PRESIDENTIAL POWER AND EXECUTIVE AGGRANDIZEMENT IN SHAPING THE CABINET

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disampaikan 15/04/2025 – di-*review* 18/11/2025 – diterima 29/12/2025
DOI: 10.25123/vej.v11i2.9233
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Abstract
This article examines the President's authority to determine the number of ministers and deputy ministers, which has the potential to result in an oversized cabinet that hinders oversight of the executive branch. Adopting a socio-legal approach that combines doctrinal analysis with the study of executive aggrandizement, this research maps the mechanisms through which normative flexibility enables the expansion of the cabinet. The main findings demonstrate that cabinet expansion through changes in the Law on State Ministries has operated at several levels as a means of consolidating executive power through political patronage, the politicization of the bureaucracy, and legal engineering. Cabinet expansion is not a new phenomenon in Indonesian political history; this pattern has recurred from the Old Order to the New Order era. Constitutional Court Decision No. 128/PUU-XXIII/2025 confirms that excessive Presidential power can hinder bureaucratic effectiveness and efficiency. The decision also strengthens claims of executive aggrandizement not only in the ministerial sector but also among deputy ministers. This article proposes restricting Presidential power, particularly in determining cabinet size, through constitutional regulation with clear quantitative limits. Clearly defined boundaries that are difficult to modify politically would provide an effective mechanism to restrain the President's authority to expand the cabinet.

Keywords:
checks and balances; executive aggrandizement; presidential power

Abstrak
Artikel ini mengeksplorasi wewenang Presiden dalam menentukan jumlah menteri dan wakil menteri sehingga berpotensi terjadi pembengkakan postur kabinet yang menghambat pengawasan terhadap eksekutif. Mengadopsi pendekatan sosio-legal yang memadukan analisis doktrinal dengan studi '*executive aggrandizement*', penelitian ini memetakan mekanisme di mana fleksibilitas normatif memungkinkan perluasan postur kabinet. Temuan utama artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa pembesaran postur kabinet melalui perubahan Undang-Undang Kementerian Negara telah beroperasi pada beberapa tingkat sebagai kanal konsolidasi kekuasaan eksekutif melalui praktik patronase politik, politisasi birokrasi, dan rekayasa hukum. Pembengkakan kabinet bukanlah fenomena baru dalam sejarah politik Indonesia; pola ini berulang sejak era Orde Lama hingga Orde Baru. Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi No. 128/PUU-XXIII/2025 memberikan validitas bahwa kekuasaan Presiden yang terlalu luas dapat menghambat efektivitas dan efisiensi birokrasi. Putusan tersebut juga memperkuat klaim bahwa *executive aggranizement* tidak hanya pada sektor menteri, tetapi juga wakil menteri. Artikel ini memberikan solusi agar pembatasan kekuasaan Presiden, terutama dalam menentukan postur kabinet, diatur dalam Konstitusi dengan memberikan batas kuantitatif yang jelas. Dengan batasan yang jelas serta aturan yang sulit untuk dimodifikasi secara politik, sejatinya dapat menahan kekuasaan Presiden untuk memperbesar postur kabinet.

Kata Kunci:

Introduction

The debate surrounding ministerial arrangements reflects the inherent tensions between the executive and legislative branches within a Presidential framework.[1] Wheare argues that in an ideal Presidential model, the executive is positioned with a significant degree of independence from parliament, including the President's freedom to restructure and restructure the cabinet, so that the prerogative of the formation of ministries becomes part of the government's autonomy.[2] On the contrary, Sartori's view suggests that the absence of firm institutional limits on the formation of ministries can cause disproportions in the supervisory functions and the balance of power;[3] In other words, too much space for executives has the potential to weaken the checks and balances mechanism.[4]

In Indonesia, the amendment to Law No. 39 of 2008 concerning State Ministries, which abolished the maximum limit of 34 (thirty-four) ministries and gave full prerogative authority to the President in determining the number of ministries,[5] has triggered an academic debate. This expansion has the potential to cause institutional hypertrophy,[6] which has implications for overlapping authority, as well as regulatory inflation,[7] due to the increasing number of ministerial

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1 See for example in Indridi H. Indridason and Shaun Bowler, "Determinants of cabinet size," European Journal of Political Research, Vol. 53 No. 2, 2014, p. 381-403.

