

The Synergy of Strategic Leadership and State Defense Governance: A Literature Analysis of Civil–Military Relations Models

Rio Akmal Syahbana¹, Asep Adang Supriadi¹, Basuki Rahmad Saleh¹

¹Universitas Pertahanan, Program Doktorat, Jakarta, 10430, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: Rio Akmal Syahbana

E-mail: rioakmal12@gmail.com



Article Info

Article history:

Received 5 July 2026

Received in revised form 7

August 2026

Accepted 13 September 2026

Keywords:

Strategic Leadership

Civil-Military Relations

Defense Governance

Public Value

Abstract

In the contemporary era, Indonesia's national defense can no longer be understood merely as the deployment of military force; rather, it is a matter of strategic governance requiring policy coherence, inter-agency coordination, democratic accountability, and the ability to adapt to multidimensional threats. Current defense dynamics indicate that civil-military relations are relatively stable yet remain in a transitional phase, as the strengthening of civilian capacity, democratic oversight, and the clear delineation of civil-military roles have not yet fully matured. The central issue addressed in this paper is the lack of integration between studies of strategic leadership, public value governance, and civil-military relations in explaining the effectiveness of Indonesia's defense governance. The proposed solution is an integrative model that positions strategic leadership as the guiding force, civil-military relations as the connecting mechanism, and defense governance as the desired outcome. The paper concludes that Indonesia's defense reform must focus on strengthening strategic leadership, institutional civilian capacity, military professionalism, and parliamentary oversight, alongside fostering a defense governance system that is democratic, adaptive, and oriented toward public value.

Introduction

In the contemporary era, national defense can no longer be narrowly understood as merely a matter of deploying military force, modernizing primary weapon systems, or maintaining combat readiness. The increasingly multidimensional nature of threats has transformed defense into an issue of strategic governance involving numerous actors, including civilian authorities, military organizations, parliament, the bureaucracy, the defense industry, civil society, and international cooperation networks. Threats to the state no longer arise solely from conventional warfare but also from cyber threats, disinformation, disruptions to strategic supply chains, maritime tensions, technological competition, and regional geopolitical dynamics. Under these conditions, defense effectiveness is largely determined by the state's capacity to establish coherent policy directions, integrate civilian and military actors, and ensure that all defense policies operate within a framework of democratic accountability and the public interest.

From a public administration perspective, this transformation aligns with the growing concept of strategic public value governance. Strategic public governance requires state institutions not only to perform administrative functions but also to align objectives, actors, resources, collaborative processes, and democratic legitimacy to generate public value (Thabit, Sancino, & Mora, 2025). In the defense sector, such public value is manifested in national security, public trust, policy effectiveness, accountable budget utilization, and the state's capacity to respond adaptively to emerging threats. Therefore, strong national defense should not be

measured solely by military capacity but also by the quality of governance connecting strategic vision, civil–military relations, democratic oversight, and public support.

Indonesia's current circumstances indicate that defense governance continues to face complex challenges. On the one hand, Indonesia has progressed significantly from the pattern of overt military dominance during the authoritarian era toward a more democratic political system. Civil–military relations are also relatively stable and have not exhibited open conflict that could disrupt democratic consolidation. However, this stability does not yet fully reflect the maturity of defense governance. Several studies indicate that Indonesia's civil–military relations remain transitional, partly because civilianization within the Ministry of Defense has not been fully completed, substantive civilian capacity still needs to be strengthened, and parliamentary oversight tends to operate through a pattern of cooperative oversight that does not always result in robust democratic control (Ng & Kurniawan, 2024; Mietzner, 2023; Haripin, Priamarizki, & Nugroho, 2023).

These issues have direct implications for societal needs. National defense is fundamentally a public need because it concerns security, sustainable development, the protection of sovereignty, and the use of state resources originating from the public. Society requires a defense system that is not only militarily strong but also transparent, accountable, responsive, and capable of addressing modern threats without compromising democratic principles. When defense governance lacks coherence, defense policies risk becoming sectoral, insufficiently measurable, less open to public scrutiny, and inadequately responsive to society's security needs. Therefore, defense governance is not merely a concern of state elites or military institutions; it is also a matter of broad public interest, as society is the primary beneficiary of national security.

Gaps are also evident at the levels of policy and resource management. Indonesia's defense acquisition strategy faces tensions among capability modernization requirements, defense-industrial capacity, budgetary priorities, and the political-economic realities of procurement (Matthews et al., 2025). This situation demonstrates that defense effectiveness cannot be adequately explained through strategic rhetoric or the size of the defense budget alone. Instead, it must be assessed according to the state's capacity to translate its defense vision into realistic, measurable, accountable, and implementable policies. Without strong strategic leadership and sound civil–military relations, defense policies risk becoming fragmented, reactive, and poorly aligned with the country's long-term needs.

Studies of strategic leadership have generally developed within the traditions of public management, public value governance, and robust governance. Meanwhile, civil–military relations have predominantly been examined within security studies and defense studies. The separation between these two bodies of scholarship has created an analytical gap, as relatively few studies explicitly explain how strategic leadership operates through civil–military relations to produce effective defense governance. In practice, however, a strategic vision cannot be translated directly into defense policy without institutional mechanisms involving civilian authorities, military organizations, parliament, the defense bureaucracy, and other supporting actors.

