and revising the TNI Bill to ensure the TNI remains focused on defense functions. The findings contribute to the discourse on civil-military relations in Indonesia and offer a new perspective on the importance of maintaining civilian supremacy in the democratization process.

Keywords: Draft TNI Law; Civil-Military; Democracy; Civil Supremacy

1. Introduction

Civil-military relations in Indonesia have experienced a long and dynamic journey, with the most decisive phase occurring during the New Order era under the leadership of President Soeharto. (Haripin, 2022). During this period, the military, which was part of the ABRI (Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia) institution, implemented the concept of "dual function", namely playing a dual role in the field of defense and security as well as government politics. (Apandi et al., 2025). Through this dual function, ABRI is not only tasked with maintaining state security, but is also active in filling civil positions in the bureaucracy, legislature, and regional government, which makes the military a dominant political force. (Djuyandi, 2023). This practice led to the subordination of civilian power to the military and formed an authoritarian political culture. After the fall of the New Order in 1998, the wave of reforms pushed for a major agenda to reform the security sector. The reforms targeted two main things: first, the separation of the roles of the military and the police (which were previously part of ABRI) (Firdausi & Djuyandi, 2024), and second, depoliticization of the TNI to refocus as a pure state defense institution. This effort is marked by several important steps, such as the revocation of the military's political rights, the elimination of the ABRI faction in parliament, and the restructuring of the TNI command structure to be subject to civilian authority.



As an integral part of the democratization process, the principle of civilian supremacy, namely the supremacy of civilian power over the military, has become a new norm that is fought for. This principle emphasizes that in a democratic country, the military must be under the full control of democratic civilian institutions such as the president, parliament, and related ministries.(Syahrul & Goncing, 2020). The emergence of this principle is not just a structural change, but also a change in political culture, which places accountability, transparency, and respect for civil rights as the main foundation of the relationship between military and civilian power. Thus, the shift from military dominance to civilian supremacy is an important milestone in building a more mature and sustainable Indonesian democracy.

Although various reforms have been carried out, the dynamics of civil-military relations in Indonesia continue to face challenges, especially with the emergence of the latest TNI Bill (RUU TNI).(Sulaiman, 2024). This bill was submitted under the pretext of strengthening the TNI's position in facing multidimensional threats to national security. However, amidst efforts to consolidate democracy and strengthen civilian supremacy, a number of provisions in the bill have actually raised concerns that there will be a decline in security sector reform. Several controversial points that have sparked public debate include the expansion of the TNI's role beyond defense functions, such as active involvement in handling non-military threats, national development, and domestic security without strict control from civilian authorities.(Susmoro & Siagian, 2022). In addition, this bill also opens up greater opportunities for the TNI to occupy strategic civilian positions without going through a transparent accountability mechanism.(Ng & Kurniawan, 2024). It is feared that these provisions could again blur the boundaries between the civil and military spheres, revive the shadow of past dual-function practices, and weaken the principle of civilian supremacy that has been painstakingly built since the 1998 Reformation.

The implications of the TNI Bill on the dynamics of civil-military relations in the era of democracy are very significant and cannot be ignored.(Gunawan, 2022). If the provisions that expand the military's role into the civilian realm are passed without strict supervision, this has the potential to weaken the principle of civilian supremacy which is a main pillar of post-Reformasi democracy. The involvement of the TNI in non-defense functions risks creating overlapping authorities.(Harefa et al., 2025), blurring the civil-military boundaries, and reducing accountability to state power. Furthermore, the return of the military to civil spaces without transparent control mechanisms can open up opportunities for militarism in government.(Pansters & Serrano, 2024)and erodes the stability of democracy that has been painstakingly built. In this context, the TNI's overly dominant power outside the defense framework has the potential to threaten the principle of the rule of law, namely the supremacy of law above all power. Therefore, the existence of the TNI Bill is not just an issue of defense regulation, but rather a critical point that determines the future direction of civil-military relations in Indonesia: whether to remain on the path of democratization with strong civilian control, or to regress to a semi-authoritarian relationship model with the military as the main political actor.

