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*ORIGINAL ARTICLE*

# Civic Space Compression, Watchdog Coalitions, and Subnational Democratic Resilience Against Executive Aggrandizement in Southeast Asia: A Multi-Tier Mixed-Methods Analysis

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Autocratization runs through executive aggrandizement and civic space compression rather than coups. Whether watchdogs can disrupt backsliding, and whether subnational democracy sustains accountability, remains open.

**Objective:** To examine how civic space compression, watchdog coalitions, judicial autonomy, and subnational audits relate to democratic resilience in Southeast Asia.

**Methods:** A four-tier design used four public datasets (210,781 records) and 24 author-coded episodes: Callaway–Sant'Anna staggered difference-in-differences (119 polities); two-way fixed-effects (TWFE) models of governance indicators (195 states); TWFE, AIPW, and quantile models for Indonesian districts; and fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) of the episodes.

**Results:** Civic space compression was followed by a −5.64-point change in Liberal Democracy ($p = 7.14 \times 10^{-05}$) and −6.26 in Electoral Democracy ($p = 3.14 \times 10^{-05}$). At t+5 the estimate was −5.84 ($p = 0.016$) with weak and −1.82 ($p = 0.755$) with strong baseline watchdog–judicial shields; the groups were not compared. Voice and Accountability was associated with Control of Corruption (+0.372) and Rule of Law (+0.463). After 2015, +1 SD civic-fiscal capacity was associated with more clean audit opinions (+8.86 pp), less patronage spending (−1.78 pp), and more capital spending (+3.02 pp); sustained clean audits were associated with lower poverty (−3.76 pp). fsQCA showed high but low-relevance necessity for watchdogs (0.966) and digital publics (0.932) and one sufficient configuration (consistency 0.910) including opposition unity and judicial autonomy.

**Conclusion:** In this sample, resilience coincided with civic mobilization with judicial autonomy and opposition unity. Protecting civic space, insulating courts and audit agencies, and opening subnational audits to participation deserve testing.

*All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.*

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Civic space compression, executive aggrandizement, and the puzzle of democratic resilience

In the contemporary third wave of autocratization, democratic breakdown rarely starts with military coups. Elected executives and ruling coalitions dismantle horizontal constitutional checks step by step instead. They also constrict the 'civic space', the legal, communicative, and associational arena in which citizens organize, scrutinize state power, and contest public policy.[1,2] We use vertical accountability for elections, horizontal accountability for courts, audit bodies, and other oversight agencies, and diagonal accountability for civil society and the media. Aspiring autocrats succeed by manipulating political tempo, forging civil-military or oligarchic pacts, weaponizing administrative and cyber-defamation law, and hollowing out oversight agencies before electoral challengers can coordinate.[3–5] Do recent global assessments show a turbulent plateau? That is debated. Scholarship still converges on one sequential insight. Compressing civic space and polarizing society are early-warning stages. Timely counter-mobilization by societal and institutional actors can disrupt the autocratization sequence.[6–8]

Why do pro-democracy mobilizations arrest executive aggrandizement in some episodes? In others they collapse into exhaustion, co-optation, or authoritarian consolidation. Recent comparative politics research shows that the capacity of democracies to resist is shaped by historical asymmetries in grassroots organizational density, by public willingness to punish illiberal incumbents at the ballot box, and by programmatic opposition competition.[9–11] Opposition parties, youth movements, and women's civic networks face acute strategic dilemmas too. When should they combine institutional litigation and parliamentary bargaining with contentious street action[12–15]? Resolving this puzzle means moving beyond static cross-national averages. The task is to examine how civil-society watchdogs interact dynamically with horizontal judicial and subnational institutional arenas.

### 1.2. Southeast Asia's regime divergence and subnational accountability frontiers

Southeast Asia is one of the richest comparative laboratories for testing theories of civic space compression and democratic resilience. About 683 million citizens live in its eleven sovereign polities.[16] These include electoral democracies, competitive party-states, royal-military tutelary regimes, and single-party autocracies, and they diverge sharply in how opposition coalitions respond to repression and how public support mediates democratic recession.[17,18] Indonesia is long celebrated as the region's democratic anchor. Between 2017 and 2023, though, intra-oligarchic accommodation, supermajority parliamentary cartels, digital harassment of critics, and fast-track statutory revisions weakened anti-corruption and environmental

safeguards.[19,20] Yet its courts pushed back. Constitutional Court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*) review and remedial injunctions remained central arenas for challenging legislative overreach, contestation that culminated in the August 2024 *#PeringatanDarurat* movement defending competitive regional election thresholds.[21–24]

Neighboring Southeast Asian polities show comparable tensions. In Malaysia, grassroots Bersih anti-kleptocracy mobilizations and pandemic-era #KerajaanGagal youth protests enacted diagonal accountability amid partisan defections and emergency parliamentary suspensions.[25,26] Thailand differs sharply. Overt codification of monarchic-military prerogative and Constitutional Court party dissolutions neutralized successive youth protest waves and electoral landslides,[27,28] which sharpens broader comparative debates on how opposition alliances and social movements survive autocratizing pressures.[27,28] In the Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte, mediating civil-rights coalitions and investigative journalists contested police impunity and broadcast shutdowns.[29] Severe coercive repression in Cambodia and post-2021 coup Myanmar turned weakened NGOs and striking civil servants into high-risk resistance networks.[30,31] Courts oscillate. Across hybrid regimes globally, they serve as instruments of executive lawfare in some cases and as genuine horizontal shields in others.[32,33]

Contemporary contention unfolds across platformized digital ecosystems. There, social media affordances enable rapid watchdog coordination, and they expose activists to state censorship, cyber-trooper surveillance, and populist institutional distrust.[34–36] Ruling elites in developing Asia frequently justify civic space restrictions through an 'autocratic technocracy' narrative. The claim is that insulating executives from civic activism and press scrutiny improves anti-corruption enforcement and administrative delivery. Comparative governance research shows otherwise: politicians routinely deploy blame-avoidance denials unless electoral and social punishment constrains them.[37,38] The subnational tier gets less attention. In decentralized democracies such as Indonesia, over 500 regencies (*Kabupaten*) and cities (*Kota*) administer core public budgets.[39] Where do the funds go? Direct mayoral elections (Pilkada), local protest, intergovernmental fiscal rules, and independent Supreme Audit Board (*Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan*, BPK) oversight directly govern whether public funds finance clientelist bureaucratic patronage or poverty-reducing infrastructure.[40–44]

### 1.3. Multi-tier methodological integration and research questions

Testing these multi-level propositions demands tools that overcome three pervasive limitations in comparative democratization studies. They are biased two-way fixed-effects estimates under staggered shock timing, unobserved confounding in subnational governance panels, and symmetric regression assumptions in small-N episode comparisons. Callaway and Sant'Anna's group-time average treatment effect estimator addresses staggered timing bias.[45] Paired with it, an unconditional quantile decomposition uncovers distributional tail effects across heterogeneous subnational units.[46,47] Configurational comparison invites positive-results inflation and mechanical remainder assumptions, so we use conservative fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) with explicit Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency (PRI) and causal-asymmetry testing.[48,49] Counterfactual process tracing and structured mixed-methods meta-inferences are formally integrated.[50–52]

Three integrated research questions guide this study. (RQ1 – Macro-Comparative Causal Scale) Across global electoral polities and Southeast Asia (2000–2024), what is the estimated dynamic effect of civic space compression shocks on liberal and electoral democracy? Does a strong baseline Diagonal–Horizontal Watchdog Shield buffer the erosion? Does compressing civic voice improve or degrade state corruption control and effectiveness? (RQ2 – Subnational Audit & Fiscal Scale) Across all 514 Indonesian districts (2009–2020), how were the post-2015 Synchronized Direct Pilkada elections and accrual BPK audit oversight associated with differences across districts with different local civic-fiscal capacity? The outcomes are clean audit attainment, bureaucratic patronage payrolls, public capital investment, and extreme poverty. (RQ3 – Set-Theoretic & Process-Tracing Scale) Across 24 major Southeast Asian episodes of executive aggrandizement (2009–2024), which necessary and conjuncturally sufficient combinations of conditions explain democratic institutional resilience versus unchecked autocratization? The conditions are grassroots watchdog coalitions, cross-cleavage opposition unity, judicial autonomy, digital counter-publics, and coercive/cyber lock-in.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Modalities of civic compression and subnational democratic anchors in Southeast Asia

Between 2005 and 2024, executive aggrandizement in Southeast Asia has worked through three distinct institutional modalities.[17,18] The first is calibrated legalistic and cyber-statutory compression. Executives with legislative majorities enact elastic electronic-information, 'fake news,' foreign-interference, or association decrees. Examples include Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA, 2019) and Foreign Interference Countermeasures Act (FICA, 2021), Indonesia's Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) defamation prosecutions and Emergency Regulation on Mass Organizations (Perppu Ormas No. 2/2017),[53,54] Cambodia's 2015 Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO), and Myanmar's pre-coup Telecommunications Law Section 66(d).[19,30,55–57] The second modality is judicialized guardianship and partisan lawfare. Here politically aligned apex courts dissolve leading opposition parties, disqualify reformist candidates, or remove independent chief justices. Thailand's Constitutional Court dissolutions of Future Forward (2020) and Move Forward (2024), together with the unelected 250-seat Senate veto, illustrate the pattern. So do Cambodia's 2017 Supreme Court dissolution of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP)[58] and the Philippines' 2018 quo warranto ouster of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno.[29,59,60] The third modality is overt coercive and military seizure. It reached its endpoint in Thailand's 2014 National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) coup and in Myanmar's February 2021 Tatmadaw coup.[31,61]

Southeast Asia also shows something else. National aggrandizement battles directly determine whether subnational democratic accountability survives. On 26 September 2014, an outgoing parliamentary coalition in Jakarta passed legislation abolishing direct popular elections for governors, regents (*bupati*), and mayors (*wali kota*) across Indonesia's 514 subnational jurisdictions. Its aim was simple: return local executive selection to closed

regional councils (DPRD) prone to elite cartelization. Reaction was fast. Within days, nationwide watchdog coalitions, independent media, and viral civic campaigns (#ShameOnYouSBY) prompted President Yudhoyono to issue Emergency Regulation Perppu No. 1/2014 on 2 October 2014 to restore direct elections, together with Perppu No. 2/2014.[62] The DPR approved both by acclamation on 20 January 2015, and they were enacted as Law No. 1/2015 and Law No. 2/2015.[63–65] Law No. 8/2015 (18 March 2015) then amended Law No. 1/2015 and underpinned the Synchronized Direct Local Elections (*Pilkada Serentak*).[66,67] Accounting rules changed too. Government Regulation No. 71/2010[68] made the accrual basis of government accounting applicable from budget year 2015, with audits by Indonesia's independent Supreme Audit Board (BPK). That body grades every district's annual financial statements on a statutory four-tier scale, which ends in the Unqualified Clean Opinion (*Wajar Tanpa Pengecualian*, WTP). Ten years later, on 20 August 2024, Constitutional Court Ruling No. 60/PUU-XXII/2024 replaced the 20 percent seat or 25 percent vote nomination threshold for regional elections with graduated valid-vote thresholds of 6.5 to 10 percent, and Ruling No. 70/PUU-XXII/2024 held that the minimum candidate age is counted at the candidate determination by the General Elections Commission (KPU).[69] When the DPR Legislation Body moved on 21 August to override both rulings, mass protests under the *#PeringatanDarurat* banner forced the House to abandon the revision the next day.[70,71]

## 2.2. Multi-tier public data architecture (210,805 records)

Four public data sources were downloaded and checked with SHA-256 hashes, which verify file integrity but not data validity. No synthetic data were used. The four public files hold 210,781 records; the 24 author-coded episodes of Tier 4 bring the total to 210,805 records (82.87 MB for the files; Figure 1A). Tier 1 is built on the University of Gothenburg Quality of Government (QoG) Standard Time-Series Dataset (January 2025 release, qog_std_ts_jan25.csv; 12,391 sovereign country-year rows; 58.67 MB). From it we extract 4,831 observations across 195 sovereign polities from 2000 to 2024. The measures come from QoG's harmonized V-Dem, Freedom House (FH), Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), and World Justice Project (WJP) modules, and they are V-Dem Electoral Democracy (vdem_polyarchy, rescaled 0–100), V-Dem Liberal Democracy (vdem_libdem, 0–100), and V-Dem Executive Corruption (vdem_execorr, 0–100). One is a standardized Civic Space Openness Index (0–100), computed as (fh_aor + fh_feb) / 28 × 100, where fh_aor is FH Associational and Organizational Rights and fh_feb is Freedom of Expression and Belief. Another is a composite Diagonal–Horizontal Watchdog Shield Index (0–100), which weights the V-Dem Participatory Component at 0.35, Academic/Media Freedom at 0.25, and Liberal Judicial-Legislative Constraints at 0.40. Two further WJP series supplement them: WJP Non-Governmental Checks (wjp_gov_pow_ngov) and Judicial Checks (wjp_gov_pow_jud).

Tier 2 combines two official World Bank REST API repositories (2000–2024). The first, Tier 2A, is the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI, source ID 3), with 30,109 non-null sovereign observations across all six Kaufmann–Kraay governance dimensions. These are Voice and Accountability GOV_WGI_VA.EST, Rule of Law GOV_WGI_RL.EST, Control of Corruption GOV_WGI_CC.EST, Government Effectiveness GOV_WGI_GE.EST, Regulatory Quality GOV_WGI_RQ.EST, and Political Stability GOV_WGI_PV.EST, scaled approximately −2.5 to +2.5. The second, Tier 2B, is the World Development Indicators (WDI). It holds 28,672 sovereign observations. These cover Internet diffusion IT.NET.USER.ZS, mobile subscriptions IT.CEL.SETS.P2, tertiary school enrollment SE.TER.ENRR, constant-2021 PPP GDP per capita NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD, and urban population share SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS.