2 See in K. C. Wheare, Modern Constitutions, Oxford University Press, London, 1964.

3 See more in Giovanni Sartori, Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives, and Outcomes, New York University Press, New York, 1994.

4 Read also in Febriansyah Ramadhan et al., "INDONESIA'S FUTURE ACTING PRESIDENCY: MAINTAINING OR REPLACING THE NEW ORDER LEGACY," Veritas et Justitia, Vol. 10 No. 1, 2024, p. 30–59.

5 See the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Article 17 paragraph (1); See also Law No. 39 of 2008 concerning State Ministries, Articles 12 and 13 paragraph (1); Compare with Law No. 61 of 2024 concerning Amendments to Law No. 39 of 2008 concerning State Ministries.

6 The concept of 'institutional hypertrophy' is defined by the author as a condition in which a state institution or political organization experiences excessive development, both in size, authority, and bureaucracy, resulting in inefficiency, overlapping authority, and reduced effectiveness in carrying out its functions.

7 The phrase 'regulatory inflation' here, the author defines as a phenomenon in which there is an excessive increase in the number of laws and regulations in a legal system, resulting in disharmony of norms, overlapping regulations, and complexity in the implementation of public policies. Theoretically, regulatory inflation can be attributed to the concept of regulatory obesity, which is a situation in which legislators or regulators produce excessive legal norms without considering the effectiveness, integration, and legal certainty in the applicable legal system. See also in Ni'matul Huda, "Kedudukan and Materi Muatan Peraturan Menteri Dalam Perspektif Sistem Presidensial," Jurnal Hukum Ius Quia Iustum, Vol. 28 No. 3, 2021, p. 550–571.

regulations issued.[8] This phenomenon not only has the potential to cause the accumulation of heavy regulations and disharmony of norms, but also presents a real threat to the checks and balances mechanism in the Presidential system. Then, can the addition of ministries be effective and democratic, or does it reduce accountable governance?

In the phenomenon of executive aggrandizement, the holder of executive power can actually expand his or her governmental capacity beyond checks and balances, that is, through administrative control over the bureaucracy, expansion of regulations, or other institutional mechanisms that reduce the effectiveness of legislative and judicial oversight.[9] This concept, promoted by Bermeo, which is gaining increasing attention in the literature of political studies and constitutional law, emphasizes that the expansion of executive power can occur both through formal legal means and administrative practices.[10] Thus, the risk of democratic erosion arises not only from obvious authoritarian actions but also from gradual and normative institutional changes. Several studies have shown that executive aggrandizement can erode the capacity of counterbalancing institutions and degrade the quality of democratic governance if not balanced by effective control mechanisms.[11]

The urgency of this research lies in normative changes that give the President broad authority to determine the number and configuration of ministries, which are actually not just administrative issues. It brings urgent constitutional and political implications to be examined. In the context of a democracy that relies on checks and balances mechanisms, it is necessary to be aware that such changes can become one of the mechanisms of executive aggrandizement, through the expansion of the capacity of executive power through institutional instruments, which, if not balanced by effective legislative and judicial control, risks eroding the quality of

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8 Id.

9 See more in Nancy Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding,", Journal of Democracy, Vol. 27 No. 1, 2016, p. 5–19.

10 See for example in Tarunabh Khaitan, "Executive aggrandizement in established democracies: A crisis of liberal democratic constitutionalism," International Journal of Constitutional Law, Vol. 17 No. 1, 2019, p. 342–56.