Given the magnitude of the implications, it is very important to critically evaluate the TNI Bill from the perspective of democracy and the principle of civil supremacy. This evaluation is necessary so that the resulting regulation not only strengthens national resilience, but also maintains the basic principle of a democratic state, namely that military power must always be under legitimate civil authority. The balance between the needs of national defense and civil control over the military is a crucial aspect that must not be ignored, considering past history where military domination over civil space has actually hampered the development of democracy. Through a critical analysis of the changes offered in this bill, the public and policymakers can assess whether the regulation is directed towards strengthening democracy or, conversely, opening up a gap for the return of authoritarian practices. Thus, the discourse

on the TNI Bill is not only about the future of the TNI as an institution, but also about the future direction of Indonesian democracy as a whole.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a documentary research method. The primary data were obtained from the analysis of various official documents, such as the latest TNI Draft Law (RUU), laws and regulations related to the defense sector and civil-military relations, and post-1998 security reform policy documents. In addition, this study also uses secondary sources in the form of academic studies, journal articles, reports from non-governmental organizations, media coverage, and opinions of relevant experts.

The data analysis technique used is content analysis with a focus on identifying key issues related to the principles of democracy, civilian supremacy, and the role of the military in a democratic state. This analysis is carried out through stages of careful reading, categorizing findings based on main themes (such as expanding the role of the military, civilian oversight, and potential implications for democracy), and drawing critical conclusions on the potential impact of the TNI Bill on the future of civil-military relations in Indonesia. To increase validity, this study compares various sources to obtain a balanced and in-depth perspective.

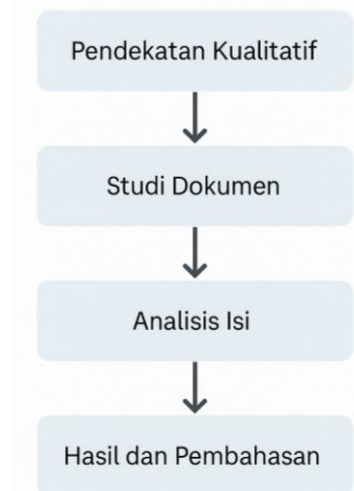


Figure 1.Research Flow

3. Results and Discussion

Content Analysis of the TNI Bill

The TNI bill currently under discussion includes a number of significant changes that could potentially impact civil-military relations in Indonesia, particularly in terms of expanding the military's role beyond traditional defense functions. One of the main proposed changes is increasing the TNI's involvement in domestic security functions.(Kurniawan et al., 2024), which was previously more of a police domain, as well as active participation in national development. Within this framework, the TNI can be involved in the management of natural resources, infrastructure, and large projects related to national resilience. This step reflects the development of a broader military role beyond defense duties, creating potential conflict with civilian sectors that should dominate domestic policy management.

On the other hand, the TNI Bill also highlights the strengthening of civilian control over the TNI, although this appears to be limited to a number of specific provisions. Although this law seeks to ensure that the TNI remains under the supervision of civilian institutions, in reality, such control is still considered inadequate to ensure full transparency and accountability. The

lack of firmness in this oversight mechanism leads to the potential for an uncontrolled strengthening of the military's position, where the TNI's role in public policy and politics could be increasingly integrated without strict control from legitimate civilian institutions. The most prominent conflict in this bill is the tension between the principle of civilian supremacy that has been built since the 1998 Reformation (Lubis & Zamharir, 2024) with the policies proposed by the bill. Civilian supremacy demands a clear separation between military and civilian political affairs, and an emphasis on accountability overseen by transparent civilian institutions. However, with the expansion of the military's role in a wider area including in handling non-military threats, there is a shift that has the potential to undermine this principle (Fanani et al., 2024). The ambiguity in setting the boundaries of the TNI's role outside of defense functions risks blurring the lines between civilian and military power, which could threaten the balance of Indonesian democracy and exacerbate tensions between civilian authority and military power.

Potential Regression in Security Reform

The TNI bill currently being discussed has the potential to represent a step backward in the security sector reforms that have been underway since post-1998. The reforms aim to separate the military from the political sphere (Rahmawati, 2024) and ensure that the TNI refocuses on the function of national defense, with strict civilian control. However, with the expansion of the military's role proposed in this bill, especially in terms of the TNI's involvement in domestic security and national development, there are concerns that this step could be reversed, leading to a regression in the reform process that has been achieved. When the TNI begins to be involved in functions that were previously the domain of civilians, such as monitoring non-military threats, there is the potential for a decline in the quality of civilian control that has previously been fought for.