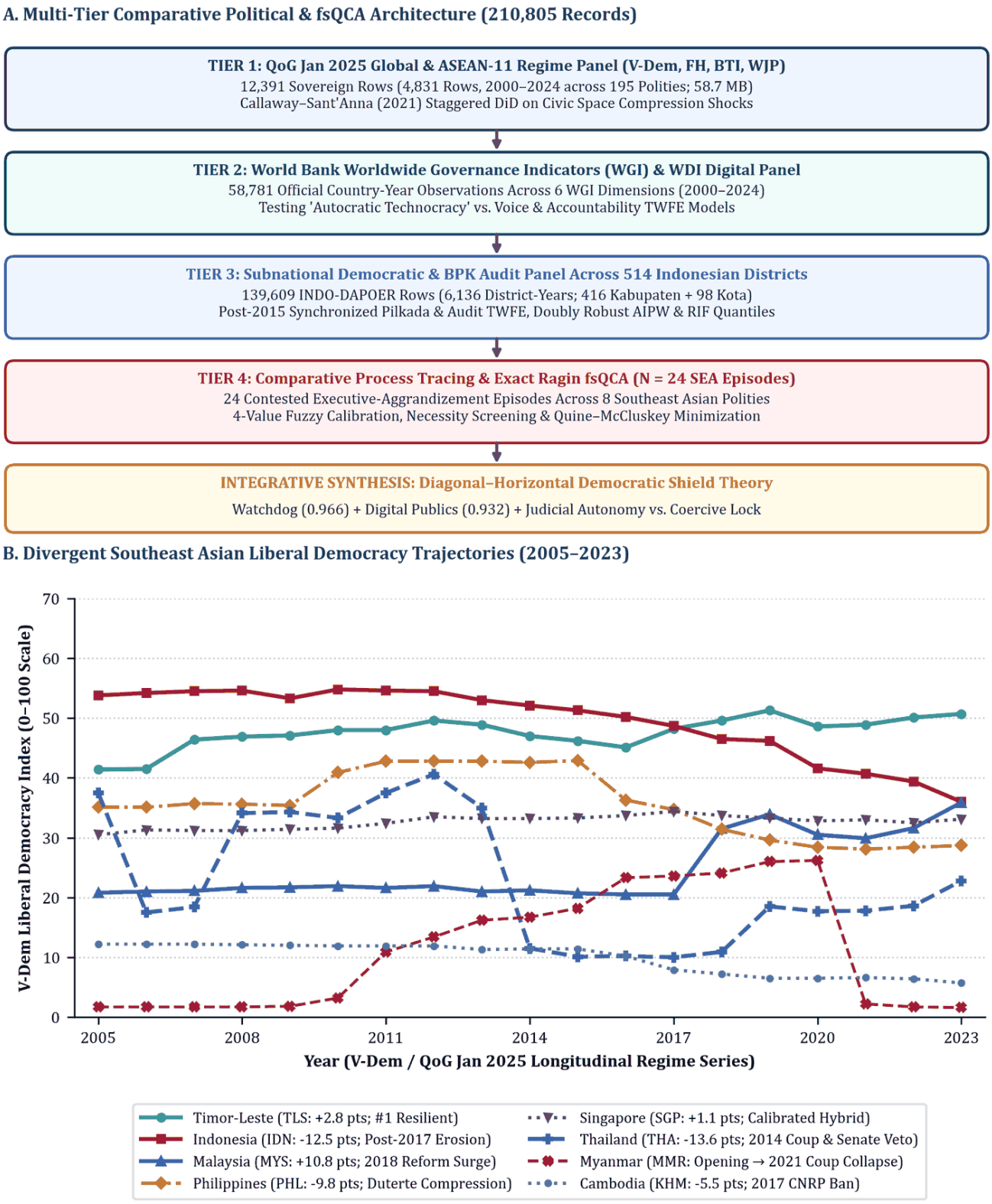



Figure 1. Multi-tier comparative political, econometric, and set-theoretic research architecture and Southeast Asian liberal democracy trajectories. (A) Four-tier empirical design integrating 210,805 records (82.87 MB; file integrity checked with SHA-256) across QoG Jan 2025 (V-Dem, Freedom House, BTI, WJP), World Bank WGI/WDI, INDO-DAPOER (514 Indonesian districts), and 24 contested Southeast Asian episodes. (B) Annual V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index trajectories (0–100 scale, 2005–2023) illustrating resilient consolidation in Timor-Leste and reformist gains in Malaysia alongside erosion in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, and post-2021 Myanmar.

Tier 3 extracts 139,609 official subnational Indonesian observations from World Bank INDO-DAPOER (source ID 45; 17.89 MB). They span all 514 autonomous districts (416 rural *Kabupaten* and 98 urban *Kota*) and yield 6,136 harmonized district-year records from 2009 to 2020. BPK.AUD.SUBN (BPK Audit Report on Sub-National Budget) is our primary institutional accountability outcome. It covers 5,434 district-years from 2009 to 2019. A trajectory check confirms that numeric code 1.0 denotes Unqualified Clean Audit Opinion, WTP. Nationally, this share rose from 2.85% in 2009 to 88.95% in 2019. Fiscal allocation indicators come next. All are bounded strictly within 0% to 100% of realized district budgets. They track Local Own-Source Fiscal Autonomy (PAD share: REV.OSRV.CR / REV.TOTL.CR), Bureaucratic Personnel/Patronage Spending Share (EC.XPD.STAF.CR / EC.XPD.TOTL.CR), Capital Public-Goods Infrastructure Share (EC.XPD.CAP.CR / EC.XPD.TOTL.CR), General Administration Overhead

Share (FC.XPD.ADMN.CR / EC.XPD.TOTL.CR), and Social Programmatic Share. SUSENAS/BPS indicators are paired with them: adult literacy (SE.LITR.15UP.ZS), senior-secondary net enrollment (SE.SRSEC.NENR.ZS), safe drinking water access (HOU.H2O.ACSN.ZS), child immunization (SH.IMM.CHLD.ZS), and district poverty rate (SI.POV.NAPR.ZS).

### 2.3. Staggered difference-in-differences, WGI TWFE, and subnational AIPW/RIF econometrics

Tier 1 estimates the dynamic effect of civic space compression under a parallel-trends assumption. We use Callaway and Sant'Anna's[45] staggered Difference-in-Differences estimator, which avoids negative-weighting bias from heterogeneous shock years. The sample is all N = 119 sovereign electoral polities. Each has baseline (2005–2009) V-Dem Electoral Democracy ≥ 35.0 (2005–2023). A polity enters treatment cohort g between 2010 and 2021, in the first year its Civic Space Openness Index drops by ≥ 7.0 points (equivalent to ≥ 2 raw Freedom House points) below its preceding 3-year rolling mean. This identifies 42 shock-treated polities across 12 cohorts and 77 never-compressed democratic controls. Group-time average treatment effects ATT(g, t) are computed against clean never-treated and not-yet-treated controls, relative to universal baseline g - 1. They are then aggregated into event-study parameters from e = −4 to e = +5, using 300 unit-clustered bootstrap replications. To test institutional buffering, we stratify the sample at the pre-2010 median of the Diagonal–Horizontal Watchdog Shield Index (71.17). Tier 2 is simpler. We estimate two-way country- and year-fixed-effects (TWFE) models. They test whether within-country shifts in WGI Voice and Accountability are associated, in the same year, with Rule of Law, Control of Corruption, Regulatory Quality, and Government Effectiveness across 195 states. Standard errors are clustered by country. The Tier 2 models are contemporaneous associations: WGI components draw on overlapping perception sources, and reverse causation cannot be excluded.

To prevent post-treatment collider bias, Tier 3 builds a pre-2015 baseline (2009–2014). It is a standardized Local Civic–Fiscal Watchdog Capacity Index (Z_Civic), a proxy for the civic-educational and fiscal capacity of districts rather than a direct measure of watchdog activity. The weights are 0.35 for senior-secondary enrollment, 0.25 for adult literacy, 0.20 for urban civic/media density, and 0.20 for the local taxpayer PAD share. Three estimation steps follow. (1) District- and year-fixed-effects TWFE models interact Post_2015 with Z_Civic across 505 districts with complete covariates. That interaction compares districts with different pre-2015 capacity after 2015, a period that bundles Law No. 8/2015 (Synchronized Direct Pilkada) with the first year of accrual accounting under Government Regulation No. 71/2010 and BPK audit enforcement; it cannot separate the two. (2) Doubly Robust Augmented Inverse Probability Weighting (AIPW, 400 bootstrap replications) estimates treatment effects of high civic-watchdog capacity and of sustained clean BPK audit governance (≥80% post-2015 WTP attainment) on clean audits, safe water, and district poverty, with IPTW standardized mean differences, VanderWeele E-values, and Cinelli–Hazlett Robustness Values RV_q reported. (3) Firpo–Fortin–Lemieux Recentered Influence Function (RIF) unconditional quantile regressions[47] cover Q10, Q25, Q50, Q75, and Q90 of district poverty and bureaucratic patronage payroll shares.

### 2.4. Comparative process tracing and four-value Ragin fsQCA calibration (N = 24 episodes)

Tier 4 compiles a comparative archive of N = 24 major episodes of executive aggrandizement and civic contention. It covers all eight electoral, hybrid, and backsliding Southeast Asian polities between 2009 and 2024. Closed single-party Vietnam and Laos and absolute monarchy Brunei are excluded. They lack contested multiparty or constitutional-court episodes, but they remain benchmarked in Tiers 1–2. The episodes break down as Indonesia (ID01–ID06, n = 6), Malaysia (MY01–MY03, n = 3), the Philippines (PH01–PH04, n = 4), Thailand (TH01–TH04, n = 4), Timor-Leste (TL01–TL02, n = 2), Myanmar (MM01–MM02, n = 2), Cambodia (KH01–KH02, n = 2), and Singapore (SG01, n = 1). Each episode is coded by triangulating constitutional/supreme court rulings, parliamentary statutes, electoral commission records, and area-studies monographs.

We follow QCA methodological best practices.[72,73] Five explanatory conditions and the outcome are calibrated onto an explicit four-value fuzzy scale. The values are 0.00 (fully out), 0.33 (more out than in), 0.67 (more in than out), and 1.00 (fully in). We avoid maximum-ambiguity 0.50 scores. (1) Grassroots Civic and Watchdog Coalition (WATCHDOG): 1.00 = broad multi-sector street/civic mobilization uniting anti-corruption NGOs, students, labor, or religious/bar associations; 0.67 = active sectoral NGO/youth advocacy; 0.33 = small/fragmented elite petitioning; 0.00 = absent. (2) Cross-Cleavage Opposition Unity (OPPO_UNITY): 1.00 = formal cross-party electoral/parliamentary pact or bipartisan institutional veto bloc; 0.67 = tactical legislative/senate alignment blocking an executive bill; 0.33 = fragmented or defecting opposition; 0.00 = supermajority parliamentary cartelization. (3) Autonomous Constitutional/Judicial Check (JUD_AUTON): 1.00 = independent apex/high court exercising binding review against the executive/coalition; 0.67 = partial/appellate judicial check or electoral body independence; 0.33 = deferential court upholding a core executive measure; 0.00 = captured, purged, or military-subordinated court. (4) Investigative and Digital Counter-Public Amplification (DIG_PUBLIC): 1.00 = nationwide viral digital mobilization paired with investigative journalism exposés; 0.67 = active online/alternative press reporting under pressure; 0.33 = censored/restricted media reach; 0.00 = total media blackout. (5) Coercive Security or Cyber-Statutory Lock-In (COERCIVE_LOCK): 1.00 = military junta rule, lethal police impunity, or systematic party-dissolution/lese-majeste bans; 0.67 = emergency suspension, riot-police crackdowns, or active cyber-defamation/anti-terror enforcement; 0.33 = restrained policing without emergency override; 0.00 = open constitutional contestation. (6) Democratic Institutional Resilience (OUTCOME_RESILIENCE): 1.00 = defeat/repeal of the aggrandizing measure, survival of an independent oversight institution, or democratic electoral turnover/reform; 0.67 = sizable institutional concession; 0.33 = partial judicial/media survival amid core executive success; 0.00 = unchecked institutional capture or democratic breakdown. Single-condition necessity is screened at consistency ≥ 0.90. Coverage and Relevance of Necessity (RoN) are reported. Truth-table configurations observed in the data are then minimized. They must pass raw consistency ≥ 0.80 and PRI ≥ 0.65. Minimization is exact and conservative (Quine–McCluskey), run for both OUTCOME_RESILIENCE and ~OUTCOME_RESILIENCE.[74] Reporting followed the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), the Schneider–Wagemann standards for fsQCA,

and the STROBE items applicable to the observational panels.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Tier 1 and Tier 2: Southeast Asian divergence, staggered DiD shocks, and the 'autocratic technocracy' claim

We compared multi-year regime baselines (2006–2013) with the recent autocratization wave (2018–2023/2024) across all eleven Southeast Asian polities. The comparison reveals a marked regional divergence (Table 1, Panel A; Figure 1B). Four polities show large liberal-democratic erosion and civic space compression. Thailand's V-Dem Liberal Democracy plunged −13.62 points, from 31.34 to 17.72, and its Civic Space fell −18.60 points. Indonesia lost −12.45 points, from 54.19 to 41.73, before sliding further to 36.0 in 2023, while its Civic Space dropped −16.22 points, from 72.77 to 56.55. The Philippines declined −9.79 points, from 38.89 to 29.10 (Civic Space −10.71 points). Cambodia fell −5.45 points to 6.48. Electoral Democracy there lost −10.98 points. Myanmar collapsed catastrophically, from 26.2 in 2020 to 1.6 in 2023, after the February 2021 military coup. The pattern reverses elsewhere. Timor-Leste consolidated its position as Southeast Asia's highest-scoring liberal democracy (+2.82 points to 49.87; Electoral Democracy +6.30 points to 68.40; Civic Space +11.16 points to 78.57). Malaysia registered a +10.76-point gain in Liberal Democracy (21.47 to 32.23, reaching 35.9 in 2023). The gain followed the 2018 Bersih/1MDB electoral breakthrough and the later Undi18/anti-hopping reforms. The 2018–2023 mean for Myanmar (13.63; Table 1) combines pre-coup and post-coup years.

Callaway and Sant'Anna staggered Difference-in-Differences estimation covers N = 119 sovereign electoral polities. Of these, 42 experienced civic space compression across 12 cohorts, and 77 were never-compressed controls. The estimates suggest that civic space compression is followed by regime erosion, under the parallel-trends assumption (Table 1, Panel B; Figure 2A). After a compression shock, Liberal Democracy falls. The overall post-treatment ATT is −5.64 points (SE = 1.42, z = −3.97, p = $7.14 \times 10^{-05}$). The fall begins at once, with −4.17 points in the shock year (t=0, p = 0.00016), and it then deepens to −6.09 (t+3), −7.08 (t+4, p = 0.00029), and −7.00 (t+5). Electoral Democracy shows an even steeper overall ATT of −6.26 points (SE = 1.50, z = −4.16, p = $3.14 \times 10^{-05}$), reaching −8.01 points at t+4 (p = 0.00021). For Electoral Democracy, the average pre-trend ATT is +0.87 (p = 0.092; t-4 ATT = +0.05, p = 0.962), which is not significant at the 5% level but borderline. Liberal Democracy declines from +1.74 at t-2 to the t-1 reference year (0.00). This pre-shock movement may reflect executive probing against judicial and procedural checks one year before the overt associational crackdowns at t=0, as sequential autocratization theory[4,6] would suggest, but it is also compatible with a violation of parallel trends and was not tested.