The originality of this study lies in its effort to bring these two bodies of scholarship together within an integrative framework. This study positions strategic leadership as a guiding factor, civil–military relations as the institutional mechanism mediating the policy process, and national defense governance as the intended outcome. Through this framework, the discussion of Indonesian defense moves beyond the civilian-versus-military dichotomy toward a more substantive analysis of how leadership vision, civilian capacity, military professionalism,

democratic oversight, interinstitutional trust, and public-value orientation interact to shape the effectiveness of defense governance.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study aims to analyze the relationship among strategic leadership, civil–military relations, and Indonesia’s national defense governance. More specifically, it seeks to explain how strategic leadership is understood within the defense sector, how civil–military relations function as an institutional mechanism, and how this integrative model can explain Indonesia’s relatively stable yet still transitional defense-governance environment. Accordingly, this study is important because it offers a conceptual contribution to the development of defense studies while also providing practical insights into strengthening Indonesia’s defense reforms in ways that are democratic, adaptive, accountable, and oriented toward the interests of society.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative integrative literature review to develop a conceptual explanation of the relationships among strategic leadership, civil–military relations, and national defense governance. This design was selected because the research integrates two bodies of scholarship that have generally developed separately: public administration and public-value governance, and defense studies and civil–military relations. The review did not aim to estimate an effect size or test statistical mediation. Instead, it compared theoretical arguments and empirical findings, identified recurring patterns, and developed an analytical model applicable to the Indonesian defense context.

The literature search focused on Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2021 and 2026, particularly articles from journals ranked in the Q1–Q3 categories. The search terms included “strategic leadership,” “public value governance,” “civil–military relations,” “democratic civilian control,” “military professionalism,” “defense ministry,” “parliamentary oversight,” “defense governance,” “hybrid threats,” “cybersecurity,” and “Indonesia defense.” The search covered international scholarship needed to establish the conceptual foundations and Indonesia-specific studies needed to interpret the country’s institutional, political, and defense conditions. The reference lists of relevant articles were also examined to identify additional studies that directly informed the analytical framework.

Studies were included when they met the following criteria: they were published in peer-reviewed academic journals within the specified period; addressed strategic leadership, civil–military relations, defense governance, or relevant contextual factors; provided a clear conceptual or empirical contribution; and were relevant to democratic governance or the Indonesian defense context. Duplicate records, popular or media-based commentary, publications outside the specified period, studies without substantive relevance to the research question, and sources without an identifiable analytical contribution were excluded. The selection process involved an initial assessment of titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text assessment based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Each selected study served as a unit of analysis. Relevant information was extracted into a structured analytical matrix covering the author and publication year, study context, principal concept, research focus, key findings or arguments, relevance to Indonesia, and relationship to the proposed framework. The extracted evidence was then coded deductively according to the X–M–Y framework. Strategic leadership (X) was positioned as the guiding construct, civil–military relations (M) as the institutional mechanism connecting strategic direction with policy implementation, and national defense governance (Y) as the intended outcome. In this study, the term “mediating mechanism” is conceptual rather than statistical. It refers to the

institutional processes through which strategic leadership is translated into defense-policy planning, coordination, oversight, budgeting, and implementation.

The analysis combined qualitative content analysis and thematic synthesis. Content analysis was used to identify recurring concepts and arguments concerning long-term strategic vision, adaptation, actor integration, civilian supremacy, military professionalism, civilian institutional capacity, parliamentary oversight, policy coherence, budgetary accountability, democratic legitimacy, and responsiveness to emerging threats. The identified similarities, differences, and relationships across studies were subsequently consolidated into five themes corresponding directly to the Results section: strategic leadership, civil–military relations, national defense governance, contextual variables, and the originality of the integrative model. Regional geopolitics, hybrid and cyber threats, bureaucratic capacity, democratic quality, and elite politics were treated as contextual conditions that could strengthen or weaken the proposed relationships.

Analytical credibility was maintained through source appraisal, cross-study comparison, and traceability between the reviewed evidence and the resulting synthesis. Priority was given to reputable peer-reviewed journals, while each source was assessed based on its relevance, conceptual clarity, and contribution to the research question. Findings from public-administration scholarship were compared with evidence from defense studies and civil–military-relations research to identify convergent and divergent interpretations. The final synthesis was presented through analytical narratives, synthesis tables, and a conceptual framework. These outputs position strategic leadership as the guiding factor, civil–military relations as the connecting institutional mechanism, national defense governance as the outcome, and contextual variables as conditioning influences. Thus, the methodological procedures correspond directly to the themes, indicators, tables, and conceptual model presented in the Results section.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study were derived from a synthesis of literature across two primary fields of inquiry: strategic leadership and public governance, and civil-military relations and defense governance. The study’s primary output consists not of empirical statistical data, but rather a conceptual mapping, a thematic synthesis, and the construction of an integrative model explaining the relationships among strategic leadership, civil-military relations, and national defense governance. Accordingly, the results are presented through analytical narratives, synthesis tables, and a conceptual framework diagram developed from a review of reputable journal articles and defense literature relevant to the Indonesian context. (Thabit, Sancino, & Mora, 2025; Mukherjee & Pion-Berlin, 2022; Ng & Kurniawan, 2024).

Table 1. Summary of research synthesis based on key variables

No.	Research Finding Component	Synthesis Outcome	Implications for Defense Governance
1	Strategic Leadership	Strategic leadership is understood as an institutional capacity to develop a long-term vision, adapt to change, integrate relevant actors, and promote a public-value orientation.	It serves as a guiding factor in formulating coherent and adaptive defense policies.
2	Civil–Military Relations	Civil–military relations function as a mediating mechanism that	They determine the quality of coordination, civilian control,

		connects leadership vision with the implementation of defense policies.	military professionalism, and interinstitutional trust.
3	National Defense Governance	Defense governance is understood as an outcome encompassing policy coherence, interinstitutional coordination, budgetary oversight, democratic legitimacy, and responsiveness to emerging threats.	It provides a broader measure of defense effectiveness beyond military strength alone.
4	Contextual Variables	Regional geopolitics, hybrid and cyber threats, bureaucratic capacity, and democratic quality influence the strength of the relationships among the principal variables.	These factors explain why Indonesia has relatively stable civil–military relations but remains transitional in strengthening its defense governance.
5	Research Novelty	The integrative model positions strategic leadership as the guiding factor, civil–military relations as the mediator, and defense governance as the outcome.	It provides a conceptual contribution to democratic defense studies and Indonesia’s defense reform.