The expansion of the TNI's role has the potential to have a further impact, namely leading to the militarization of Indonesian politics. The involvement of the TNI in broader aspects of civilian life, such as infrastructure development and natural resource management, opens up space for the military to increasingly position itself as a major political actor. The TNI's involvement in these activities could be a factor that strengthens its political position, even without clear political legitimacy. If this military role is not monitored transparently and effectively, then Indonesia is at risk of entering a path where politics is controlled by military power (Laksmana, 2021), blurring the lines between military and civilian politics, and disproportionately influencing public policy.

Furthermore, policies that lead to the expansion of the TNI's role could trigger a return to an authoritarian government model. If the military's role in politics and government increases, without a strict oversight mechanism, there is a risk of consolidation of power in the hands of the military which could reduce space for civilian opposition (Croissant & Haynes, 2023). In the long term, this could threaten the stability of democracy that has been built after the 1998 Reformation, by returning to more centralized and authoritarian patterns of government. A government dominated by the military has the potential to undermine democratic principles such as freedom of speech, accountability, and transparency, as well as hinder the development of strong and independent civil institutions.

Comparison with Other Countries

Comparisons with countries that have undergone civil-military relations reform, such as Turkey, Chile, and Thailand, provide important perspective in assessing the potential implications of the TNI Bill for civil-military relations in Indonesia. All three countries have long histories of military intervention in politics, but through various stages of reform, they

have attempted to limit the military's role in politics and strengthen civilian control over the security sector.

In Turkey, for example, although the military has long been a dominant force in politics, especially since the era of the secular state led by the army, reforms undertaken in the early 21st century have succeeded in placing the military under tighter civilian control. One significant step was the reduction of the military's authority in political and legal decisions, and the dissolution of the National Security Council that had previously given the military veto power on important policies. However, in recent years, Turkey has experienced a setback in terms of democracy with the consolidation of power in the hands of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has also involved the military in domestic politics.(Evrensel, 2024), reminiscent of the situation before the reforms. This shows that despite progress in reducing the military's influence, the risk of regression remains if civilian oversight is not strengthened.

In Chile, civil-military relations reform began after the end of the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship. In the early post-dictatorship years, Chile succeeded in upholding the principles of civilian supremacy by changing the structure of the military.(Jenne & Martinez, 2022), such as limiting the role of the military in politics, and demanding greater accountability through laws regulating the oversight of military institutions. However, these changes did not completely eliminate the influence of the military in political life. Nevertheless, Chile is still considered an example of success in integrating democratic principles with more transparent management of civil-military relations.

Thailand, on the other hand, exhibits a more complex dynamic with frequent military involvement in politics, although the country has made some reforms. In 1997, Thailand's constitution underwent major changes that more clearly separated the roles of the military and politics.(Chambers, 2022). However, tensions between the military and the civilian government continue, with several military interventions in the form of coups or takeovers. Thailand's reforms show that despite progress in limiting the role of the military, political stability and civilian oversight still face serious challenges, especially when the military feels its position is threatened.

From this comparison, Indonesia can learn that while a clear reform process can reduce the military's influence in politics, the main challenge lies in strengthening transparent and effective civilian control mechanisms. Although these countries, including Indonesia, have made significant reforms, there is potential for the military's influence to re-emerge if civilian control is weak or neglected. The novelty of this analysis is that while many studies focus on the achievements of reform, few have explored in depth how imbalances in civilian oversight of the military can trigger a return to authoritarian practices, as seen in some of these countries. Indonesia, observing these examples, needs to be careful not to fall into the same trap, where a greater military role in civilian affairs can undermine democratic progress and threaten fragile political stability.

Table 1. Comparison of Civil-Military Relations Reform in Indonesia with Other Countries

Aspect	Türkiye	Chile	Thailand	Indonesia
Historical Context	The military has been dominant since the secular era, playing an active role in politics until the early 21st century.	Military dictator Augusto Pinochet controlled politics, reforms began after 1990.	Despite several military coups, the military had great influence until the 1990s.	The military was dominant during the New Order era, reforms began post-1998.