Panel B of Table 1 and Figure 2B are consistent with moderation by pre-shock Diagonal–Horizontal Watchdog Shields. Take first the electoral polities that entered a civic space shock with weak baseline watchdog and judicial shields (<71.17; n = 59). Their Liberal Democracy suffers statistically significant, compounding post-shock decay (overall ATT = −4.13 points, p = 0.0134), deepening continuously from −2.52 at t=0 to −5.68 at t+4 and −5.84 at t+5 (p = 0.0164). Polities with strong baseline watchdog and judicial shields (≥71.17; n = 59) look different. Their initial compression (−3.36 at t=0; −4.70 at t+1) is followed by a smaller estimate at t+5 (−1.82 points, p = 0.755; overall post-shock ATT = −3.58, 95% CI −11.47 to +4.30, p = 0.373). The overall ATTs of the two groups are similar, the strong-shield interval is wide, and the two groups were not compared formally. Tier 2 adds World Bank WGI Two-Way Fixed-Effects regressions across 195 sovereign states (N = 4,391–4,437; Table 2, Panel A; Figure 3A). These estimates run against the 'autocratic technocracy' claim. Country fixed effects, global time shocks, log PPP income, Internet diffusion, and urbanization are held constant. Under that control, a 1-unit gain in Voice and Accountability is significantly associated with higher Rule of Law (β = +0.4632, t = 10.64, p = $4.16 \times 10^{-21}$), Control of Corruption (β = +0.3716, t = 9.42, p = $1.34 \times 10^{-17}$), Regulatory Quality (β = +0.3265, t = 5.30, p = $3.15 \times 10^{-07}$), and Government Effectiveness (β = +0.2254, t = 4.04, p = $7.59 \times 10^{-05}$).

Table 1. Southeast Asian Regime & Civic-Space Trajectories (2006–2024; ASEAN-11) and Global Callaway–Sant'Anna Staggered Difference-in-Differences Event-Study Estimates of Civic Space Compression Shocks (Tier 1: QoG Jan 2025)

| Polity / Staggered DiD Specification | Baseline LibDem (2006–2013) | Recent LibDem (2018–2023) | Δ LibDem / Post ATT | Civic Space (2018–2024, Δ) | Inference / WJP Non-Gov & Judicial Checks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Panel A: Southeast Asian 11-Polity Longitudinal Regime & Civic-Space Divergence (0–100 Scale)** | | | | | |
| Timor-Leste (TLS) | 47.05 | 49.87 | +2.82 pts | 78.6 (+11.2) | V-Dem / FH Tracked |
| Indonesia (IDN) | 54.19 | 41.73 | −12.45 pts | 56.5 (−16.2) | NGov=64.0% \| Jud=66.7% |
| Singapore (SGP) | 31.96 | 33.03 | +1.07 pts | 39.3 (−5.8) | NGov=47.3% \| Jud=73.3% |
| Malaysia (MYS) | 21.47 | 32.23 | +10.76 pts | 51.2 (+0.3) | NGov=48.2% \| Jud=62.4% |
| Philippines (the) (PHL) | 38.89 | 29.10 | −9.79 pts | 67.9 (−10.7) | NGov=50.4% \| Jud=49.7% |
| Thailand (THA) | 31.34 | 17.72 | −13.62 pts | 34.5 (−18.6) | NGov=48.8% \| Jud=56.8% |
| Myanmar (MMR) | 6.33 | 13.63 | +7.31 pts | 28.0 (+10.6) | NGov=23.6% \| Jud=37.5% |
| Viet Nam (VNM) | 11.24 | 11.32 | +0.08 pts | 15.5 (−6.8) | NGov=39.8% \| Jud=36.9% |
| Lao People's Democratic Republic (the) (LAO) | 7.81 | 9.47 | +1.65 pts | 11.9 (−5.1) | V-Dem / FH Tracked |
| Cambodia (KHM) | 11.94 | 6.48 | −5.45 pts | 36.9 (−12.2) | NGov=28.0% \| Jud=23.9% |
| Brunei Darussalam (BRN) | — | — | — | 32.1 (+0.0) | V-Dem / FH Tracked |

| Polity / Staggered DiD Specification | Baseline LibDem (2006–2013) | Recent LibDem (2018–2023) | Δ LibDem / Post ATT | Civic Space (2018–2024, Δ) | Inference / WJP Non-Gov & Judicial Checks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Panel B: Callaway–Sant'Anna (2021) Staggered DiD Across N = 119 Electoral Polities (42 Shock-Treated, 12 Cohorts)** | | | | | |
| V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index (0–100) | t-4 ATT = +0.94 (p = 0.292) | t=0 ATT = −4.17 (p = $1.6 \times 10^{-4}$) | Post ATT = −5.64 | 95% CI [−8.42, −2.85] | z = −3.97, p = $7.14 \times 10^{-05}$ (t+4: −7.08) |
| V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index (0–100) | t-4 ATT = +0.05 (p = 0.962) | t=0 ATT = −4.39 (p = $7.8 \times 10^{-4}$) | Post ATT = −6.26 | 95% CI [−9.21, −3.31] | z = −4.16, p = $3.14 \times 10^{-05}$ (Pre p = 0.092) |
| Subsample: Strong Baseline Watchdog–Judicial Shield (≥71.2, n=59) | Pre-trend p = 0.153 | t=0 ATT = −3.36 (ns) | Post ATT = −3.58 | 95% CI [−11.47, +4.30] | p = 0.373 (Rebounds to −1.82 at t+5, p = 0.755) |
| Subsample: Weak Baseline Watchdog–Judicial Shield (<71.2, n=59) | Pre-trend p = 0.096 | t=0 ATT = −2.52 (p = 0.099) | Post ATT = −4.13 | 95% CI [−7.41, −0.86] | p = 0.0134 (Deepens to −5.84 at t+5, p = 0.016) |

*Note: Computed from University of Gothenburg Quality of Government (QoG) Standard Time-Series Dataset (Jan 2025; file integrity checked with SHA-256, 12,391 raw rows). Civic space index rescaled to 0–100 from Freedom House Associational Rights (fh_aor) plus Freedom of Expression (fh_feb). Callaway–Sant'Anna ATT(g,t) uses clean never-treated and not-yet-treated controls with 300 unit-clustered bootstraps. Panel A values are period means; the 2018–2023 mean for Myanmar combines pre-coup and post-coup years. The two Panel B subsamples (59 + 59) sum to 118 of 119 polities.*

Table 2. Testing the 'Autocratic Technocracy' Hypothesis Across 195 Sovereign States (World Bank WGI Two-Way Fixed-Effects Panel, 2000–2024) and Latest ASEAN-11 Governance & Digital Profiles (Tier 2)

| WGI dimension (range −2.5 to +2.5) | Sample (N observations) | β of Voice & Accountability | SE (country-clustered) | 95% CI | t statistic, p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Panel A: Global Country & Year Fixed-Effects (TWFE) Regressions on WGI Voice & Accountability (VA.EST)** | | | | | |
| WGI Rule of Law (−2.5 to +2.5) | 195 states (4,437) | β_VA = +0.4632 | SE = 0.0435 | [+0.3778, +0.5485] | t = 10.64, p = $4.16 \times 10^{-21}$ |
| WGI Control of Corruption (−2.5 to +2.5) | 195 states (4,400) | β_VA = +0.3716 | SE = 0.0394 | [+0.2943, +0.4489] | t = 9.42, p = $1.34 \times 10^{-17}$ |
| WGI Regulatory Quality (−2.5 to +2.5) | 195 states (4,392) | β_VA = +0.3265 | SE = 0.0616 | [+0.2057, +0.4473] | t = 5.30, p = $3.15 \times 10^{-07}$ |
| WGI Government Effectiveness (−2.5 to +2.5) | 195 states (4,391) | β_VA = +0.2254 | SE = 0.0558 | [+0.1162, +0.3347] | t = 4.04, p = $7.59 \times 10^{-05}$ |
| **Panel B: Latest ASEAN-11 Worldwide Governance Indicators (−2.5 to +2.5) & Digital Diffusion** | | | | | |
| **Polity** | **Year** | **Voice & Accountability (VA)** | **Rule of Law (RL)** | **Control of Corruption (CC)** | **Gov. Effectiveness (GE) / Internet use (Net)** |
| TLS | 2024 | VA = +0.41 | RL = −0.66 | CC = −0.37 | GE = −0.65 \| Net = 35.0% |
| MYS | 2024 | VA = −0.08 | RL = +0.37 | CC = +0.47 | GE = +0.87 \| Net = 98.0% |
| IDN | 2024 | VA = −0.13 | RL = −0.21 | CC = −0.56 | GE = +0.27 \| Net = 72.8% |
| SGP | 2024 | VA = −0.17 | RL = +1.47 | CC = +1.97 | GE = +2.11 \| Net = 94.4% |
| PHL | 2024 | VA = −0.21 | RL = −0.56 | CC = −0.58 | GE = +0.08 \| Net = 67.3% |
| THA | 2024 | VA = −0.55 | RL = −0.19 | CC = −0.53 | GE = +0.21 \| Net = 90.9% |
| BRN | 2024 | VA = −0.95 | RL = +0.62 | CC = +1.20 | GE = +0.80 \| Net = 96.3% |
| VNM | 2024 | VA = −1.30 | RL = −0.30 | CC = −0.26 | GE = −0.13 \| Net = 84.2% |
| KHM | 2024 | VA = −1.63 | RL = −1.02 | CC = −1.23 | GE = −0.40 \| Net = 68.5% |
| LAO | 2024 | VA = −1.64 | RL = −0.71 | CC = −1.00 | GE = −0.64 \| Net = 65.6% |
| MMR | 2024 | VA = −2.14 | RL = −1.79 | CC = −1.25 | GE = −1.64 \| Net = 45.4% |

*Note: Official World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI, source ID 3; 30,109 rows) merged with World Development Indicators (WDI; 28,672 rows). TWFE models control simultaneously for country fixed effects, year fixed effects, log per-capita GDP PPP, Internet penetration, and urbanization share, with country-clustered standard errors. Panel A and Panel B have separate column headers.*

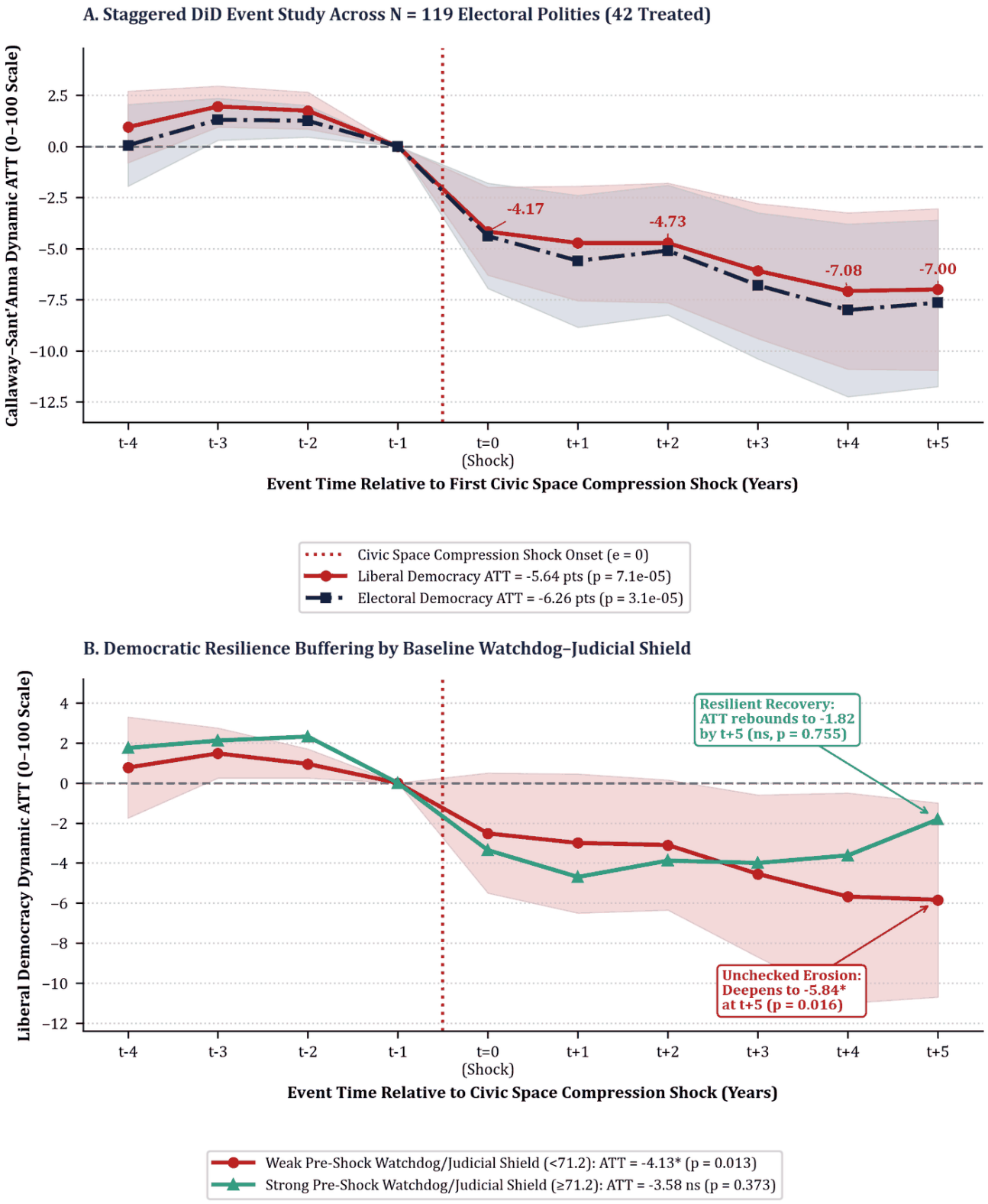



Figure 2. Callaway–Sant'Anna[45] staggered Difference-in-Differences event-study estimates of civic space compression shocks across N = 119 electoral polities (2005–2023). (A) Dynamic event-time ATT trajectories (with 95% unit-clustered bootstrap confidence bands) showing post-compression erosion in Liberal Democracy (overall ATT = −5.64 pts, $p = 7.14 \times 10^{-05}$) and Electoral Democracy (overall ATT = −6.26 pts, $p = 3.14 \times 10^{-05}$). (B) Subsample moderation showing sustained democratic decay in polities with weak pre-shock Watchdog–Judicial Shields (−5.84 pts at t+5, p = 0.016) versus resilient recovery in high-shield polities (−1.82 pts at t+5, p = 0.755).

### 3.2. Tier 3: subnational BPK audit surge and fiscal-accountability structure across 514 districts

Tier 3 turns to Indonesia's 514 subnational jurisdictions: 416 rural *Kabupaten* and 98 urban *Kota* (N = 6,136 district-years, 2009–2020). Local fiscal governance changed here. Direct local executive elections were preserved (Law No. 8/2015), and independent Supreme Audit Board (BPK) accrual audits were enforced, even as national politics became more cartelized (Figure 3B). Nationally, the share of Indonesian regencies and cities earning BPK's highest Unqualified Clean Audit Opinion (WTP) began at only 2.85% in 2009, then reached 28.51% in 2014, 55.91% in 2015, 74.41% in 2017, and 88.95% in 2019. High Civic-Watchdog districts rose from 4.42% (2009) and 33.60% (2014) to 94.00% (2019). They led Low Civic-Watchdog districts by 10 to 21 percentage points throughout the post-2015 transition. Personnel spending fell too. Over the same

decade, the mean district bureaucratic personnel/patronage spending share declined steadily from 52.12% of total budgets in 2010 to 35.34% in 2019.