11 See for example in Tarunabh Khaitan, "Killing a Constitution with a Thousand Cuts: Executive Aggrandizement and Party-state Fusion in India," Law & Ethics of Human Rights, Vol. 14 No. 1, 2020, p. 49–95; Carmen Wintergerst, Consolidating Power: Strategies and Tactics of Executive Aggrandizement The Autocratic Expansion Model in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, Heidelberg: Dissertation, Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Economics and Social Studies, Heidelberg University, 2025.

accountability and the rule of law.

This article wants to presents the perspective of executive aggrandizement,[12] from the change in norms that open up the President's prerogative to determine the number of ministries and the configuration of executive institutions.[13] This article is not only analyzed from the point of view of technical compliance with legislative norms, but also as part of the political dynamics of the law that may reflect the tendency of aggrandizement. Manifestations that need to be considered include: (a) the proliferation of ministries as a way of expanding political patronage and the executive bureaucratic base; (b) weakening inter-agency coordination through fragmentation of functions; and (c) the use of legal norms to consolidate policies under executive control.

In addition, practically, one of the signs of response to the potential increase in executive power in Indonesia can be seen in the Constitutional Court Decision Number 128/PUU-XXIII/2025, which affirms restrictions on the practice of dual positions of Deputy Minister and its implications for ministerial governance.[14] This ruling shows that the institution called 'the guardian of the constitutions'[15] actually acts as one of the counterparts to the tendency of executive aggrandizement in the private sector. This decision also provides validation that the expansion of the cabinet posture has occurred in two forms: first, the expansion of the number of quantities in the ministerial sector; Second, expansion in the deputy minister sector.

This article seeks to connect executive aggrandizement theory with case studies in Indonesia to produce normative and practical policy recommendations. This research was carried out by: first, normative analysis of constitutional and statutory provisions related to state ministries; second, the study of documents, including the minutes of the session on the formation and amendment of the Ministerial Law, the decision of the Constitutional Court; then, third, by looking for an operational evaluative framework oriented to relevant executive

12 Afif Noor, "Socio-Legal Research: Integration of Normative and Empirical Juridical Research in Legal Research," Jurnal Ilmiah Dunia Hukum, Vol. 7 No. 2, 2023.

13 In the case in Indonesia, this is stated in Law No. 61 of 2024 concerning Amendments to Law No. 39 of 2008 concerning State Ministries, which is also used as primary legal material in this study.

14 See more in the Constitutional Court Decision Number 128/PUU-XXIII/2025, which tests and declares Article 23 of Law Number 39 of 2008 concerning State Ministries 'unconstitutional'.

15 Lars Vinx, The Guardian of the Constitution, ed. oleh Lars Vinx, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015, p. 6.

aggrandizement indicators. The object of the research focuses on the legal politics of the number of state ministries. The data analysis technique used is qualitative analysis with a prescriptive approach, namely, interpreting and examining the data obtained to understand the relationship between legal regulations and political dynamics in determining the number of state ministries. Because this research is interdisciplinary, by borrowing the terms Banakar and Travers, this article can be said to be socio-legal research.[16]

The previous two studies that also placed the executive aggrandizement framework as a reference also enriched the findings in the author's research. Mietzner's findings, for example,[17] highlight the role of political elite collusion in Indonesia that opens up loopholes for strengthening executive capacity while showing its political limits, for example, the existence of elite resistance to certain proposals, such as the extension of Presidential terms, indicates that collusion does not always lead to unfettered dominance.[18] Accordingly, Khaitan outlines how a series of gradual legal changes can be used to erode supervisory functions and normalize practices that undermine institutional control, a legal strategy that appears to be procedural but substantively shifts the balance of power.[19]