Civil-Military Relations Reform	Reforms began in the early 2000s to place the military under civilian control.	Post-dictatorship reforms, limiting the role of the military in politics, stronger civilian oversight.	Reforms began in 1997 with a new constitution, although the military remained influential.	Post-New Order reforms focused on separating the roles of the military and civilian control.
The Role of the Military in Politics	The military reduced its role in politics after 2000, but President Erdoğan's new consolidation of power represents a step back.	The military was completely excluded from post-Pinochet politics, although political influence remained in some sectors.	The military is directly involved in politics through coups and interventions, despite restrictions in the 1997 constitution.	The TNI has had a reduced role in politics since 1998, although the TNI Bill has the potential to expand the military's role in politics.
Civilian Control of the Military	Civilian control was strengthened in the 2000s, but oversight was again undermined by the increasing powers of the President.	Civilian oversight of the military is strong with post-dictatorship policies of transparency and accountability.	Civilian oversight is weak, and although the 1997 constitution reduced the role of the military, coups still occur.	Civilian oversight was strengthened post-1998, but the TNI bill shows the potential for weakening civilian control.
The Risk of Militarization of Politics	There is the potential for political militarization with power returning to the president.	The militarization of politics is relatively controlled although there is a role for the military in certain sectors.	The high potential for political militarization, especially with the occurrence of several coups.	The potential for political militarization exists with the expansion of the TNI's role in civil and development affairs.
Lessons for Indonesia	Strengthening civilian control is essential to prevent regression to a military model of government.	Civil-military reforms are successful, despite challenges, strong civilian control is key.	Shallow reforms and weak oversight could lead to a return to militarism.	Indonesia must strengthen civilian oversight of the military to prevent a return to authoritarian practices.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis that has been done, to strengthen civilian supervision of the military, there are several policy recommendations that must be considered. First, ensuring that the TNI remains within the defense framework and is not involved in politics.(Tetelepta et al., 2025)is a fundamental step to maintain the stability of Indonesian democracy. Therefore, policies that limit the involvement of the TNI in civilian affairs, especially in matters of domestic security and national development, must be strictly enforced. To that end, there needs to be clearer legal provisions that distinguish between the role of the military in defense functions and other civilian duties. In the context of the TNI Bill, there should be a clause that emphasizes that the TNI will only be involved in defense matters and not in managing domestic policies or national development which are the responsibility of the civilian government. Strengthening the role of civilian oversight bodies, such as the Military Oversight Commission, which is equipped with the authority to audit military policies and operations, can be an important mechanism to ensure that the military remains within legitimate limits.

Second, to avoid the potential for a return to an authoritarian system, the TNI Bill needs to be revised by adding a stricter and more transparent oversight mechanism for all aspects that allow the military to be involved in civilian affairs. One crucial change is to clarify and strengthen the regulation on the position of the military in the government structure, avoiding the granting of strategic civilian positions to military officers without a clear and open

accountability process. For example, every civilian position involving the TNI must go through an open selection mechanism and obtain approval from the legislative body, and be supervised by an independent supervisory body. Thus, the potential for military influence in government can be minimized, and the principle of civilian supremacy can be maintained.

Third, to update the military oversight and accountability mechanism to be more transparent, there needs to be strengthening of public and institutional accountability towards the TNI. This can be done by establishing a military oversight institution that is truly independent from political pressure, which is not only limited to policy evaluation, but is also responsible for monitoring the use of the budget and other military activities. In addition, it is important to ensure that all military activities, including those related to overseas operations and countering non-military threats, are clearly reported to the public through annual reports that can be accessed and evaluated by civil society. The existence of this institution must be equipped with sufficient legal powers to conduct audits and provide recommendations that can influence policy. This reform will increase transparency and reduce the potential for abuse of power by the military, as well as ensure that the TNI remains under firm civilian control.

The emphasis on strengthening civilian control in a more structured and transparent manner, not only through policy revisions but also by fostering a culture of accountability among civilian institutions tasked with overseeing the TNI. This study makes a new contribution by highlighting the importance of active civil society involvement in military oversight, which is often overlooked in previous policies, and emphasizes that civilian supremacy is not only manifested in the separation of military and civilian duties, but also in a clear and accountable oversight system.

4. Conclusion

Civil-military relations reforms in Indonesia since the New Order era have resulted in significant changes, but the proposed TNI Bill has the potential to weaken the principle of civilian supremacy and expand the role of the military in politics. Comparative analysis with countries such as Turkey, Chile, and Thailand shows the importance of strong civilian control to prevent the return of military dominance. Policy recommendations include ensuring the TNI remains focused on its defense role, avoiding military involvement in politics, and strengthening civilian oversight with independent institutions and transparent mechanisms. This study highlights the need to strengthen military accountability so that the principle of civilian supremacy is maintained, for the sake of the sustainability of Indonesian democracy.

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