Source: Authors' synthesis based on Thabit, Sancino, and Mora (2025); Kitchener and Ashworth (2025); Mukherjee and Pion-Berlin (2022); Ng and Kurniawan (2024); Mietzner (2023); Haripin, Priamarizki, and Nugroho (2023).

Table 1 illustrates that the study’s primary contribution lies in establishing the conceptual relationships among strategic leadership, civil–military relations, state defense governance, contextual variables, and the study’s novel aspects. The new information presented in the table is not merely a summary of the literature but represents the authors’ synthesis, which positions each variable within an interconnected analytical framework. Strategic leadership is positioned as the driving factor because it determines policy direction, institutional priorities, resource allocation, and public value orientation. Through strategic leadership, national defense objectives can be translated into institutional agendas and coordinated actions across relevant governmental and military institutions. Therefore, the effectiveness of defense governance depends not only on the formal authority of leaders but also on their capacity to develop a shared strategic vision, manage institutional complexity, and align organizational interests with broader national priorities.

Civil–military relations serve as a mediating mechanism because any strategic vision within the defense sector must navigate the institutional relationships among civilian authorities, military organizations, parliament, and the defense bureaucracy before becoming effective policy. This mediating role indicates that strategic leadership does not directly produce effective defense governance. Its influence is shaped by the quality of civilian control, institutional trust, role clarity, communication, coordination, and accountability among defense actors. When these relationships are cooperative and institutionally balanced, strategic priorities are more likely to be translated into coherent and legitimate policies. Conversely, institutional rivalry, unclear authority, military dominance, or weak parliamentary oversight may hinder the implementation of strategic decisions.

Defense governance is positioned as the outcome, reflecting the final result of leadership processes and civil–military relations in terms of policy coherence, interinstitutional coordination, democratic oversight, public legitimacy, accountability, and responsiveness to security threats. In this framework, effective defense governance is therefore understood not

simply as administrative efficiency or military effectiveness but as the capacity of the defense system to integrate strategic objectives, democratic principles, institutional responsibilities, and changing security demands. Contextual variables including geopolitical pressures, bureaucratic capacity, political dynamics, institutional culture, technological change, and the quality of democracy may strengthen or weaken these relationships. Consequently, similar leadership approaches may produce different governance outcomes under different national and institutional conditions. The framework thus emphasizes that defense governance emerges from the interaction between leadership, civil–military institutional arrangements, and the broader context in which defense policies are formulated and implemented (Kitchener & Ashworth, 2025; Mukherjee, 2022; Waardenburg et al., 2025).

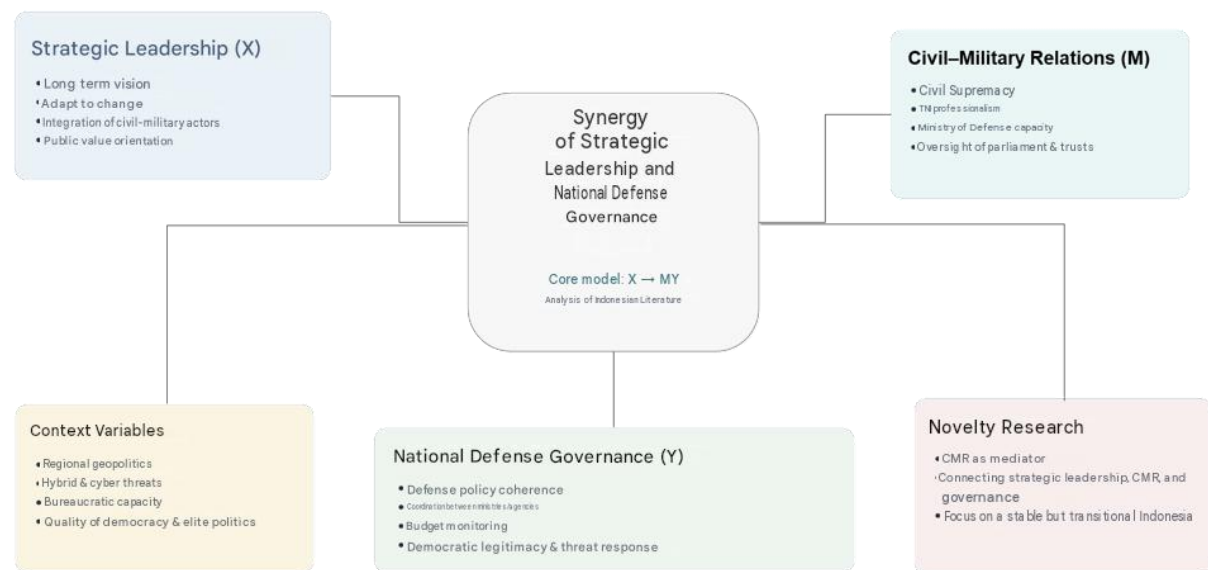


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the synergy between strategic leadership and state defense governance.

Source: The authors' synthesis of the literature on strategic leadership, civil–military relations, and defense governance.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships among the variables that form the basis of the discussion of the study's findings. Strategic leadership is positioned as the guiding variable because it serves to establish a long-term vision, facilitate adaptation to change, integrate civilian and military actors, and promote a public-value orientation. *Civil–military relations* are positioned as the mediating variable because they constitute the institutional channel connecting leadership vision with the planning, oversight, coordination, and implementation of defense policies. National defense governance is positioned as the outcome because it represents the expected result of this process. Contextual variables, including regional geopolitics, hybrid and cyber threats, bureaucratic capacity, and democratic quality, are positioned as factors that may strengthen or weaken the relationships among these principal variables (Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2023; Torfing et al., 2025; Berthelsen, 2025).