As such, both studies are important to the understanding of executive aggrandizement, but the authors differ markedly: rather than focusing on elite collusion or abusive legislative techniques, this study examines how formal changes to the ministerial architecture, through legislative amendments and reshuffle practices, build the permanent institutional capacity that enables executive aggrandizement, as well as the interaction between those dynamics and the effectiveness of judicial control that determine whether aggrandizement can be prevented or allowed to strengthen. This article is expected to contribute to the literature on the erosion of institutional democracy as well as provide policy recommendations that can strengthen the checks and balances mechanism within

16 See in Reza Banakar and Max Travers, "Theory and method in socio-legal research," Oñati international series in law and society, 2005; Fachrizal Afandi, "Penelitian Hukum Interdisipliner Reza Banakar: Urgensi and Desain Penelitian Sosio-legal," Undang: Jurnal Hukum, Vol. 5 No. 1, 2022, p. 231–255.

17 Marcus Mietzner, "Elite Collusion in Indonesia: How It Has Both Enabled and Limited Executive Aggrandizement," The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 712 No. 1, 2024, p. 223–234.

18 Id.

19 See Khaitan, supra note 10.

the Indonesian constitutional framework.

Analysis

Executive Aggrandizement in the Law on State Ministries

This section will systematically outline two core issues arising from normative changes regarding ministries: first, executive behavior practices, particularly the President's actions to enlarge the cabinet; Second, changes to the Ministerial Law that provide normative space for such actions so that they have the potential to be a driver for the consolidation of executive power. In this article, the author categorizes it as executive aggrandizement. The goal is not only to describe the phenomenon, but to provide a normative diagnosis that can be used as a basis for policy recommendations.[20]

Executive aggrandizement differs from a *coup d'état* in that it is not a rapid and dramatic transfer of personnel, but rather a gradient process in which executive power is expanded through institutional changes that appear legal and procedural.[21] This process is realized when the President uses legal instruments to expand the President's discretionary space, while placing loyal actors in strategic positions.[22] The executive can also leverage a parliament whose coalition is conducive and an influential judiciary to pass legal changes that weaken oversight mechanisms, a dynamic that transforms formal control tools into subordinate instruments of the regime.[23]

In principle, the formation of the cabinet and the composition of ministries is a direct mandate from the constitution as stated in Article 17 paragraphs (1) to paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (1945 Constitution). [24] The constitution tasks lawmakers to formulate provisions regarding the establishment, amendment, and dissolution of ministries as part of

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20 Teri L. Caraway, "Labor's reversal of fortune: contentious politics and executive aggrandizement in Indonesia," Social Movement Studies, Vol. 22 No. 5–6, 2023, p. 689–705.

21 Bermeo, supra note 9.

22 Id.

23 Khaitan, supra note 10.

24 See the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Article 17, which reads:(1) The President is assisted by the Ministers of State. (2) The ministers are appointed and dismissed by the President. (3) Each minister is in charge of certain affairs in the government. (4) The establishment, amendment, and dissolution of state ministries shall be regulated in the law.

the executive institutional design.[25] The Presidential system requires the President elected through elections to have the prerogative authority to determine the composition of the cabinet, often described through the winner-take-all principle.[26] However, the Law on State Ministries stipulates that this authority should not be exercised arbitrarily, because every formation of the cabinet must pay attention to several basic principles, namely: (a) efficiency and effectiveness of government administration; (b) the rationality of the division of tasks and the proportionality of the workload; (c) continuity, harmony, and integration of the implementation of government functions; and (d) the dynamics of global environmental development.[27]

If we look at the historical developments in Simanjuntak's work,[28] the number of ministries in Indonesia always fluctuates, which does not always correlate with the effectiveness of the government. In the Old Order era, the number of ministries changed according to the political constellation at that time, from 21 ministries in the first Presidential cabinet in 1945 to 110 ministries in the Dwikora II cabinet.[29] The bureaucratic reform that was touted in the New Order era did not yield significant results, because in the end, the determination of the number of ministries was determined more by political considerations than administrative needs.[30] The post-1998 reforms had brought hope with efforts to streamline the bureaucracy, but this trend did not last long.[31] In fact, the increasingly strong multi-party system in Indonesia creates an incentive for the President to continue to increase the number of ministries to accommodate the interests of coalition parties.[32]