Table 3 sets out the structural contrast between High and Low Pre-2015 Civic–Fiscal Watchdog Capacity districts across the 12-year panel. High civic-watchdog districts have double the local own-source tax autonomy (PAD share: 12.47% vs. 6.02%, Welch t = 31.76, p = $4.52 \times 10^{-197}$). Their senior-secondary enrollment is +14.05 pp higher (63.23% vs. 49.17%). Adult literacy is +6.61 pp higher (96.92% vs. 90.31%). General administrative overhead is −2.08 pp lower (27.52% vs. 29.59%, p = $2.29 \times 10^{-05}$). Cumulative BPK WTP clean audit attainment is +9.84 pp higher (45.26% vs. 35.42%, t = 7.46, p = $9.93 \times 10^{-14}$). Household safe drinking water access is +19.63 pp higher (70.71% vs. 51.08%, t = 38.92, p = $8.10 \times 10^{-295}$), and the district poverty headcount is −5.23 pp lower (10.92% vs. 16.15%, t = −24.95, p = $1.47 \times 10^{-129}$). The PAD share, enrollment, and literacy contrasts are partly built in, because these variables are components of the index (Z_Civic) that defines the two groups.

Table 3. Subnational Structural, Audit, Fiscal-Patronage, and Public-Service Comparison Across All 514 Indonesian Districts (2009–2020; N = 6,136 District-Years): High vs. Low Pre-2015 Civic–Fiscal Watchdog Capacity

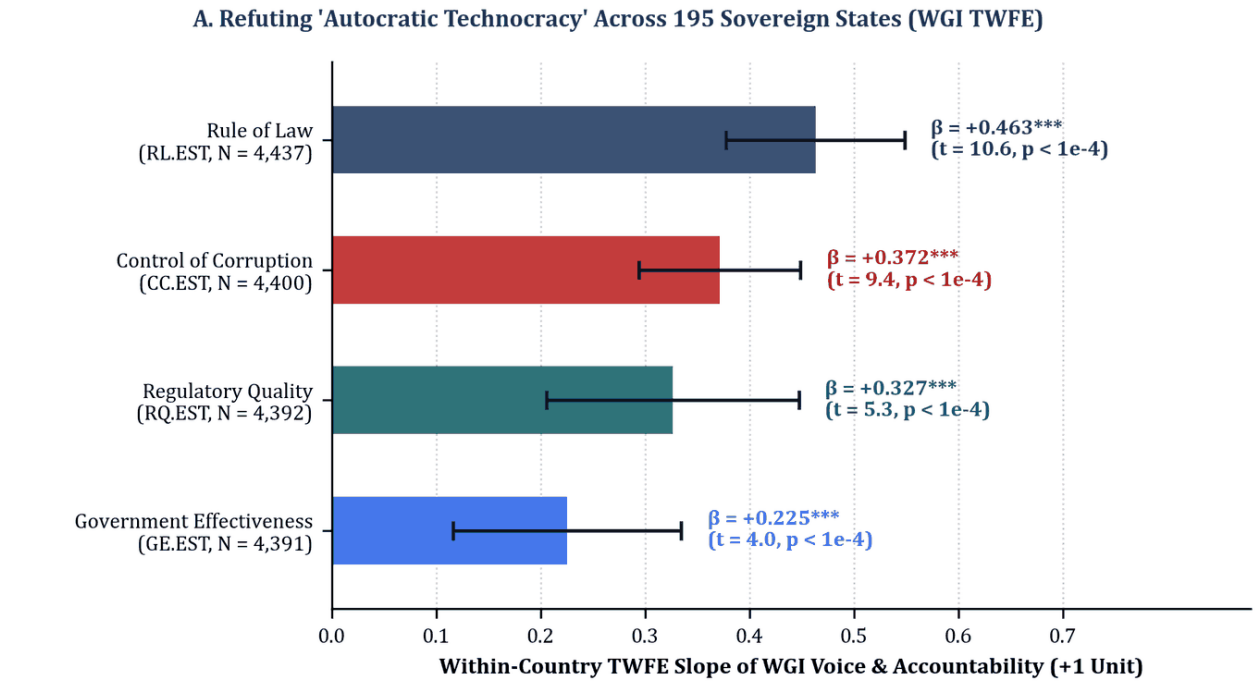
| Subnational Governance, Fiscal & Welfare Indicator | High Civic-Watchdog Districts (Mean ± SD) | Low Civic-Watchdog Districts (Mean ± SD) | Mean Difference (High – Low) | Welch t-Statistic | Two-Sided p-Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BPK Unqualified Clean Audit Opinion (WTP, %) | 45.26 ± 49.78 | 35.42 ± 47.83 | +9.84 | 7.46 | $9.93 \times 10^{-14}$ |
| Local Own-Source Fiscal Autonomy (PAD / Total Revenue, %) | 12.47 ± 10.33 | 6.02 ± 4.09 | +6.45 | 31.76 | $4.52 \times 10^{-197}$ |
| Bureaucratic Personnel / Patronage Spending Share (%) | 46.06 ± 11.60 | 40.90 ± 12.75 | +5.16 | 16.19 | $1.05 \times 10^{-57}$ |
| Capital Public-Goods Infrastructure Spending Share (%) | 21.77 ± 8.66 | 24.47 ± 9.63 | −2.71 | −11.31 | $2.45 \times 10^{-29}$ |
| General Administration Overhead Share (%) | 27.52 ± 8.87 | 29.59 ± 10.82 | −2.08 | −4.25 | $2.29 \times 10^{-05}$ |
| Senior Secondary Net Enrollment Ratio (%) | 63.23 ± 10.16 | 49.17 ± 13.71 | +14.05 | 45.07 | $< 1.00 \times 10^{-300}$ |
| Adult Civic Literacy Rate 15+ (%) | 96.92 ± 3.26 | 90.31 ± 13.28 | +6.61 | 26.33 | $7.76 \times 10^{-139}$ |
| Household Safe Drinking Water Access (%) | 70.71 ± 18.18 | 51.08 ± 20.76 | +19.63 | 38.92 | $8.10 \times 10^{-295}$ |
| Child Immunization Coverage (%) | 94.52 ± 5.71 | 89.69 ± 13.16 | +4.82 | 15.81 | $3.95 \times 10^{-54}$ |
| District Poverty Headcount Rate (%) | 10.92 ± 6.10 | 16.15 ± 9.69 | −5.23 | −24.95 | $1.47 \times 10^{-129}$ |

*Note: Computed from World Bank INDO-DAPOER (source ID 45; 139,609 raw subnational observations across 416* Kabupaten *and 98* Kota*). Pre-2015 Local Civic–Fiscal Watchdog Capacity Z-index combines 2009–2014 senior-secondary net enrollment, adult literacy, urban media/civic density, and local own-source tax revenue share (PAD). The PAD share, enrollment, and literacy rows are components of the index (Z_Civic) that defines the groups.*

### 3.3. Tier 3: subnational TWFE, doubly robust AIPW, and RIF quantile estimates for patronage and poverty

Table 4 and Figure 4 estimate within-district shifts and distributional tail differences across 505 Indonesian districts. The TWFE models include district and year fixed effects and control for log per-capita total revenue and urbanization (Table 4, Panel A; Figure 4A). A 1-SD higher pre-2015 Local Civic–Fiscal Watchdog Capacity Index, following the 2015 Synchronized Direct Pilkada and accrual audit reform, was associated with a significantly faster rise in BPK WTP clean audit attainment, by +8.86 percentage points (SE = 1.43, t = 6.21, p = $1.13 \times 10^{-09}$). The raw cross-section looks different. High-civic urban/semi-urban districts began with larger legacy teacher/health civil-service payrolls. Within districts, though, post-2015 TWFE indicates that high civic-watchdog districts reduced bureaucratic personnel/patronage spending significantly faster (−1.78 pp, t = −6.47, p = $2.36 \times 10^{-10}$). Their capital public-goods infrastructure share also rose faster (+3.02 pp, t = 11.74, p = $2.68 \times 10^{-28}$). The welfare coefficients run the other way: headline poverty is +0.40 pp higher (p = $8.26 \times 10^{-06}$) and safe water access −1.13 pp lower (p = 0.0192) in high-capacity districts. Convergence from baseline levels is one possible explanation, but it was not tested.

Doubly Robust AIPW estimation across post-2015 Indonesian districts (N = 505; Table 4, Panel B) estimates large differences in accountability outcomes. The models condition on per-capita fiscal capacity, population scale, and autonomous municipality status. Under this conditioning, high civic-watchdog capacity is associated with post-2015 BPK WTP clean audit rates that are +25.60 pp higher (80.57% vs. 54.97%, z = 8.39, p = $5.01 \times 10^{-17}$; VanderWeele E-value = 3.38, RV_q = 31.1%). It is also associated with household safe water access that is +23.10 pp higher (70.19% vs. 47.09%, z = 12.40, p = $2.61 \times 10^{-35}$; E-value = 5.18, RV_q = 42.1%). A further model tests the direct welfare payoff of institutional audit integrity. It controls for civic-watchdog capacity, revenue per capita, population, and *Kota* status (mean weighted |SMD| = 0.165). Districts with sustained clean BPK audit governance (≥80% post-2015 WTP opinions, n = 347 vs. 158) show a −3.76 pp lower district poverty headcount (11.01% vs. 14.76%, z = −4.57, p = $4.95 \times 10^{-06}$; E-value = 2.45, 95% CI E-value = 1.88, RV_q = 18.4%). Treatment (≥80% post-2015 WTP opinions) and outcome are measured over overlapping post-2015 windows, so the contrast may reflect joint determination.



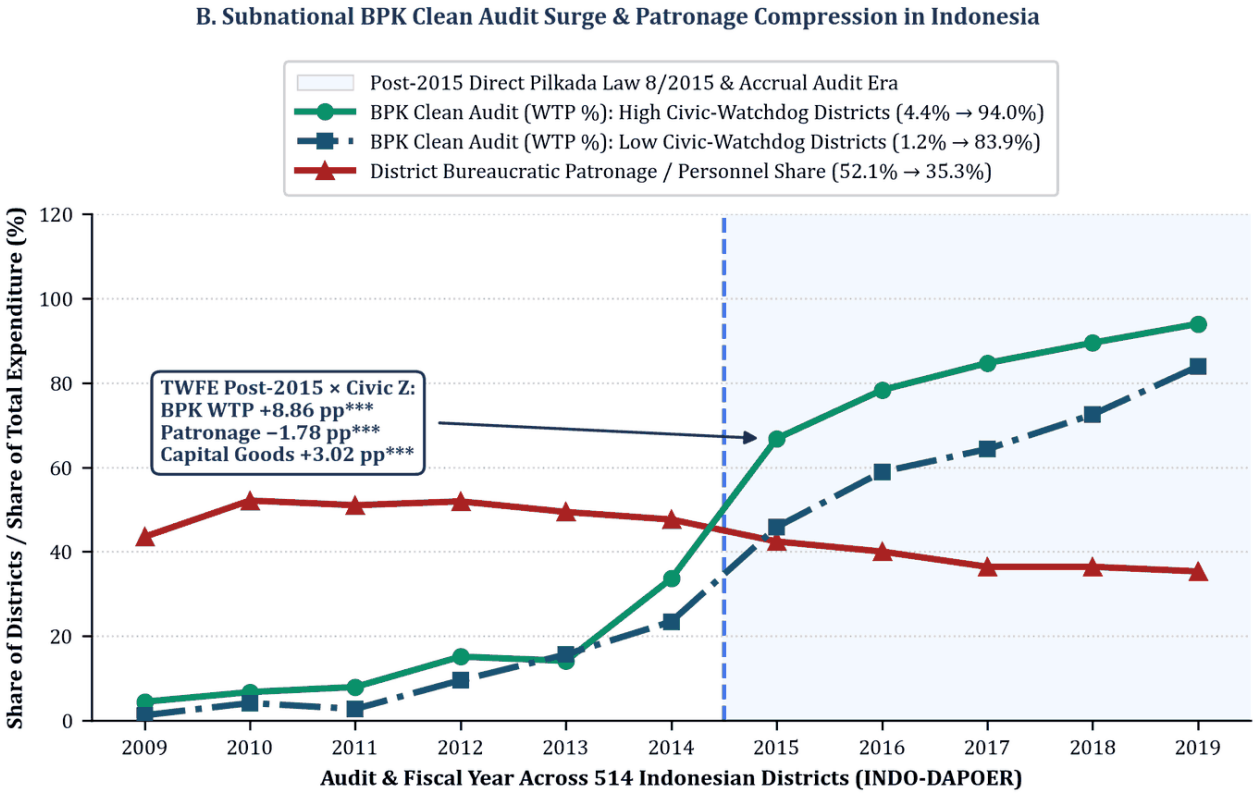
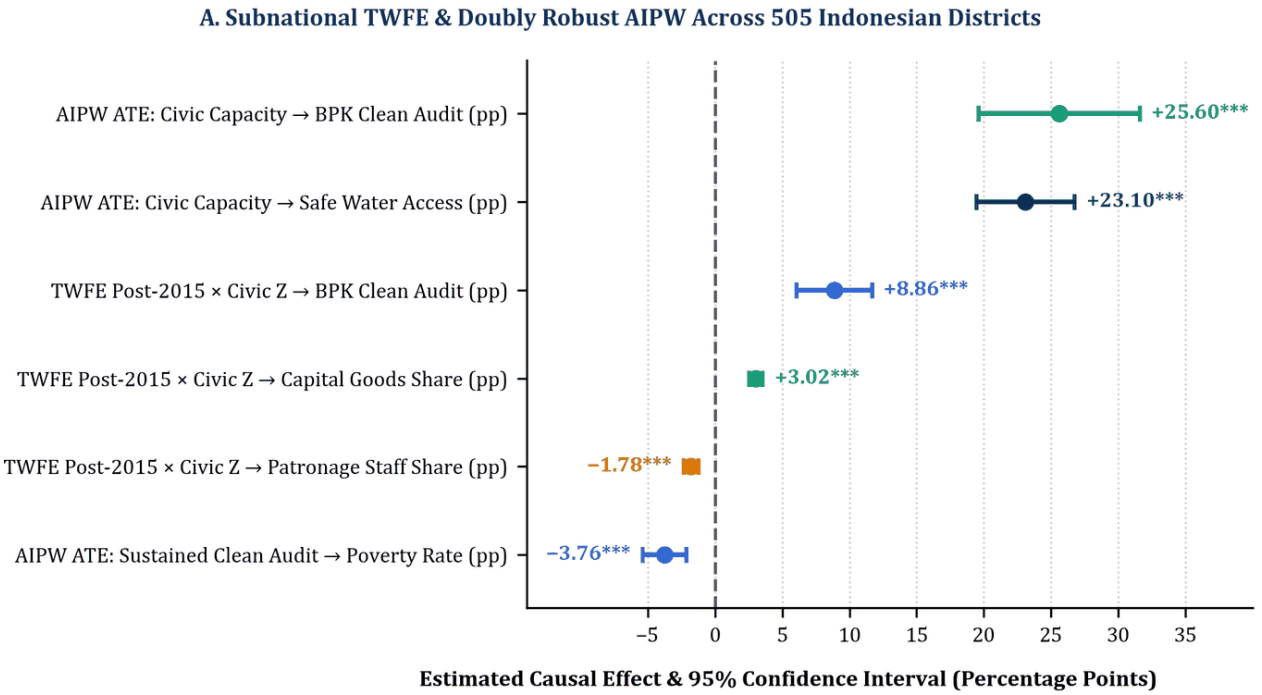




Figure 3. Cross-national test of 'autocratic technocracy' and subnational audit-patronage transformation in Indonesia. (A) Country- and year-fixed-effects (TWFE) slopes of World Bank WGI Voice & Accountability across 195 sovereign states (N = 4,391–4,437), showing positive associations with Rule of Law (+0.463), Control of Corruption (+0.372), Regulatory Quality (+0.327), and Government Effectiveness (+0.225; all $p < 1 \times 10^{-04}$). (B) Trajectory across 514 Indonesian districts (2009–2019) showing post-2015 Direct Pilkada Law 8/2015 acceleration of BPK Unqualified Clean Audit Opinions (WTP: 4.4% to 94.0% in high-civic districts) alongside compression of bureaucratic patronage payroll shares (52.1% to 35.3%).