Strategic Leadership as the Foundation of National Defense Governance

The literature synthesis indicates that, in contemporary national defense, the most fundamental issue is no longer merely the size of a country's military power. A more decisive issue is whether the state can provide direction, establish priorities, connect diverse actors, and develop a coherent strategic vision for the defense sector. The increasingly multidimensional nature of threats including regional geopolitical competition, cyber threats, disinformation, supply-chain disruptions, and maritime tensions demonstrates that defense cannot be governed solely

through the logic of command and force deployment. Modern defense requires leadership capable of interpreting the strategic environment, integrating institutional capacities, and positioning defense policy as part of the broader system of state governance (Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2023; Torfing et al., 2025).

The findings demonstrate that strategic leadership should be understood as an institutional capacity rather than merely an individual leader's attributes. Leaders undoubtedly play an important role in determining policy direction within the defense sector; however, defense effectiveness cannot depend solely on the president, minister of defense, or military commander. Strategic leadership should be understood as the defense system's capacity to establish a shared vision, maintain policy continuity, integrate civilian and military roles, and ensure that strategic decisions are translated into concrete institutional agendas. Strategic leadership therefore provides the foundation that enables the state to establish defense governance that is not reactive but visionary, adaptive, and oriented toward long-term objectives (Kitchener & Ashworth, 2025; Dandalt, 2024; Andersen & Groeneveld, 2025).

The findings also indicate that strategic leadership in the defense sector must be situated within the framework of *public value governance*. This means that defense policies should be evaluated not only according to their success in developing military capabilities but also according to the extent to which they generate public value in the form of security, legitimacy, accountability, and public trust. Within this context, strategic leadership must go beyond producing planning documents by ensuring that strategies are understood by implementing actors, democratically accepted, and operationalized through measurable institutional mechanisms. A public-value orientation is particularly important because the defense sector utilizes substantial state resources and directly affects the interests of society as a whole (Thabit, Sancino, & Mora, 2025; Virtanen & Jalonen, 2024; Koliba, 2024).

A significant outcome of this literature synthesis is the identification of four principal indicators of strategic leadership in defense governance. The first is a long-term vision that prevents defense policy from becoming confined to short-term responses. The second is the capacity to adapt to changes in the strategic environment, particularly hybrid and cyber threats and regional geopolitical dynamics. The third is the capacity to integrate civilian and military actors to prevent the fragmentation of defense policy. The fourth is a public-value orientation that ensures defense policy remains consistent with democracy, accountability, and the public interest. These four indicators constitute a conceptual contribution that clarifies the position of strategic leadership as the guiding variable within the proposed research model (Kitchener & Ashworth, 2025; Fischer & Schott, 2025; Fohim, Jacobs, & Sieger, 2025).

In the Indonesian context, strategic leadership has become increasingly important because defense governance involves numerous actors and interests. The president, Ministry of Defense, Indonesian National Armed Forces, parliament, technical ministries, defense industry, cybersecurity institutions, and civil society perform interconnected roles in shaping defense policy. This complexity requires leadership that is capable not only of making decisions but also of managing coordination, reducing institutional fragmentation, fostering interinstitutional trust, and ensuring policy continuity. Without strong strategic leadership, defense policies risk becoming sectoral, reactive, and insufficiently aligned with the country's continually evolving national security needs (Steccolini et al., 2025; Plaček et al., 2024; Currie et al., 2025).

National Defense Governance as an Outcome Broader Than Military Power

The findings indicate that national defense governance must be understood as an outcome extending beyond military power. In many policy discourses, defense is still frequently reduced

to the modernization of primary weapon systems, military posture, or combat readiness. Although these measures are important, they are insufficient to explain defense effectiveness in a modern democratic state. Effective defense governance must encompass policy coherence, interinstitutional coordination, budgetary oversight, resource management, democratic legitimacy, and adaptive responses to threats. Military power therefore constitutes only one component of the broader defense system (Ångström, Dalsjö, & Widerberg, 2024; Li, Tang, & Wen, 2026).

These findings demonstrate that defense effectiveness should be assessed according to the state's capacity to connect its strategic vision with implementable policies. A state may possess a sound defense doctrine and ambitious military modernization plans; however, without policy coherence, interinstitutional coordination, and effective budgetary oversight, its defense objectives will be difficult to achieve. Defense governance therefore measures not only military outputs but also the quality of the policy processes that support the exercise of state power. From this perspective, a strong defense system is one that is not only capable of confronting threats but also capable of managing authority and resources accountably (Ohl, 2025; Waardenburg, Groenleer, & de Jong, 2025).

Table 2. Mapping of state defense governance indicators

No.	Defense Governance Indicator	Meaning in This Study	Synthesis Finding
1	Policy Coherence	Alignment among defense visions, strategies, programs, and implementation.	Stronger integration between strategic direction and resource-allocation decisions is still required.
2	Interinstitutional Coordination	The ability of civilian authorities, military institutions, parliament, and the bureaucracy to work toward a common policy direction.	Coordination is a fundamental requirement because contemporary defense threats are cross-sectoral.
3	Budgetary Oversight	Control over the use of defense resources to ensure effectiveness and accountability.	Budgetary oversight constitutes a substantive indicator of the quality of defense governance.
4	Democratic Legitimacy	Public acceptance of defense policies and their conformity with democratic principles.	A strong defense system must remain subject to civilian control and public accountability.
5	Threat Responsiveness	The state's capacity to respond to conventional, hybrid, and cyber threats.	Modern threats require responses that are not merely coercive but also coordinated and adaptive.

Source: The authors' synthesis based on Li, Tang, and Wen (2026); Waardenburg, Groenleer, and de Jong (2025); Matthews et al. (2025); and Wibisono, Kumendong, and Maulana (2025).