The Law on State Ministries itself was first formed in 2008, the government, in this case represented by Yusril Ihza Mahendra, thought that the President needed

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25 Id., Article 17 paragraph (4); See also considerations letter d. Law No. 39 of 2008 concerning State Ministries.
26 Kazuko Kojima, "Domestic politics and policy making toward China in East Asian countries," Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies, Vol. 10 No. 2, 2021.
27 See Article 13 paragraph (2) of Law No. 39 of 2008 concerning State Ministries.
28 P.N.H. Simanjuntak, Kabinet-kabinet Republik Indonesia: Dari Awal Kemerdekaan sampai Reformasi, Sinar Grafika, Jakarta, 2003, p. 29-49
29 See Id.
30 Id.
31 Tom Ginsburg and Aziz Z. Huq, "The Pragmatics of Democratic Front-Sliding," Ethics and International Affairs, Vol. 36 No. 4, 2022, p. 437–453.
32 Mahesa Rannie, Retno Saraswati, and Fifiana Wisnaeni, "Does the Reform of the Parliamentary and Presidential Threshold Strengthen the Presidential System in Indonesia?," Sriwijaya Law Review. Vol. 8 No. 1, 2024.

to be limited in terms of determining the number of ministries, reflecting on the fat cabinets of the previous era.[33] Mahendra revealed that the maximum limit of 34 ministries is not a number that appears arbitrarily, but is a logical consequence of the administrative architecture of the government that has been arranged.[34] So that changes in the number of ministries must consider the continuity between the central structure and the regional structure so as not to reduce the quality of public services and the effectiveness of the implementation of government affairs.[35]

The defense of the President's prerogative in determining the number of ministries, as in the amendment of the Law on State Ministries, is often claimed as a form of strengthening the Presidential system.[36] However, this is also a strategy to ensure that the President has the flexibility to accommodate various political interests that arise after the election.[37] The number of ministries often expands in line with the increasing political needs of the coalition of the election-winning parties.[38] In other words, the more parties that must be accommodated in the government coalition, the more ministries that must be formed as a form of political concession.[39] Such logic indicates that ministries are no longer solely an administrative instrument of the state, but rather a tool of political negotiation that erodes the principle of bureaucratic effectiveness.[40]

To borrow Bermeo's framework,[41] these historical developments show that the swelling of the cabinet in Indonesia is not an anomaly but a consistent pattern that has long served as an instrument of expansion of executive power through patronage mechanisms, political party co-optation, and expansion of administrative

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33 See the Minutes of the Meeting to Discuss Amendments to the Law of State Ministries, Legislation Center of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024, p. 22

34 See Id., p. 17

35 See Id., p. 18

36 See for example in Fitra Arsil, Teori Sistem Pemerintahan: Pergeseran Konsep and Saling Kontribusi Antar Sistem Pemerintahan di Berbagai Negara, Rajagrafindo Persada, Depok, 2017.

37 John Ishiyama and Michael Widmeier, "From 'bush bureaucracies' to electoral competition: what explains the political success of rebel parties after civil wars?," Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, Vol. 30 No. 1, 2020.

38 See the Minutes of the Meeting to Discuss the Law of State Ministries, Legislative Center of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, 2008.

39 See in David Andersen and Agnes Cornell, "Voting for bureaucracy? Contestation, suffrage and meritocracy," European Journal of Political Research, Vol. 62 No. 4, 2023; Hassan Javid, "Winning 'friends' and 'influencing' people: democratic consolidation and authoritarianism in Punjab," Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, Vol. 58 No. 1, 2020.