Firpo–Fortin–Lemieux RIF unconditional quantile regressions (Table 4, Panel C; Figure 4B) reveal an asymmetry across the tails. For bureaucratic personnel share, BPK WTP clean audit status is mildly positive at the under-staffed 10th percentile (+2.25 pp at Q10, p = 0.010), where remote districts fill essential clinic/school posts. It is null at Q25 (+0.14 pp, p = 0.768). Across the median and upper quantiles, where clientelist payroll bloat concentrates, it is strongly negative: −1.84 pp at Q50 ($p = 1.80 \times 10^{-06}$), −3.78 pp at Q75 ($p = 1.95 \times 10^{-13}$), and −4.81 pp at Q90 (patronage = 49.42%, $p = 1.92 \times 10^{-09}$). For district poverty headcount, the poverty-reducing impact of clean BPK WTP audits is about 18 times larger at Q90 than at Q10. It is −0.79 pp at Q10 (p = 0.0001) and −1.78 pp at Q50 ($p = 2.13 \times 10^{-06}$). It then reaches −4.23 pp at Q75 ($p = 1.60 \times 10^{-15}$) and −13.90 pp at the extreme-poverty 90th percentile (poverty = 23.56%, $p = 8.97 \times 10^{-17}$). A −19.18 pp

Q90 slope from local civic-watchdog capacity ($p = 3.12 \times 10^{-95}$) adds to this pattern.



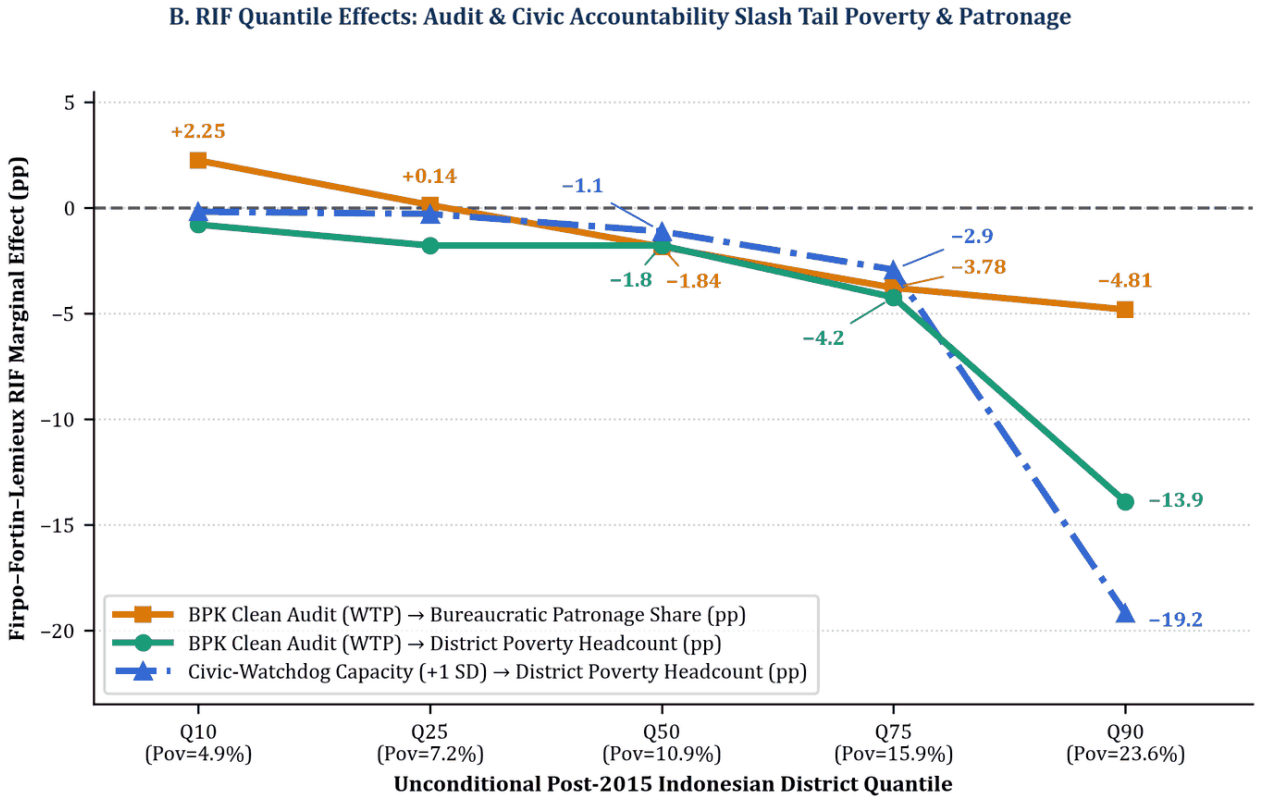




Figure 4. Subnational estimates and distributional quantile accountability patterns across 505 Indonesian districts. (A) Forest plot of district-clustered TWFE and Doubly Robust AIPW estimates showing significant differences in BPK WTP clean audits (+25.60 pp AIPW; +8.86 pp TWFE), safe drinking water (+23.10 pp AIPW), capital public goods (+3.02 pp TWFE), patronage compression (−1.78 pp TWFE), and lower poverty with clean audits (−3.76 pp AIPW). (B) Firpo–Fortin–Lemieux RIF unconditional quantile curves (Q10–Q90) demonstrating steep upper-tail reductions in bureaucratic patronage (−4.81 pp at Q90) and extreme district poverty (−13.90 pp from BPK WTP and −19.18 pp from civic capacity at Q90).

Table 4. Subnational Estimates Across 505 Indonesian Districts: Post-2015 Synchronized Direct Pilkada & Accrual Audit TWFE, Doubly Robust AIPW, and RIF Unconditional Quantile Regressions (Tier 3)

| Econometric Specification & Target Outcome | Sample Domain (Units / Obs) | Point Estimate (β or ATE) | Cluster / Bootstrap SE | 95% Confidence Interval | p-Value & Robustness Bounds |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Panel A: District & Year Fixed-Effects (TWFE) Post-2015 Direct Pilkada/Audit × Pre-2015 Civic-Watchdog Z** | | | | | |
| BPK Clean Unqualified Audit Opinion (WTP, %) | 505 dist (5,434) | +8.8625 pp | 1.4279 | [+6.0573, +11.6678] | $t = 6.21$, $p = 1.13 \times 10^{-09}$ |
| Bureaucratic Personnel / Patronage Spending Share (%) | 505 dist (5,834) | −1.7822 pp | 0.2756 | [−2.3236, −1.2408] | $t = -6.47$, $p = 2.36 \times 10^{-10}$ |
| Capital Public-Goods Spending Share (%) | 505 dist (5,833) | +3.0230 pp | 0.2575 | [+2.5171, +3.5290] | $t = 11.74$, $p = 2.68 \times 10^{-28}$ |
| Household Safe Drinking Water Access (%) | 505 dist (5,933) | −1.1257 pp | 0.4792 | [−2.0671, −0.1842] | $t = -2.35$, $p = 1.92 \times 10^{-02}$ |
| District Poverty Headcount Rate (%) | 505 dist (5,947) | +0.4047 pp | 0.0898 | [+0.2282, +0.5813] | $t = 4.50$, $p = 8.26 \times 10^{-06}$ |
| **Panel B: Doubly Robust AIPW Treatment Effects Across Post-2015 Indonesian Districts (N = 505)** | | | | | |
| Civic-Watchdog Capacity → BPK Clean Audit (WTP %; 80.57% vs. 54.97%) | 505 dist (250 T / 255 C) | +25.60 pp | 3.05 | [+19.62, +31.59] | $p = 5.01 \times 10^{-17}$; E-val = 3.38; RV_q = 31.1% |
| Civic-Watchdog Capacity → Safe Drinking Water (%; 70.19% vs. 47.09%) | 505 dist (250 T / 255 C) | +23.10 pp | 1.86 | [+19.44, +26.75] | $p = 2.61 \times 10^{-35}$; E-val = 5.18; RV_q = 42.1% |
| Sustained Clean BPK Audit (≥80% WTP) → Poverty Rate (11.01% vs. 14.76%) | 505 dist (347 T / 158 C) | −3.76 pp | 0.82 | [−5.37, −2.14] | $p = 4.95 \times 10^{-06}$; E-val = 2.45; \|SMD\| = 0.165 |
| **Panel C: Firpo–Fortin–Lemieux RIF Unconditional Quantile Effects of BPK Clean Audit & Civic Capacity** | | | | | |
| **Quantile (poverty level; patronage level)** | **Sample** | **Poverty: β_BPK (pp)** | **Poverty: β_CivZ (pp)** | **Patronage: β_BPK (pp)** | **p values** |
| Q10 Quantile (Pov = 4.94%; Patronage = 25.75%) | Post-2015 Districts | Pov β_BPK = −0.79 pp | Pov β_CivZ = −0.18 pp | Pat β_BPK = +2.25 pp | $p_BPK_Pov = 1.02 \times 10^{-04}$; $p_BPK_Pat = 1.04 \times 10^{-02}$ |
| Q25 Quantile (Pov = 7.15%; Patronage = 33.14%) | Post-2015 Districts | Pov β_BPK = −1.78 pp | Pov β_CivZ = −0.28 pp | Pat β_BPK = +0.14 pp | $p_BPK_Pov = 1.04 \times 10^{-12}$; $p_BPK_Pat = 7.68 \times 10^{-01}$ |
| Q50 Quantile (Pov = 10.91%; Patronage = 38.58%) | Post-2015 Districts | Pov β_BPK = −1.78 pp | Pov β_CivZ = −1.11 pp | Pat β_BPK = −1.84 pp | $p_BPK_Pov = 2.13 \times 10^{-06}$; $p_BPK_Pat = 1.80 \times 10^{-06}$ |
| Q75 Quantile (Pov = 15.92%; Patronage = 43.99%) | Post-2015 Districts | Pov β_BPK = −4.23 pp | Pov β_CivZ = −2.92 pp | Pat β_BPK = −3.78 pp | $p_BPK_Pov = 1.60 \times 10^{-15}$; $p_BPK_Pat = 1.95 \times 10^{-13}$ |
| Q90 Quantile (Pov = 23.56%; Patronage = 49.42%) | Post-2015 Districts | Pov β_BPK = −13.90 pp | Pov β_CivZ = −19.18 pp | Pat β_BPK = −4.81 pp | $p_BPK_Pov = 8.97 \times 10^{-17}$; $p_BPK_Pat = 1.92 \times 10^{-09}$ |

*Note: TWFE regressions control for district fixed effects, year fixed effects, log per-capita total revenue, and urbanization share with district-clustered standard errors. Doubly Robust AIPW uses 400 bootstrap replications, reporting VanderWeele E-values and Cinelli–Hazlett omitted-variable Robustness Values (RV_q).*

## 3.4. Tier 4: fsQCA necessity, sufficiency, and 'Blocked Mobilization' across 24 episodes

At the regime-contention scale, Tier 4 analyzes 24 major episodes of executive aggrandizement across eight Southeast Asian polities (Table 5, Panel A; Figure 5B). Overall, 8 of 24 episodes (33.3%) achieved full Democratic Institutional Resilience (1.00). They came from Timor-Leste (2/2), Malaysia (2/3), Indonesia (3/6), and the Philippines (1/4). Another 5 episodes achieved partial contested survival (0.33). The remaining 11 resulted in unchecked executive aggrandizement or autocratic breakdown (0.00). Single-condition necessity analysis against Ragin's 0.90 threshold indicates an asymmetry between resilience and backsliding (Table 5, Panel B; Figure 5A). For Democratic Institutional Resilience (OUTCOME_RESILIENCE), two conditions exceed 0.90 necessity: Grassroots Civic and Watchdog Mobilization (WATCHDOG: consistency = 0.9658, coverage = 0.4989, RoN = 0.3624) and Investigative and Digital Counter-Publics (DIG_PUBLIC: consistency = 0.9316, coverage = 0.4810, RoN = 0.3538). Autonomous Judicial Checks (JUD_AUTON: consistency = 0.8632, coverage = 0.8064, RoN = 0.8724) trail them closely. Both RoN values are below 0.50, which indicates trivial necessity: the two conditions are also widespread among the non-resilient episodes (necessity for ~OUTCOME_RESILIENCE = 0.7213 and 0.7449; Table 5).

Why do WATCHDOG and DIG_PUBLIC show very high necessity consistency (>0.93) yet only low Relevance of Necessity (RoN = 0.35–0.36)? Table 6 gives the configurational answer.[72,73] The 2^5 = 32 logical truth table holds all 24 Southeast Asian episodes, and they fall into 7 empirically observed rows (Table 6, Panel A). Conservative Quine–McCluskey minimization then yields one conjunctural sufficiency pathway for Democratic Resilience (Table 6, Panel B; Figure 6A): WATCHDOG * OPPO_UNITY * JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * ~COERCIVE_LOCK → OUTCOME_RESILIENCE. Its Consistency = 0.9101, PRI = 0.8904, and Coverage = 0.6922. The pattern is tight. All eight resilient episodes in Southeast Asia (Row 11110, n = 8: ID01, ID02, ID06, MY01, MY03, PH04, TL01, TL02) show these elements together. Diagonal civic-digital mobilization coincided with horizontal judicial autonomy and cross-cleavage opposition coordination, all under restrained coercion. Because only one row is populated for the outcome, the data cannot show that each element was required. Only 7 of the 32 logical rows are populated, and a single row meets the consistency threshold for the outcome, so the minimization adds nothing beyond that row.