Table 2 demonstrates that national defense governance comprises several interconnected indicators. Policy coherence is required to ensure that defense strategies do not remain merely normative documents but instead provide a foundation for program development, procurement,

and resource management. Interinstitutional coordination is essential because contemporary defense threats can no longer be addressed by a single institution acting independently. Budgetary oversight is necessary because the use of defense resources must be democratically accountable. Public legitimacy is required to secure social and political support for defense policies, while threat responsiveness measures the state's capacity to adapt to changes in the strategic environment (Matthews et al., 2025; Wibisono, Kumendong, & Maulana, 2025).

The findings also demonstrate that the concept of *total defence* provides an important foundation for understanding Indonesia's defense governance. This concept suggests that national defense cannot be entrusted solely to military organizations but instead requires the integration of *whole-of-government* and *whole-of-society* approaches. In the Indonesian context, this means that defense policy must be connected to fiscal policy, defense-industrial development, diplomacy, cybersecurity, societal resilience, and national development. National defense governance must therefore be positioned as a cross-sectoral policy system requiring strong leadership, coordination, and accountability (Ångström, Dalsjö, & Widerberg, 2024; Krogh & Triantafillou, 2024).

Budgetary concerns constitute one of the key findings concerning defense governance. Indonesia's defense acquisition strategy operates amid tensions among capability-modernization requirements, defense-industrial capacity, and budgetary constraints. This situation demonstrates that defense-spending decisions cannot be separated from strategic vision and credible oversight mechanisms. When spending priorities are not aligned with strategic requirements, defense modernization may become fragmented and less effective. Conversely, when budgetary decisions are subject to accountable oversight and guided by a clear strategic vision, defense governance becomes more coherent and sustainable (Matthews et al., 2025; Schillemans & Aleksovska, 2025).

Defense governance must also be considered in relation to responses to nontraditional threats. Cyber threats, disinformation, digital terrorism, and attacks on critical infrastructure cannot be addressed solely through conventional military approaches. Such threats require interinstitutional coordination, technological capacity, adaptive regulations, public literacy, and sound information governance. The synthesis indicates that purely repressive measures are insufficient to address modern threats because such threats evolve rapidly, transcend national borders, and frequently exploit the digital environment. Effective defense governance must therefore combine coercive, coordinative, preventive, and adaptive capabilities (Wibisono, Kumendong, & Maulana, 2025; Kühn & Williams, 2025; Schneider, 2025).

Civil–Military Relations as a Mediating Mechanism

The findings indicate that *civil–military relations* constitute a decisive mediating mechanism in the relationship between strategic leadership and defense governance. In a democratic state, defense-related challenges cannot be addressed merely by formally establishing civilian supremacy. A more significant challenge is ensuring that civilian supremacy operates effectively in practice without undermining military professionalism or the effectiveness of defense policy. Civil–military relations should therefore not be understood merely in terms of who controls whom, but rather as an institutional mechanism that translates civilian political visions into defense-policy planning, oversight, coordination, and implementation (Mukherjee & Pion-Berlin, 2022; Mukherjee, 2022).

The synthesis indicates that the Ministry of Defense occupies a strategic position at the intersection of democratic civilian control and military effectiveness. The Ministry of Defense functions not only as an administrative institution but also as a bridge between civilian political decisions and the professional requirements of the military organization. When civilian

capacity within the Ministry of Defense is weak, civilian control tends to remain formal and is unable to provide substantive direction for defense policy. Conversely, when civilian capacity is strong, the Ministry of Defense can function effectively in defense-policy planning, budgeting, oversight, and evaluation (Mukherjee & Pion-Berlin, 2022; Mukherjee, 2022).

The findings also demonstrate that the quality of civil–military relations cannot be measured solely by whether officials have civilian backgrounds or whether legal provisions formally establish civilian supremacy. Formal civilian supremacy can coexist with informal military dominance when civilian authorities lack the substantive capacity to direct and oversee the defense sector. Therefore, the quality of *civil–military relations* should be assessed through several indicators: substantive civilian supremacy, military professionalism, the capacity of the Ministry of Defense, parliamentary oversight, and interinstitutional trust. These indicators demonstrate that healthy civil–military relations result from mutually reinforcing institutional design, actor capacity, and organizational culture (Kim & Kuehn, 2022; Ateş, 2024).

Trust represents another important finding of this study. Interinstitutional trust does not imply the absence of control, criticism, or oversight; rather, it reflects an institutional relationship that enables civilian and military actors to pursue shared objectives while maintaining clearly defined roles. Without trust, strategic leadership may remain confined to the level of vision because it lacks an effective institutional channel through which that vision can be translated into policy. Conversely, relationships founded on trust, professionalism, and accountability strengthen coordination and reduce fragmentation within defense governance (Fischer & Schott, 2025; Livingstone, 2025).

In the Indonesian context, the findings indicate that civil–military relations are relatively stable but remain transitional. This stability is significant because it demonstrates that Indonesia has progressed considerably from the pattern of overt military dominance that characterized the authoritarian era. Nevertheless, stability does not automatically mean that civilian control has substantively matured. Studies of Indonesia indicate that the *civilianization* of the Ministry of Defense remains incomplete, parliamentary oversight tends to be cooperative, and substantive civilian authority still requires further strengthening. Indonesia is therefore not experiencing an overt crisis in civil–military relations, but it continues to face challenges related to institutional deepening (Ng & Kurniawan, 2024; Mietzner, 2023; Haripin, Priamarizki, & Nugroho, 2023).

The conceptual contribution of this section lies in positioning *civil–military relations* as a mediator rather than merely an institutional background condition. This positioning is important because strategic decisions in the defense sector cannot be directly transformed into outcomes without passing through civil–military institutional mechanisms. Decisions concerning strategy, doctrine, procurement, organizational structure, budgetary oversight, and threat responses invariably involve interactions between civilian and military actors. Consequently, the strength or weakness of civil–military relations determines whether strategic leadership can effectively produce sound defense governance (Mukherjee, 2022; Roberts, 2026).