40 Javid, Id.

41 Bermeo, supra note 9, p. 19.

control.[42] From the Old Order era to the New Order period the basic logic remained the same: the cabinet structure was used as a tool to strengthen political loyalty and expand executive capacity. The amendment to the Law on State Ministries in 2024 which removes the limit on the number of ministries, deepens this tendency because it provides a more flexible normative basis for the President to carry out institutional engineering according to short-term political needs.[43] Thus, if in the previous period, namely after 2008, the enlargement of the cabinet posture occurred despite legal limitations, now the enlargement can take place without significant normative obstacles.[44] This shows that there is a historical continuity, namely the swelling of the cabinet as a power strategy, which is now transforming from political practice to institutional design that potentially strengthens the phenomenon of executive aggrandizement in Indonesia's Presidential system.

Furthermore, the government in Indonesia tends to be a large coalition, where the elected President must share power with the coalition parties and their supporters.[45] As a result, the cabinet is often filled by figures who do not always have competence in their fields,[46] but rather because of political representation.[47] Then, when comparing the Academic Manuscript of the 2008 Law on State Ministries with the Revised Academic Manuscript of 2024, there is continuity as well as an important argumentative shift. The 2008 Academic Paper on the principle that the formation of ministries should be subject to constitutional design regarding the separation of powers and the strengthening of executive accountability.[48] However, the 2024 Academic Paper shows a significant change:[49] the limit on the number of ministries is considered no longer relevant, and Presidential flexibility is considered more important to answer the dynamics of development and the complexity of

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42 Zulkarnain Zulkarnain, Kabinet Parlementer Indonesia Tahun 1950-1959, ed. oleh Shendy A., 1st ed., UNY Press, Yogyakarta, 2021, p. 39.

43 See more in Cortavis Morrow, "Executive Power: The Growing Threat to Democracy," Democratic Erosion Consortium, 2025, https://democratic-erosion.org/2025/04/23/executive-power-the-growing-threat-to-democracy/.

44 See for example in Jimly Asshiddiqie, Oligarki and Totalitarianisme Baru, Depok, LP3ES, 2022, p. 20

45 Caterina Filippini, "The constitutionalization of the 'Presidential supremacy' and its (limited) rejection in the post-Soviet space," Diritto Pubblico Comparato ed Europeo, No. 3, 2023.

46 See in Erik Jan van Dorp, "'The Minister Wants it': Self-Politicisation and Proxy Politics among Senior Civil Servants," Public Policy and Administration, Vol. 38 No. 4, 2023.

47 Gunawan Suswantoro et al., "Majoritarian tendency and semi-Presidential regime in Indonesia," Opcion, Vol. 35 No. Special Issue 19, 2019.

48 See the Academic Manuscript of the Law of the Ministry of State, 2008, p. 10-25

49 See the Academic Text of Changes in the Law of the Ministry of State, 2024, p. 25-27

modern government.

However, the two academic texts still have one important similarity, namely the recognition that the structure of the ministry plays a key role in maintaining the effectiveness of the administration of government. What distinguishes the two is their political orientation, the 2008 Academic Paper positions restrictions as a mechanism of checks and balances, while the 2024 Academic Paper positions flexibility as a mechanism of governability. According to the author, this shift in argument is the most tangible evidence that the change in norms in 2024 is not only technical but reflects a paradigm shift that opens up wider space for the President to consolidate power through the engineering of the cabinet posture.

The decision to no longer limit the number of ministries also raises serious questions about the future of the Presidential system of government in Indonesia. Lijhphart argued that a stable Presidential system is characterized by a clear separation of powers between the executive and the legislature.[50] However, referring to Elgie's opinion,[51] the greater the influence of political parties in the formation of the cabinet, the closer Indonesia is to the parliamentary government model in which the cabinet depends on political support in parliament. The fundamental difference is that, in the parliamentary system, there is a clear mechanism to change the government if the cabinet fails to carry out its duties, whereas in a Presidential system, such as in Indonesia, the President retains full power during his term.[52]

In this context, the elimination of the President's unlimited power in shaping the cabinet posture clarifies the tension between the constitutional design that calls for a Presidential-style separation of powers and political practices that move towards institutional hybridization. When the President has the discretion to enlarge the cabinet to maintain the balance of the coalition, this pattern creates an executive dependence on the dynamics of party support, a feature that is closer to

50 Arend Lijhphart, Thinking About Democracy Power Sharing and Majorty Rule in Theory and Practice, Routledge, New York, 2008.