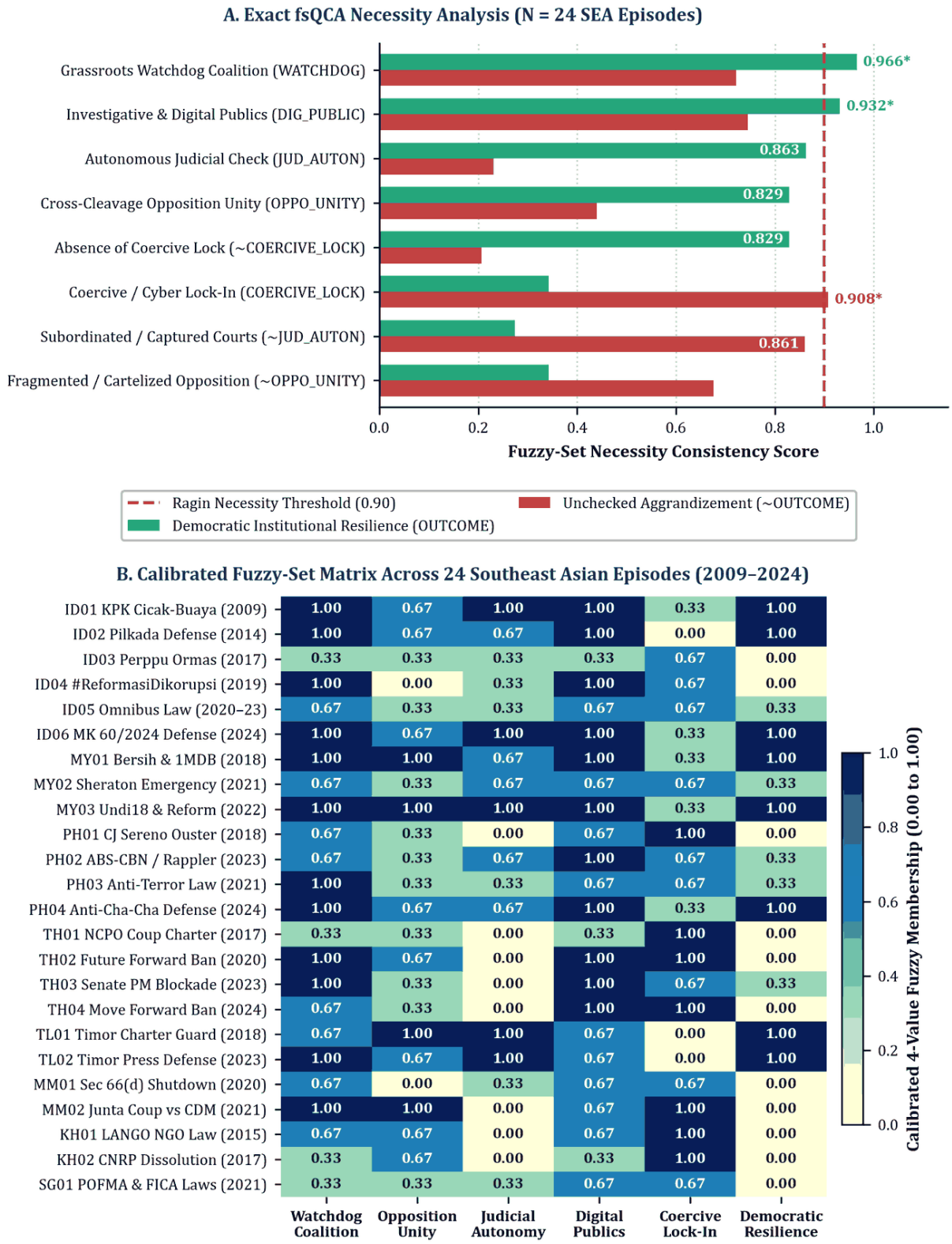



Figure 5. Set-theoretic necessity screening and calibrated 24-episode Southeast Asian fuzzy-set membership matrix. (A) Exact Ragin fsQCA necessity consistency scores against the 0.90 threshold, showing high necessity consistency for Grassroots Watchdog Coalitions (0.966) and Investigative/Digital Counter-Publics (0.932) in democratic resilience, and for Coercive/Cyber Lock-In (0.908) in unchecked aggrandizement. (B) Complete 24 × 6 calibrated four-value fuzzy-set heatmap spanning Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Singapore (2009–2024).

Modeling Unchecked Aggrandizement (~OUTCOME_RESILIENCE; Table 5, Panel B; Table 6, Panel C) gives the reverse picture. Coercive/Cyber Lock-In emerges as a necessary condition (COERCIVE_LOCK: consistency = 0.9080, coverage = 0.8876, RoN = 0.8496). Judicial subordination comes close to necessity (~JUD_AUTON: consistency = 0.8606, coverage = 0.9034, RoN = 0.8867). Quine–McCluskey minimization uncovers three sufficient backsliding pathways (Overall Solution Consistency = 0.9402, PRI = 0.9296, Coverage = 0.7226). Pathway P1_Backslide (~OPPO_UNITY * ~JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * COERCIVE_LOCK; consistency = 0.9587) covers ID04, ID05, PH01, PH03, TH03, TH04, MM01, SG01. Pathway P2_Backslide (~WATCHDOG * ~JUD_AUTON * ~DIG_PUBLIC * COERCIVE_LOCK; consistency = 1.0000) covers ID03, TH01, KH02. The third is Pathway P3_Backslide ('Blocked Mobilization': WATCHDOG * ~JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * COERCIVE_LOCK; consistency

= 0.9317, raw coverage = 0.6279), which covers ID04, ID05, PH01, PH03, TH02, TH03, TH04, MM01, MM02, KH01. Pathway P3 is consistent with the low RoN of WATCHDOG and DIG_PUBLIC. Mobilization was present (WATCHDOG ≥ 0.67) in ten major crises, from Indonesia's 2019 *#ReformasiDikorupsi* to Thailand's 2020–2023 youth waves and Myanmar's 2021 Civil Disobedience Movement. Yet apex courts were captured or bypassed (~JUD_AUTON) and coercive/statutory lock-in held. In those cases, bottom-up mobilization did not reach institutional translation.

Table 5. Polity-Level Contention Summary and Exact Ragin fsQCA Single-Condition Necessity Analysis for Democratic Institutional Resilience vs. Unchecked Aggrandizement (Tier 4: N = 24 Southeast Asian Episodes)

| Polity (episodes) | WATCHDOG (mean) | OPPO_UNITY (mean) | JUD_AUTON (mean) | COERCIVE_LOCK (mean) | Mean resilience; resilient episodes (>0.50) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Panel A: Polity-Stratified Fuzzy-Set Means Across N = 24 Contested Episodes (2009–2024)** | | | | | |
| Indonesia (n = 6 episodes) | WATCHDOG = 0.83 | OPPO_UNITY = 0.45 | JUD_AUTON = 0.61 \| COERCIVE_LOCK = 0.45 | Mean Resilience = 0.56 | 3 / 6 Resilient (>0.50) |
| Malaysia (n = 3 episodes) | WATCHDOG = 0.89 | OPPO_UNITY = 0.78 | JUD_AUTON = 0.78 \| COERCIVE_LOCK = 0.44 | Mean Resilience = 0.78 | 2 / 3 Resilient (>0.50) |
| Philippines (n = 4 episodes) | WATCHDOG = 0.83 | OPPO_UNITY = 0.42 | JUD_AUTON = 0.42 \| COERCIVE_LOCK = 0.67 | Mean Resilience = 0.42 | 1 / 4 Resilient (>0.50) |
| Thailand (n = 4 episodes) | WATCHDOG = 0.75 | OPPO_UNITY = 0.42 | JUD_AUTON = 0.00 \| COERCIVE_LOCK = 0.92 | Mean Resilience = 0.08 | 0 / 4 Resilient (>0.50) |
| Timor-Leste (n = 2 episodes) | WATCHDOG = 0.83 | OPPO_UNITY = 0.83 | JUD_AUTON = 1.00 \| COERCIVE_LOCK = 0.00 | Mean Resilience = 1.00 | 2 / 2 Resilient (>0.50) |
| Myanmar (n = 2 episodes) | WATCHDOG = 0.83 | OPPO_UNITY = 0.50 | JUD_AUTON = 0.17 \| COERCIVE_LOCK = 0.83 | Mean Resilience = 0.00 | 0 / 2 Resilient (>0.50) |
| Cambodia (n = 2 episodes) | WATCHDOG = 0.50 | OPPO_UNITY = 0.67 | JUD_AUTON = 0.00 \| COERCIVE_LOCK = 1.00 | Mean Resilience = 0.00 | 0 / 2 Resilient (>0.50) |
| Singapore (n = 1 episode) | WATCHDOG = 0.33 | OPPO_UNITY = 0.33 | JUD_AUTON = 0.33 \| COERCIVE_LOCK = 0.67 | Mean Resilience = 0.00 | 0 / 1 Resilient (>0.50) |
| **Panel B: Exact Single-Condition Necessity Screening (X and ~X Tested Against Both Outcomes)** | | | | | |
| **Southeast Asian Polity / Set-Theoretic Condition** | **Resilience Necessity Consistency** | **Resilience Coverage (RoN)** | **Aggrandizement (~OUTCOME) Necessity** | **Aggrandizement Coverage (RoN)** | **Set-Theoretic Interpretation (≥0.90)** |
| Grassroots Civic & Watchdog Coalition (WATCHDOG) | 0.9658 | 0.4989 (0.362) | 0.7213 | 0.5541 (0.390) | Necessary for Resilience (0.966 ≥ 0.90) |
| Investigative & Digital Counter-Publics (DIG_PUBLIC) | 0.9316 | 0.4810 (0.354) | 0.7449 | 0.5720 (0.399) | Necessary for Resilience (0.932 ≥ 0.90) |
| Autonomous Constitutional / Judicial Check (JUD_AUTON) | 0.8632 | 0.8064 (0.872) | 0.2314 | 0.3214 (0.661) | High-Salience Horizontal Anchor (0.863; RoN=0.872) |
| Cross-Cleavage Opposition Unity (OPPO_UNITY) | 0.8290 | 0.6319 (0.709) | 0.4397 | 0.4984 (0.641) | Key Electoral/Parliamentary Lever (0.829) |
| Coercive Security / Cyber Lock-In (COERCIVE_LOCK) | 0.3420 | 0.2248 (0.450) | 0.9080 | 0.8876 (0.850) | Necessary for Aggrandizement (0.908 ≥ 0.90) |
| Absence of Coercive Lock-In (~COERCIVE_LOCK) | 0.8290 | 0.8584 (0.917) | 0.2070 | 0.3187 (0.698) | High-Relevance Civic Opening (RoN = 0.918) |
| Subordinated / Captured Judiciary (~JUD_AUTON) | 0.2736 | 0.1931 (0.484) | 0.8606 | 0.9034 (0.887) | Near-Necessary for Backsliding (0.861; RoN=0.887) |
| Fragmented / Cartelized Opposition (~OPPO_UNITY) | 0.3420 | 0.2910 (0.612) | 0.6753 | 0.8545 (0.885) | Core Component of Cartelized Aggrandizement |

*Note: Four-value fuzzy sets calibrated at 0.00, 0.33, 0.67, and 1.00 (the membership matrix is shown in Figure 5B). Low RoN on WATCHDOG (0.362) and DIG_PUBLIC (0.354) indicates trivial necessity and reflects widespread citizen mobilization in coercive/captured episodes where ~JUD_AUTON * COERCIVE_LOCK blocked reform. Panel A shows means of the calibrated memberships in Figure 5B. Panel B values reproduce from the matrix in Figure 5B.*

Table 6. Exact Ragin Truth-Table Configurations and Conservative Quine–McCluskey Boolean Sufficiency Solutions Showing Asymmetry Between Democratic Resilience and Autocratic Aggrandizement (N = 24 Episodes)

| Truth-table row | Raw consistency | PRI consistency | Cases (n) | Outcome code | Episodes (membership > 0.50) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Panel A: Observed Truth-Table Configurations (2^5 = 32 Logical Corners; 7 Populated Empirical Rows, N = 24)** | | | | | |
| Row 11110 (W=1, O=1, J=1, D=1, C=0) | 0.9101 | 0.8904 | 8 | 1 | ID01, ID02, ID06, MY01, MY03, PH04, TL01, TL02 |
| Row 10111 (W=1, O=0, J=1, D=1, C=1) | 0.5360 | 0.3311 | 2 | 0 | MY02, PH02 |
| Row 11011 (W=1, O=1, J=0, D=1, C=1) | 0.3667 | 0.1419 | 3 | 0 | TH02, MM02, KH01 |
| Row 10011 (W=1, O=0, J=0, D=1, C=1) | 0.2585 | 0.0549 | 7 | 0 | ID04, ID05, PH01, PH03, TH03, TH04, MM01 |
| Row 00011 (W=0, O=0, J=0, D=1, C=1) | 0.2494 | 0.0000 | 1 | 0 | SG01 |

| Truth-table row | Raw consistency | PRI consistency | Cases (n) | Outcome code | Episodes (membership > 0.50) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Row 01001 (W=0, O=1, J=0, D=0, C=1) | 0.2215 | 0.0000 | 1 | 0 | KH02 |
| Row 00001 (W=0, O=0, J=0, D=0, C=1) | 0.1808 | 0.0000 | 2 | 0 | ID03, TH01 |
| **Panel B: Conservative Quine–McCluskey Sufficiency Solution for Democratic Institutional Resilience (OUTCOME_RESILIENCE)** | | | | | |
| **Truth-Table Row / Boolean Sufficiency Pathway** | **Raw Consistency** | **PRI Consistency** | **Raw Coverage** | **Unique Coverage** | **Empirically Covered Southeast Asian Episodes (Membership > 0.50)** |
| Pathway P1_Res: WATCHDOG * OPPO_UNITY * JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * ~COERCIVE_LOCK | 0.9101 | 0.8904 | 0.6922 | 0.6922 | ID01 KPK 2009, ID02 Pilkada 2014, ID06 MK 60/2024, MY01 Bersih/1MDB, MY03 Undi18, PH04 Anti-Cha-Cha, TL01, TL02 |
| Overall Resilience Solution Metrics | Cons = 0.9101 | PRI = 0.8904 | Cov = 0.6922 | | Exceeds Strict Ragin (0.80) & PRI (0.65) Sufficiency Benchmarks |
| **Panel C: Asymmetric Quine–McCluskey Sufficiency Solution for Unchecked Aggrandizement (~OUTCOME_RESILIENCE)** | | | | | |
| Pathway P1_Backslide: ~OPPO_UNITY * ~JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * COERCIVE_LOCK | 0.9587 | — | 0.5345 | 0.0237 | ID04 (Indonesia), ID05 (Indonesia), PH01 (Philippines), PH03 (Philippines), TH03 (Thailand), TH04 (Thailand), MM01 (Myanmar), SG01 (Singapore) |
| Pathway P2_Backslide: ~WATCHDOG * ~JUD_AUTON * ~DIG_PUBLIC * COERCIVE_LOCK | 1.0000 | — | 0.2780 | 0.0711 | ID03 (Indonesia), TH01 (Thailand), KH02 (Cambodia) |
| Pathway P3_Backslide: WATCHDOG * ~JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * COERCIVE_LOCK | 0.9317 | — | 0.6279 | 0.1171 | ID04 (Indonesia), ID05 (Indonesia), PH01 (Philippines), PH03 (Philippines), TH02 (Thailand), TH03 (Thailand), TH04 (Thailand), MM01 (Myanmar), MM02 (Myanmar), KH01 (Cambodia) |
| Overall Backsliding Solution Metrics | Cons = 0.9402 | PRI = 0.9296 | Cov = 0.7226 | 3 Disjunct Paths | Is consistent with 'Blocked Mobilization' under captured courts and coercion |