Defense reform cannot be understood solely through changes in leadership, legal frameworks, or budgetary increases. Defense reform becomes effective when civil–military relations can bridge strategic vision and institutional governance. When civil–military relations are strong, strategic leadership gains an institutional channel through which it can generate coordination, accountability, and policy consistency. When these relations are weak, strategic leadership tends to remain at the discursive level, while defense governance becomes unbalanced and

insufficiently adaptive to emerging threats (Ng & Kurniawan, 2024; Mietzner, 2023; Roberts, 2026).

Contextual Variables as Influential Factors

The findings demonstrate that the relationships among strategic leadership, *civil–military relations*, and defense governance do not operate in a vacuum. These relationships are invariably influenced by contextual variables that may strengthen or weaken the model's effectiveness. The most prominent contextual variables identified in this study are regional geopolitics, hybrid and cyber threats, bureaucratic capacity, democratic quality, and elite politics. Incorporating these contextual variables makes the research model more realistic because it avoids assuming that strategic leadership automatically produces effective defense governance (Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2023; Berthelsen, 2025).

The regional geopolitical context creates significant external pressures on the formulation of Indonesia's defense policy. Indonesia's position in the Indo-Pacific, developments in the South China Sea, competition among major powers, and relations with global actors mean that defense policy cannot be separated from complex strategic calculations. The synthesis indicates that leadership characteristics, foreign-policy orientation, and Indonesia's position as a middle power influence how external threats are translated into defense policies. Within this framework, regional geopolitics may intensify the need for adaptive strategic leadership, but it may also constrain accountability when external threats are used to justify delaying institutional reform (Caroline, 2021; Sari, 2021; Arif, 2021; Prasetya, Ladiqi, & Salleh, 2024).

Hybrid and cyber threats constitute a second highly influential contextual variable. These threats demonstrate that the traditional division of roles between civilian and military actors is no longer adequate. Cyberattacks, disinformation, digital propaganda, and the use of emerging technologies in conflict require cross-institutional coordination, adaptive regulation, technological capabilities, and public literacy. When the state uses hybrid threats as an opportunity to promote integration, the relationships among strategic leadership, *civil–military relations*, and defense governance become stronger. However, when such threats are addressed through sectoral and repressive responses, defense governance may become fragmented and less accountable (Wibisono, Kumendong, & Maulana, 2025; Kühn & Williams, 2025; Schneider, 2025).

Bureaucratic capacity represents a third contextual variable that determines whether strategic leadership can be translated into implementable policies. In the defense sector, the primary challenge of civilian control concerns not only the norm of civilian supremacy but also civilian capacity to understand doctrine, budgeting, technology, and the organizational requirements of the military. When civilian bureaucratic capacity is weak, defense policy becomes highly dependent on the military and difficult to oversee substantively. Conversely, a strong civilian bureaucracy enhances defense-policy planning, budgeting, evaluation, and coordination. Bureaucratic capacity can therefore strengthen or weaken the relationship between strategic leadership and defense-governance outcomes (Mukherjee & Pion-Berlin, 2022; Mukherjee, 2022; Ohl, 2025).

Democratic quality and elite politics also influence defense governance. In a democratic system, parliamentary oversight, policy transparency, political competition, and public accountability are essential for ensuring that the defense sector remains under democratic control. However, when elite politics become excessively accommodative, parliamentary scrutiny may be reduced to a formality or develop into insufficiently rigorous *cooperative oversight*. The synthesis indicates that political stability can help maintain orderly *civil–military relations*, but such stability does not necessarily lead to democratic deepening or robust

civilian control. Democratic quality is therefore a crucial factor in determining the maturity of Indonesia's defense governance (Sabrina & Inder, 2024; Tambunan, 2023; Ng & Kurniawan, 2024).

Table 3. Contextual variables influencing the integrative model

No.	Contextual Variable	Form of Influence	Impact on the Model
1	Regional Geopolitics	Increases the need for adaptive strategic leadership.	Strengthens the urgency of integrating defense policies.
2	Hybrid and Cyber Threats	Require cross-sectoral coordination and nonconventional responses.	Reinforce the need for flexible and accountable civil–military relations.
3	Bureaucratic Capacity	Determines civilian authorities' capacity to formulate, oversee, and evaluate policies.	Strengthens or weakens the effectiveness of substantive civilian control.
4	Democratic Quality and Elite Politics	Determine the depth of parliamentary oversight and public accountability.	Influence democratic legitimacy within defense governance.

Source: The authors' synthesis based on Arif (2021); Ng and Kurniawan (2024); Wibisono, Kumendong, and Maulana (2025); Sabrina and Inder (2024); and Tambunan (2023).

Table 3 demonstrates that contextual variables cannot be treated merely as supplementary elements. Instead, they explain why defense policies may produce different outcomes even when they adopt the same formal principles. Two countries may both embrace civilian supremacy and have ministries of defense, yet the quality of their defense governance may differ because of variations in geopolitical pressures, bureaucratic capacity, and democratic quality. In the Indonesian context, these variables explain why the country appears stable in terms of civil–military relations but remains transitional in strengthening its defense governance (Berthelsen, 2025; Ng & Kurniawan, 2024; Mietzner, 2023).

By explicitly incorporating contextual variables, the proposed research model becomes more dynamic and nonlinear. It does not assume that strategic leadership automatically improves civil–military relations or that stable civil–military relations invariably produce mature defense governance. Instead, the model demonstrates that relationships among these variables are highly dependent on the surrounding domestic and external conditions. Therefore, Indonesia can be more accurately understood as a stable yet transitional case by considering the interactions among leadership, institutions, and the strategic environment (Torfing et al., 2025; Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2023).