51 See in Robert Elgie, "Semi-Presidentialism: An Inceasingly Common Constitutional Choice," in Semi-Presidentialism and Democracy, ed. oleh Robert Elgie, Sophia Moestrup, and Yu-Shan Wu, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011.

52 Arsil, supra note 36.

the logic of parliamentary confidence.[53] However, unlike the parliamentary system that provides a 'constructive vote of no confidence' mechanism,[54] Indonesia does not have the instrument to correct a cabinet that has lost political legitimacy in parliament. The absence of this corrective mechanism creates a paradoxical situation: the executive can expand the cabinet for the sake of political stability, but that stability is not accompanied by proportionate structural accountability.[55] As a result, Indonesia's system of government has the potential to give birth to a configuration in which the President is increasingly politically strong, while the process of institutional oversight becomes weaker.

The relationship between legislative changes, cabinet enlargement, and institutional oversight capabilities shows a pattern that indicates the transformation of Indonesia's government system towards a form of Presidentialism that is increasingly centered on executive power.[56] The author argues that the practice of patronage, bureaucratic politicization, and legal engineering through amendments to ministerial laws are real manifestations of executive aggrandizement that work gradually but systemically. Constitutional Court Decision No. 128/PUU-XXIII/2025 confirms the existence of control efforts from the judiciary, but its effectiveness depends heavily on inter-institutional compatibility and political will to implement the decision consistently. This presents a serious challenge to the future of Indonesian Presidentialism: on the one hand, executive power is increasingly strengthened through formal and informal instruments; On the other hand, the supervisory mechanism that was supposed to hold back the expansion faced functional limitations.

Thus, the main findings in this section show that the enlargement of the cabinet posture in the changes in Indonesian ministerial laws functions on several levels as an instrument that facilitates executive aggrandizement: through

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53 Francesco Bromo, "The executive trump card: government-initiated votes of confidence in parliamentary democracies," Parliamentary Affairs, 16 Juni 2025.

54 Ayelet Rubabshi-Shitrit and Sharon Hasson, "The effect of the constructive vote of no-confidence on government termination and government durability," in Parliaments and Government Termination, Routledge, London, 2023, p. 121–35.

55 Amenah Elgazzar, "Executive Aggrandizement & Institutional Resistance: South Korea," Democratic Erosion Consortium, 2025, https://democratic-erosion.org/2025/04/18/executive-aggrandizement-institutional-resistance-south-korea/.

56 Toby S. James, "Democracy, public administration, and democratic backsliding," Policy Studies, Juli 2025, hlm. 1–26.

patronage, bureaucratic politicization, and legal engineering. The Constitutional Court Decision No. 128/PUU-XXIII/2025 shows its judicial capacity to partially restrain such practices, but its effectiveness depends on inter-agency compatibility and implementation mechanisms. On the other hand, the decision also validates the President's power today is very large, and it has the potential to hinder the effectiveness and efficiency of bureaucratic governance in the executive sector. Therefore, the next section will explain how the direction of the change in the Law on State Ministries.