*Note: Conservative Quine–McCluskey minimization performed strictly over observed configurations meeting raw consistency ≥ 0.80 and Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency (PRI) ≥ 0.65 without remainder assumptions. Row-level consistencies in Panel A reproduce from the matrix in Figure 5B when all 24 episodes are weighted by their membership in each row.*

## 3.5. Counterfactual process tracing and integrative mixed-methods joint display

Table 7 brings together all four empirical tiers through counterfactual within-polity and cross-polity process tracing.[50,51,75] The most informative evidence is the within-country longitudinal contrast across Indonesia's six episodes (ID01–ID06). It holds national political culture and social structure constant. Horizontal and partisan conditions vary. Three episodes succeeded: 2009 (ID01: '*Cicak vs. Buaya*'), 2014 (ID02: Direct Pilkada repeal reversal), and August 2024 (ID06: *#PeringatanDarurat* defense of Constitutional Court Rulings 60 & 70/PUU-XXII/2024). Viral digital counter-publics and street coalitions prevailed in each. Why? An autonomous judicial arena supplied a legally self-executing focal point that fractured executive-legislative cartelization.[21,71] In 2009 and 2024 that arena was the Constitutional Court, which played KPK wiretap recordings in open court in the first case[76] and lowered the Pilkada nomination threshold in the second.[69] In 2014 it was constitutional Perppu authority backed by divided party elites. September 2019 (ID04: *#ReformasiDikorupsi*) went differently. Student-watchdog street protests were just as large, yet they failed to save the KPK's operational independence.[77,78] Three barriers closed every horizontal veto gate: a governing-coalition majority in the DPR, projected at 65.5% of seats before the 2019 election (OPPO_UNITY = 0.00),[79] riot-police repression (COERCIVE_LOCK = 0.67), and later Constitutional Court deference (JUD_AUTON = 0.33). Sectarian polarization had likewise split civil society during the 2017 Perppu Ormas decree (ID03 = 0.00).[80]

Cross-polity process tracing reinforces this Diagonal–Horizontal Interlock across Southeast Asia. Malaysia and the Philippines show it first. In Malaysia (MY01, MY03) and the Philippines (PH04), grassroots electoral-reform and church-civic watchdogs prevailed. Cross-ethnic opposition coalitions turned public outrage into binding vetoes (Pakatan Harapan in 2018; bipartisan Undi18 MOU plus the High Court order of 3 September 2021 to implement Undi18 by 31 December 2021[81]). So did institutional Senate/COMELEC pushback against paid 'People's Initiative' signatures (2024).[25,29,82] Timor-Leste's outlier resilience (TL01, TL02) points the same way. The country has lower income, a post-conflict history, and 35% Internet penetration. Even so, it repeatedly defeated executive overreach through Court of Appeal impartiality, cross-party constitutional norms, and Press Council/La'o Hamutuk vigilance. Elsewhere the result reversed. In Thailand (TH02–TH04), Cambodia (KH01–KH02), and Myanmar (MM02), extraordinary electoral mandates could not prevent autocratic entrenchment (Move Forward's 2023 victory monitored by the Vote62 network of more than 39,000 volunteers, who photographed tally boards at about 30,890 constituency polling units;[83] NLD's 2020 landslide backed by nationwide CDM strikes). Tutelary Constitutional Courts, unelected Senates, or military juntas had come to monopolize horizontal sovereignty.[27,30,31]

Table 7. Integrative Mixed-Methods Joint Display Uniting Macro Staggered DiD, WGI Governance Regressions, Subnational BPK/Pilkada Econometrics, and 24-Episode fsQCA Process Tracing

| Analytical Axis | Macro & Subnational Econometric Evidence (Tiers 1–3) | Set-Theoretic fsQCA & Within-Case Process Tracing (Tier 4: N = 24 SEA Episodes) | Mixed-Methods Meta-Inference & Theoretical Advance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Civic Space Compression & Sequential Autocratization | Tier 1: Civic space compression is followed by a −5.64 pt change in LibDem ($p = 7.1 \times 10^{-5}$) & −6.26 pt Polyarchy ($p = 3.1 \times 10^{-5}$) Callaway–Sant'Anna ATT (−7.08 & −8.01 at t+4). Tier 2: Higher WGI Voice is associated with higher Corruption Control (+0.372, $p = 1.3 \times 10^{-17}$) & Rule of Law (+0.463, $p = 4.2 \times 10^{-21}$). | fsQCA Backsliding P2 (~WATCHDOG * ~JUD_AUTON * ~DIG_PUBLIC * COERCIVE_LOCK; Cons=1.000: ID03 Perppu Ormas, TH01 NCPO Coup, KH02 CNRP Ban) & SG01 POFMA/FICA legalistic compression. | CONSISTENT WITH A SEQUENTIAL MECHANISM: Statutory or coercive civic compression is followed by institutional and anti-corruption decay rather than 'technocratic' order. |
| 2. The 'Diagonal–Horizontal Shield' in Episodic Resilience | Tier 1 Moderation: Polities with strong baseline Watchdog–Judicial Shields (≥71.2) buffer post-shock ATT to statistical parity (−1.82 at t+5, p = 0.755 vs. −5.84, p = 0.016 in weak-shield states). | fsQCA Resilience P1 (WATCHDOG * OPPO_UNITY * JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * ~COERCIVE_LOCK; Cons=0.910, PRI=0.890): ID01 KPK 2009, ID06 MK Ruling 60/2024 (*#PeringatanDarurat*), MY01 Bersih/1MDB, MY03 Undi18, PH04 Anti-Cha-Cha, TL01/TL02. | PROPOSED EXPLANATION: Diagonal street-digital mobilization is associated with halting aggrandizement when anchored by autonomous constitutional/electoral rulings and cross-cleavage opposition pacts. |
| 3. Asymmetric 'Blocked Mobilization' Under Court Capture | Tier 1: Severe V-Dem LibDem drops in Thailand (−13.62 pts), Indonesia 2018–2023 (−12.45 pts), Philippines (−9.79 pts), & post-2021 Myanmar (26.2 → 1.6). | fsQCA Backsliding P3 (WATCHDOG * ~JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * COERCIVE_LOCK; Cons=0.932, Cov=0.628): ID04 *#ReformasiDikorupsi* 2019, TH02/TH04 Future Forward & Move Forward dissolutions, PH01/PH03, MM02 Myanmar CDM vs. Junta. | PRODUCTIVE DISCORDANCE: A possible account of why high mobilization necessity (0.966) coexists with frequent failure—captured courts and lethal/statutory coercion sever street protest from institutional veto. |
| 4. National Pilkada Defense to Subnational Audit & Welfare Gains | Tier 3 (514 IDN Districts): Post-2015 Direct Pilkada Law 8/2015 × Civic Z is associated with higher BPK WTP clean audits (+8.86 pp, $p = 1.1 \times 10^{-9}$), lower patronage staff (−1.78 pp), higher capital goods (+3.02 pp), & lower poverty via clean audits (AIPW −3.76 pp; Q90 −13.90 pp). | Process Tracing of Episode ID02 (2014 #ShameOnYouSBY civic reversal of parliamentary indirect-Pilkada bill → Perppu 1/2014 & Law 8/2015) and ID06 (2024 MK 60/2024 defense of competitive Pilkada thresholds). | MULTI-LEVEL SYNTHESIS: National civic defense of local electoral competition is associated with subnational audit discipline, lower bureaucratic patronage, and lower extreme poverty. |

*Note: Constructed in accordance with refs.[50,51,84] mixed-methods integration standards. Episode IDs map 1:1 to the membership matrix in Figure 5B.*

# 4. Discussion

## 4.1. Theorizing the 'Diagonal–Horizontal Accountability Shield' against executive aggrandizement

This study combines staggered causal econometrics with configurational set theory. It advances comparative democratization scholarship by proposing 'Diagonal–Horizontal Shield Theory'.[1,2,6,32] Prevailing accounts of democratic resilience often split into two camps. Institutionalists stress constitutional parchment barriers,[2] while societal accounts celebrate autonomous street protest.[6,12] Our multi-tier evidence suggests that neither dimension is sufficient in isolation. At the macro level, civic space compression shocks are followed by compounding erosion in both Liberal Democracy (−5.64 pts overall; −7.08 pts at t+4) and Electoral Democracy (−6.26 pts overall; −8.01 pts at t+4). The erosion is clearer where baseline diagonal-horizontal shields are weak. Polities with strong civic-judicial shields, by contrast, show a smaller and statistically insignificant decline by t+5 (−1.82 pts at t+5, p = 0.755); the two groups were not compared formally.

At the episode level, fsQCA is consistent with a mechanism behind this buffering pattern. Diagonal accountability actors appear to act as agenda-setters and legitimacy disruptors; this mechanism was not measured. They include grassroots watchdog coalitions (0.9658 necessity) and investigative/digital counter-publics (0.9316 necessity). Without them, incumbents enacted authoritarian decrees with little resistance in these cases (Pathway P2_Backslide = 1.000 consistency, n = 3). Yet mobilization alone was not enough. 'Blocked Mobilization' (Pathway P3_Backslide = 0.9317 consistency) arises whenever incumbents command cohesive legislative cartels, subordinate constitutional courts, and deploy coercive or cyber-legal repression.[17,19,27,85] Democratic resilience appears when diagonal mobilization interlocks with horizontal judicial autonomy and cross-cleavage opposition unity (Sufficiency = 0.9101, PRI = 0.8904). Courts matter here. They provide legally authoritative focal rulings, such as Indonesia's MK Ruling 60/2024 or Malaysia's Undi18 High Court mandamus. Street and digital watchdogs then raise the political cost of executive non-compliance. The cost climbs beyond what ruling coalition partners will bear.[85,86]

## 4.2. Subnational democratic anchors: how local elections and public audits relate to welfare

Our Tier 2 and Tier 3 findings also challenge developmentalist justifications for civic space restriction in Southeast Asia.[87] The cross-national evidence is consistent with this view. Across 195 states, within-country gains in Voice and Accountability go together with better governance, although the panel does not show what happens when voice is compressed. WGI Voice and Accountability is positively associated, within countries, with Control of Corruption (+0.372, $p = 1.34 \times 10^{-17}$) and Rule of Law (+0.463, $p = 4.16 \times 10^{-21}$). Subnationally, the evidence from Indonesia's 514 districts links national regime contention (Episode ID02's 2014 rescue of Direct Pilkada) directly to local public-finance econometrics.[40,42,43]

Vertical electoral competition under Law No. 8/2015 was paired with standardized accrual auditing by Indonesia's independent Supreme Audit Board (BPK). The results were clear. Districts with stronger baseline civic-educated publics and local tax-accountability linkage showed a larger rise in clean WTP audit opinions (+8.86 pp TWFE; +25.60 pp AIPW). In those districts, bureaucratic personnel/patronage spending fell faster, by −1.78 pp TWFE (reaching −4.81 pp at the 90th patronage quantile). The capital public-goods infrastructure share grew faster, by +3.02 pp TWFE. Doubly Robust AIPW and RIF quantile estimates associate sustained clean BPK audit governance with a lower district poverty headcount, by −3.76 pp on average (E-value = 2.45) and by −13.90 pp in extreme-poverty Q90 districts. This may point to material benefits for poor citizens from protecting local electoral competition and fourth-branch audit agencies, although the TWFE welfare coefficients are null or adverse (Table 4, Panel A).

Our RIF unconditional quantile estimates speak to an open question in the decentralization and clientelism

literature on civil-service payroll spending.[40,43,47,88] Start with the 10th percentile of personnel share. These are geographically remote regencies that struggle with acute shortages of frontline nurses, midwives, and schoolteachers. There, BPK WTP audit compliance modestly supports core staffing (+2.25 pp, p = 0.010). The pattern reverses higher up. From the median to the 90th percentile, local incumbents historically inflated discretionary administrative allowances and auxiliary contract patronage ahead of electoral cycles, and in that range clean accrual auditing paired with educated local publics is associated with a lower personnel share (−1.84 pp at Q50 to −4.81 pp at Q90, p = $1.92 \times 10^{-09}$) and with budgets shifted toward capital public goods. This pattern is consistent with independent audit institutions and subnational electoral competition limiting payroll growth where personnel shares are highest; the mechanisms were not tested.