Novelty of the Integrative X–M–Y Model

The principal outcome of this study is the formulation of an original integrative model that positions strategic leadership as the guiding variable, *civil–military relations* as the mediating variable, and national defense governance as the outcome. This model was developed to bridge two bodies of literature that have generally evolved independently. On the one hand, the literature on *public management*, *public value governance*, and *robust governance* emphasizes the importance of vision, adaptation, coordination, and public-value creation. On the other hand, the literature on defense and *civil–military relations* emphasizes civilian supremacy, military professionalism, defense-ministry capacity, and democratic oversight (Thabit, Sancino, & Mora, 2025; Mukherjee & Pion-Berlin, 2022).

The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that the quality of defense governance cannot be sufficiently explained by who leads the sector or by the formal existence of civilian supremacy. Effective defense governance emerges when strategic leadership operates through healthy, professional, accountable, and trust-based civil–military relations. Accordingly, this model shifts the discussion away from the civilian-versus-military dichotomy toward an analysis of the causal relationships among leadership, institutional relations, and defense-governance outcomes (Kitchener & Ashworth, 2025; Kim & Kuehn, 2022; Roberts, 2026).

The strength of this integrative model lies in its capacity to explain Indonesia as a stable yet still transitional case. The stability of civil–military relations following the Reform era represents significant progress compared with the authoritarian period. However, this stability does not yet fully reflect the maturity of civilian control or defense governance. Indonesia continues to face incomplete *civilianization*, insufficiently developed substantive civilian capacity, and parliamentary oversight that tends to be cooperative but is not necessarily rigorous. The X–M–Y model therefore provides a sharper analytical lens for distinguishing among political stability, substantive civilian control, and effective defense governance (Ng & Kurniawan, 2024; Mietzner, 2023; Haripin, Priamarizki, & Nugroho, 2023).

The integrative model also provides a clearer causal explanation. Strategic leadership influences civil–military relations through long-term vision, adaptation to change, civilian–military actor integration, and public-value orientation. Healthy civil–military relations subsequently influence defense-governance effectiveness through policy coherence, interinstitutional coordination, budgetary oversight, democratic legitimacy, and threat responsiveness. Thus, *civil–military relations* are not positioned merely as a background condition but as the central mechanism determining whether a leadership vision can be translated into defense-governance outcomes (Mukherjee, 2022; Waardenburg, Groenleer, & de Jong, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends strategic leadership and *public value governance* to the defense sector. Strategic leadership has traditionally been examined within public administration, organizational management, and public-service governance. In this study, the concept is applied to the defense sector, which possesses distinctive characteristics related to coercive authority, extensive resource utilization, legitimate confidentiality requirements, and demands for democratic accountability. Consequently, this study contributes simultaneously to the development of public administration and defense studies (Thabit, Sancino, & Mora, 2025; Koliba, 2024; Bertelli & Cannas, 2025).

From a practical perspective, this study provides direction for Indonesia’s defense reform. Strengthening national defense cannot be achieved solely through the modernization of primary weapon systems, budgetary increases, or changes in senior officials. Defense reform should focus on strengthening institutional civilian capacity, clarifying civilian and military roles, improving the quality of parliamentary oversight, reinforcing the professionalism of the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and developing strategic communication that sustains public legitimacy. These measures would enable Indonesia’s defense governance to address contemporary strategic challenges more democratically, adaptively, and accountably (Matthews et al., 2025; Ng & Kurniawan, 2024; Wibisono, Kumendong, & Maulana, 2025).

Based on the overall findings and discussion, the study’s principal contribution is the development of a conceptual framework explaining the relationships among strategic leadership, civil–military relations, and national defense governance. The framework demonstrates that Indonesia’s defense effectiveness cannot be understood solely through measures of military strength. Instead, it must be regarded as the result of interactions among

leadership direction, the quality of institutional relations, bureaucratic capacity, democratic legitimacy, and the state's ability to respond to threats. This study therefore offers conceptual and practical contributions to strengthening Indonesia's defense governance within the context of an evolving democracy (Kitchener & Ashworth, 2025; Mukherjee & Pion-Berlin, 2022; Ångström, Dalsjö, & Widerberg, 2024).

Conclusion

This study concludes that effective national defense governance cannot be achieved solely through military capability, defense modernization, or increased resource allocation. It requires strategic leadership capable of establishing a long-term vision, adapting to multidimensional threats, coordinating relevant institutions, and ensuring that defense policies remain consistent with democratic principles and public values. However, strategic leadership does not directly produce effective governance. Civil–military relations serve as the principal institutional mechanism through which strategic direction is translated into policy formulation, coordination, oversight, budgeting, and implementation.

The integrative model developed in this study positions strategic leadership as the guiding factor, civil–military relations as the connecting mechanism, and national defense governance as the intended outcome. Effective defense governance is reflected in policy coherence, interinstitutional coordination, accountable resource management, democratic legitimacy, civilian institutional capacity, military professionalism, and responsiveness to conventional, hybrid, and cyber threats. These relationships are influenced by regional geopolitics, bureaucratic capacity, democratic quality, and elite politics, which may either strengthen or constrain the effectiveness of the governance process.

Civil–military relations are relatively stable but remain transitional in terms of substantive defense governance. Stability has not yet been fully accompanied by strong civilian capacity, clearly defined institutional roles, rigorous parliamentary oversight, and comprehensive democratic accountability. Therefore, Indonesia's defense reform should prioritize the institutional capacity of civilian authorities, military professionalism, policy coordination, parliamentary oversight, and transparent defense-resource management. The main contribution of this study is an integrative framework that connects public-administration perspectives with civil–military-relations scholarship to explain defense governance more comprehensively. Nevertheless, because this study is based on an integrative literature review, the proposed relationships remain conceptual. Future research should empirically test the model through comparative case studies, interviews with defense-policy stakeholders, institutional assessments, or quantitative analysis across different political and strategic contexts.