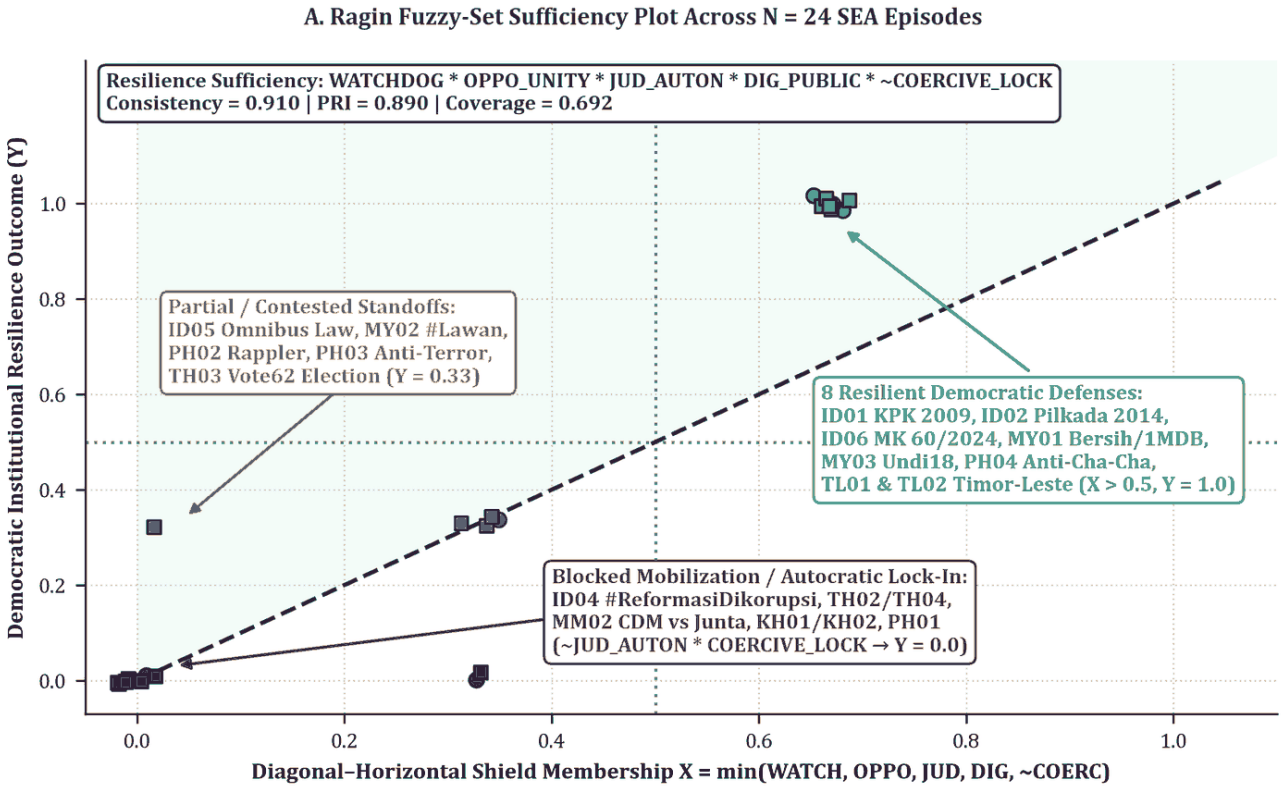
### 4.3. Navigating digital counter-publics and cyber-legal compression

Our findings also shed light on the double-edged politics of Southeast Asia's digital public sphere.[19,89,90] In Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, and the Philippines, Internet use ranges from 67.3% (Philippines) to 98.0% (Malaysia) (Table 2, Panel B). Digital counter-publics are therefore widely available for rapid watchdog coordination (necessity consistency 0.9316 for resilience, RoN = 0.3538). Examples are easy to find. Malaysia's #KerajaanGagal, Thailand's Vote62 crowd-sourced poll monitoring, and Indonesia's viral '*Garuda Biru*' *#PeringatanDarurat* mobilization all show it. Yet connectivity is not freedom. Ten of eleven Southeast Asian states combine Internet use of 45.4%–98.0% with negative WGI Voice scores (Timor-Leste, at +0.41, is the exception). This pairing is consistent with the use of cyber-defamation laws (ITE, POFMA, FICA, Section 112, Section 66d), state-linked cyber-troopers, and harassment of investigative newsrooms.[19,55,89,91] Digital activism needs statutory freedom-of-expression and press-shield protections. Otherwise, platformized visibility may be neutralized by legalistic intimidation.

### 4.4. Five-pillar institutional and civic reform protocol for democratic resilience

Grounded in our four-tier empirical evidence, we propose a five-pillar institutional reform protocol to strengthen democratic resilience across Southeast Asia and decentralizing democracies (Figure 6B). The pillars are proposals informed by, but not tested in, the evidence above. First, legislatures should repeal criminal cyber-defamation, sedition, and ministerial censorship clauses, such as Indonesia's ITE Law articles, Malaysia's Communications and Multimedia Act Section 233, and comparable regional statutes. They should enact statutory anti-SLAPP shields in their place. Partial protections already exist in Indonesia (Article 66 of Law No. 32/2009 and Supreme Court Regulation 1/2023), the Philippines (Rule 6 of the Rules of Procedure for Environmental Cases), and Thailand (dismissal of bad-faith criminal complaints), but they are narrow and unevenly applied.[92–94] Those shields would protect investigative journalists, academic researchers, student unions, and anti-corruption watchdogs.[1,19] Second, constitutional design should insulate horizontal 'fourth-branch' accountability institutions. These are Constitutional Courts (MK), Anti-Corruption Commissions (KPK), Election Commissions, and Supreme Audit Boards (BPK). Three safeguards matter. They are transparent, non-partisan selection panels that choose appointees on qualifications alone; staggered security of tenure; and statutory bans on appointments that involve executive or kinship conflicts of interest.[95,96]

Third, electoral laws should institutionalize competitive entry rules. They should also deter parliamentary cartelization. That means codifying lowered gubernatorial/mayoral nomination thresholds (building on Indonesia's MK Ruling 60/PUU-XXII/2024) and the removal of the presidential nomination threshold (as in MK Decision 62/PUU-XXII/2024[97]), together with anti-party-hopping mandates (building on Malaysia's 2022 constitutional amendment, in force from 5 October 2022[98]). Voters keep real programmatic alternatives.[10,12] Fourth, subnational governance reforms should formally couple direct Pilkada elections with participatory public-audit transparency. Village- and district-level open procurement dashboards would be linked to BPK audit follow-up recommendations, and statutory caps on bureaucratic personnel overhead would help fiscal transfers reach safe-water and anti-poverty capital investments.[40,43] Indonesia already publishes tender data through the national LPSE system and the Opentender.net platform,[99] although evidence that e-procurement curbs corruption in local governments is mixed.[100,101] Law No. 1/2022 already limits regional personnel spending to 30% of the regional budget (Article 146), so this pillar concerns enforcement and the overhead share.[102] Fifth, emergency powers and fast-track omnibus legislation (Perppu and Emergency Ordinances) should face mandatory 30-day substantive judicial review and legislative supermajority sunset clauses. This would limit executive tempo manipulation.[4] Article 22 of the Constitution already requires DPR approval of a Perppu at its next session,[103] and the Constitutional Court has accepted jurisdiction to review Perppu;[104] a time limit on that review and sunset clauses[105] would be new.



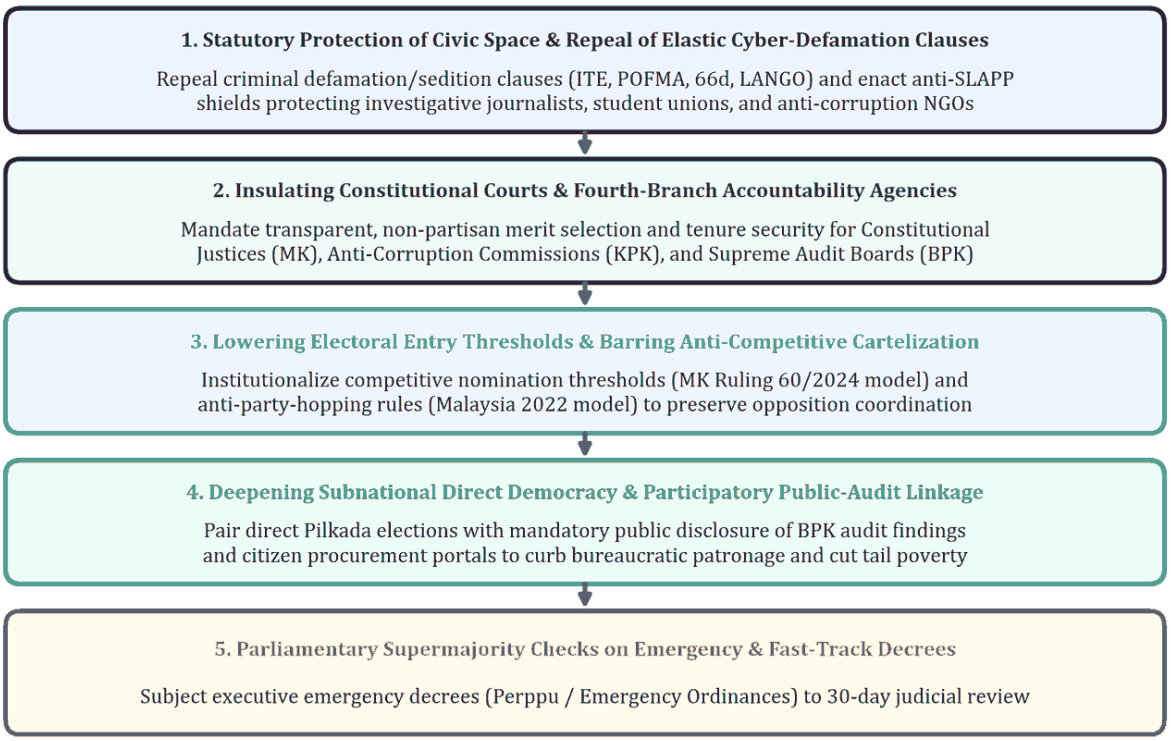




Figure 6. Ragin fuzzy-set X–Y sufficiency plot and institutional reform protocol for democratic resilience. (A) Sufficiency plot of the Diagonal–Horizontal Shield conjunction WATCHDOG * OPPO_UNITY * JUD_AUTON * DIG_PUBLIC * ~COERCIVE_LOCK → OUTCOME_RESILIENCE (Consistency = 0.910, PRI = 0.890, Coverage = 0.692), separating all 8 successful Southeast Asian democratic defenses from contested standoffs and blocked mobilizations. (B) Five-pillar legal and institutional reform protocol safeguarding civic space, fourth-branch judicial/audit autonomy, competitive electoral thresholds, and subnational participatory auditing.

### 4.5. Methodological limitations and future research agenda

We note three methodological scope boundaries, followed by further limitations. First, in Tier 1, our Callaway–Sant'Anna staggered DiD identifies discrete civic space compression shocks (≥7.0-point drops on the 0–100 FH civic space scale) among electoral polities. Sharp statutory or coercive crackdowns are cleanly captured. Slower sub-threshold 'salami-slicing' restrictions call for continuous-treatment panel extensions in future work.[45,106] Second, in Tier 3, the INDO-DAPOER subnational BPK audit series spans 2009–2019 (5,434 district-years). The fiscal/welfare series spans 2009–2020 (6,136 district-years). Together they capture the 2015 Direct Pilkada and the accrual-audit transition, before pandemic fiscal

emergency reallocations. Extending district-level BPK and Pilkada competitiveness micro-panels through the November 2024 synchronized regional elections across all 38 Indonesian provinces would allow tests of the downstream subnational effects of MK Ruling 60/2024.[43,107]

Third, in Tier 4, our N = 24 episode matrix intentionally focuses on salient national contention episodes across Southeast Asia's eight electoral, hybrid, and autocratizing polities. Three polities fall outside it. Closed single-party Vietnam and Laos and absolute monarchy Brunei are left out of episode-level QCA. They remain in the Tiers 1–2 macro panels.[48,49] Future mixed-methods studies should combine subnational protest-event geocoding with survey experiments among Indonesian, Filipino, Malaysian, and Thai voters. Such designs could trace thresholds. They would locate the micro-level points at which citizens defect from popular incumbents who attack judicial or anti-corruption guardrails.[36,108] Further limitations apply. The civic-watchdog capacity index (Z_Civic) is a proxy based on schooling, literacy, urban density, and tax share rather than a direct measure of watchdog activity. The Watchdog–Judicial Shield Index shares V-Dem components with the Liberal Democracy outcome. The Welch tests in Table 3 appear to treat district-years as independent observations. The post-2015 comparison is a single national shock that coincides with the first year of accrual accounting. The 24 episodes were coded by the authors without a second coder, several episode details are not yet sourced, and many tests are reported without adjustment for multiplicity.

## 5. Conclusion

This study draws on 210,805 records (file integrity checked by SHA-256 for the four public datasets; 24 author-coded episodes) from global and Southeast Asian longitudinal regime series (2000–2024), World Bank governance panels across 195 states, and 12-year subnational audit and fiscal panels across all 514 Indonesian districts. Exact Ragin fsQCA process tracing across 24 Southeast Asian contention episodes adds a case-level layer. The evidence suggests that civic space is central to democratic survival and accountable governance. Cross-nationally, civic space compression shocks are followed by dynamic losses in Liberal Democracy (−5.64 points) and Electoral Democracy (−6.26 points). Within countries, gains in Voice and Accountability go together with better corruption control. Polities with strong pre-shock Diagonal–Horizontal Watchdog Shields show a smaller and statistically insignificant decline by t+5, although the difference from weak-shield polities was not tested.

Subnationally, across Indonesia's 514 regencies and cities, districts with higher civic-fiscal capacity showed faster gains in clean public financial management after the defense of direct local elections and independent BPK accrual auditing (+8.86 pp TWFE; +25.60 pp AIPW). Their clientelist bureaucratic payrolls fell faster (−1.78 pp TWFE; −4.81 pp at Q90). Their public capital infrastructure share rose faster (+3.02 pp TWFE). Sustained clean audits were associated with lower extreme poverty (−3.76 pp AIPW; −13.90 pp at Q90). In set-theoretic terms, grassroots watchdog coalitions (0.9658 necessity) and investigative digital counter-publics (0.9316 necessity) are associated with the defeat of executive aggrandizement (Consistency = 0.9101, PRI = 0.8904). This holds specifically when they interlock with cross-cleavage opposition unity and autonomous judicial checks. Court capture and coercive lock-in (0.9080 necessity) accompany blocked mobilization in the other episodes. Protecting open civic space therefore matters. Independent courts and subnational electoral-audit accountability are likely to matter as well, for both democratic resilience and equitable human development in Southeast Asia.

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## 6. Declarations

### Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

None. The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used in the design, analysis, or writing of this manuscript.

### Author Contribution Statement

Conceptualization: C.N. Methodology: C.N. Software: C.N. Validation: D.A.S. Formal analysis: C.N. Investigation: C.N., D.A.S. Resources: C.N. Data curation: C.N. Writing – original draft: C.N. Writing – review & editing: D.A.S. Visualization: C.N. Supervision: D.A.S. Project administration: C.N.

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### Conflict of Interest / Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

### Data Availability Statement

All analyzed data are public: the Quality of Government Standard Time-Series Dataset (January 2025 release) with the V-Dem, Freedom House, BTI and WJP series distributed in it, the World Bank WGI and WDI, and INDO-DAPOER (BPK audit opinions and BPS statistics).

### Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study analyzed only publicly archived governance datasets, official aggregated Indonesian audit and fiscal statistics, and public constitutional, legislative, and historical records of 24 Southeast Asian episodes. No human-subjects intervention or private personal data collection was conducted. The study was approved by Ethical Committee of Social Research, Enigma Institute, Indonesia (approval number 2026/166).

### Consent for Publication

Not applicable. No identifiable individual-level data, clinical records, or personal images are included.

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