References

- Andersen, & Groeneveld. (2025). Integrating leadership perspectives into public management scholarship: Editorial for the public leadership symposium. *Public Performance & Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2025.2533309>
- Ångström, Dalsjö, R., & Widerberg. (2024). Unpacking the varying strategic logics of total defence. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2260958>
- Ansell, Sørensen, E., & Torfing. (2023). Public administration and politics meet turbulence: The search for robust governance responses. *Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12874>

- Arif. (2021). Balancing with Jokowi's characteristics: A neoclassical realism approach to Indonesia's foreign and security policies in the South China Sea. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970211041455>
- Ateş. (2024). Civil-military relations and education of military elites in Türkiye: Lessons learned from the past. *Armed Forces & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X221103294>
- Barbera, C., Dom, B. K., du Boys, C., Korać, S., Saliterer, I., & Steccolini, I. (2025). Insights from local government managers: Navigating crises through organizational capacities and perceptions. *Public Administration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13859>
- Bertelli, & Cannas. (2025). Anchoring institutional values in democracy: A systematic review, a constructive critique, and a research agenda. *Public Administration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.70036>
- Berthelsen. (2025). Hybrid times: War and peace in military innovation studies. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2025.2512238>
- Caroline. (2021). Indonesia's global maritime fulcrum: From hedging to underbalancing. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970211041661>
- Currie, Lynch, A., Swan, J., Alderson, H., Friel, S., Harrop, C., Johnson, R., Kerridge, G., Smart, D., McGovern, R., & Munro, E. (2025). How to extend pilot innovation in public services: A case of children's social care innovation. *Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.13028>
- Dandalt. (2024). Government-level public leadership development in the United States. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12670>
- Dyson, Tull, J., & van der Vorm, M. (2026). Battlefield knowledge and barracks reality: Learning practices within the Netherlands Army. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2025.2521287>
- Fischer, & Schott. (2025). Antecedents of shared leadership in the public sector: A social network approach. *Public Performance & Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2025.2541852>
- Fohim, Jacobs, G., & Sieger. (2025). Expanding towards a public value governance paradigm: The role of mindset expansion in a Swiss government agency. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2566903>
- Geeraert. (2025). The dark side of governance networks: How private actors use discursive strategies in global sport governance. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2456034>
- Haripin, Priamarizki, A., & Nugroho. (2023). Quasi-civilian defence minister and civilian authority: The case study of Indonesia's Ministry of Defence during Joko Widodo's presidency. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911221141016>
- Kim, & Kuehn. (2022). The Ministry of National Defence in South Korea: Military dominance despite civilian supremacy? *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2022.2127092>

- Kitchener, & Ashworth. (2025). Strategizing public value. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2538067>
- Koliba. (2024). Liberal democratic accountability standards and public administration. *Public Administration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13831>
- Krogh, & Triantafyllou. (2024). Developing new public governance as a public management reform model. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2313539>
- Kühn, & Williams. (2025). Governing the impact of emerging technologies: Actors, technologies, and regulation. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2025.2472213>
- Li, Tang, J., & Wen. (2026). Unpacking resilience in public administration: Insights from a meta-narrative review. *Public Administration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.70083>
- Livingstone. (2025). The metagovernance of power in collaboration innovation: A case study of transforming local systems in the Scottish Highlands. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2496992>
- Matthews, et al. (2025). Indonesia's defense acquisition strategy. *Asian Security*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2025.2527088>
- Mietzner. (2023). Democracy and military oversight in crisis: The failed civilianisation of Indonesia's Ministry of Defence. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970231152014>
- Mukherjee, & Pion-Berlin. (2022). The fulcrum of democratic civilian control: Re-imagining the role of defence ministries. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2022.2127094>
- Mukherjee. (2022). Towards control and effectiveness: The Ministry of Defence and civil-military relations in India. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2022.2118115>
- Ng, & Kurniawan. (2024). The Parliament and cooperative oversight of the Indonesian Armed Forces: Why civil-military relations in Indonesia is stable but still in transition. *Armed Forces & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X221137281>
- Ohl. (2025). The potential of organizations to advance public value goals. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2566454>
- Plaček, et al. (2024). Cross-sectoral collaboration in times of crisis: Comparing the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland. *Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.13016>
- Prasetya, Ladiqi, S., & Salleh. (2024). Back to the past: The roots of Indonesian middlepowermanship. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911241236518>
- Roberts. (2026). Beyond cultural determinism: Rethinking military effectiveness in the Gulf monarchies. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2025.2598762>

- Sabrina, & Inder. (2024). Concentration of power in nomination of presidential candidates in Indonesia. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911231199530>
- Sari. (2021). Continuity in Indonesia's strategy in the South China Sea under Joko Widodo. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970211039310>
- Schillemans, & Aleksovska. (2025). Making nonpunitive accountability matter: Exploring behavioral effects of nonpunitive accountability in a conjoint experiment. *Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.13024>
- Schneider. (2025). The digital cult of the offensive and the US military. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2024.2376542>
- Tambunan, E. (2023). The intervention of oligarchy in the Indonesian legislative process. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911231159395>
- Thabit, Sancino, & Mora. (2025). Strategic public value(s) governance: A systematic literature review and framework for analysis. *Public Administration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13877>
- Torfin, J., Bentzen, T. Ø., Caponio, T., Coroado, S., Douglas, S., Randma-Liiv, T., Russo, C., Sørensen, E., & Verhoest, K. (2025). Advancing robust governance in turbulent times: The role of multi-level governance, hybrid governance, and negotiated societal intelligence. *Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.70011>
- Van Gestel, & Ferlie. (2026). The contested nature of New Public Governance as a third governance model. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2026.2645329>
- Virtanen, & Jalonen. (2024). Public value creation mechanisms in the context of public service logic: An integrated conceptual framework. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2023.2268111>
- Waardenburg, Groenleer, M., & de Jong. (2025). Performance management in collaborative governance: A review of the literature and synthesis of the challenges. *Public Performance & Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2025.2510973>
- Wibisono, Kumendong, R., & Maulana. (2025). Indonesia's handling of terrorists' cyber activities: How repressive measures still fall short. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970241298764>