Expansion of Presidential Power in Shaping the Cabinet

This section will outline the changes in the power of the Indonesian President in the Law on State Ministries that show a political configuration, at the executive level, that is oriented towards authoritarianism. This can also be evidenced by the existence of legal products, in this case, the new Law on State Ministries, that seem regressive. [57] This reflects a phenomenon that Scheppele calls "Autocratic Legalism,"[58] in which law is used not to limit executive power, but to legitimize the unchecked expansion of power.[59]

Changes to the Law on State Ministries in 2024 have the potential to cause a shift in the legal paradigm, leading to the conception of 'Presidential supremacy'[60] in the institutional design of government. The amendment to Article 15, which abolishes the de facto maximum limit on the number of ministries, actually provides room for the executive to continue to add ministries without clear juridical limits.[61] The abolition also gives the President the flexibility to consolidate politics by creating new ministries that are more oriented towards the distribution of power to

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57 Regressive legal products indicate that it comes from the process of forming laws that seem corrupt. This also indicates that the legal politics that are being built are authoritarian. See more in Moh. Mahfud MD, Politik Hukum di Indonesia, 7th ed., Rajagrafindo Persada, Jakarta, 2017, p. 266

58 See in Kim Lane Scheppele, "Autocratic Legalism," The University of Chicago Law Review, Vol. 85 No. 2, 2018, p. 545–83.

59 Zainal Arifin Mochtar and Idul Rishan, "Autocratic Legalism: the Making of Indonesian Omnibus Law," Yustisia, Vol. 11 No. 1, 2022; Will Freeman, "Colonization, Duplication, Evasion: The Institutional Strategies of Autocratic Legalism," SSRN Electronic Journal, 2018.

60 See in Joel D Aberbach, Mark A Peterson, and Paul J Quirk, "The Contemporary Presidency: Who Wants Presidential Supremacy? Findings from the Institutions of American Democracy Project," Presidential Studies Quarterly, Vol. 37 No. 3, 2007, p. 515–530; See also Caterina Filippini, supra note 45.

61 See Article 15 of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 39 of 2008 Jo. Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 61 of 2024 concerning State Ministries.

political allies than the effectiveness of the government.[62] Without being balanced with a strict control mechanism from parliament and judicial institutions, this can actually lead to systematic weakening due to deep-rooted political co-optation.[63]

The author is also of the view that this revision also contradicts the principle of checks and balances, which is a fundamental element in the Presidential system. As outlined in the Constitutional Court Decision No. 79/PUU-IX/2011, any policy that has the potential to increase executive authority without effective supervision will give birth to constitutional dysfunction.[64] The implications of this policy not only have an impact on the legal aspect, but also have serious consequences in governance. As mentioned earlier, history has shown that an uncontrolled increase in the number of ministries often leads to inefficient budget overruns and policy fragmentation that hinders inter-agency coordination.[65]

In comparative perspective, this pattern is widely found in the system of government in countries with a democratically backsliding democratic index, as happened in Turkey under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.[66] He used legal changes as an instrument to strengthen executive control over the bureaucracy, thereby reducing transparency and accountability in government.[67] The expansion of executive authority often begins with changes in the rule of law that are formally democratic, but in practice increasingly concentrate power in the hands of government leaders. If this pattern continues to be allowed in Indonesia, then the revision of the Law on State Ministries could be the starting point for a shift in the political system towards absolute Presidentialism, where control over the number and structure of ministries is used as a tool to accommodate political interests and strengthen executive patronage without any meaningful oversight mechanism.

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62 See also for example in Fifik Wiryani, Febriansyah Ramadhan, and Mokhammad Najih, "Indigenous People's Land Rights in Post-Soeharto Indonesia The Continuing Problem of Land Grabbing," International Journal on Minority and Group Rights, Vol. 31 No. 5, 2024, p. 1–38.

63 See for example in Febriansyah Ramadhan and Ilham Dwi Rafiqi, "Study of Constitutional Court Decisions cancelling All Norms in the Law," Legality: Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum, Vol. 29 No. 2, 2021.

64 See Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia Number 79/PUU-IX/2011.

65 See Piotr Bystranowski, Ivar Hannikainen, and Kevin Tobia, "Legal Interpretation as Coordination," SSRN Electronic Journal, 2023; See also in Geert Bouckaert, B. Guy Peters, and Koen Verhoest, The Coordination of Public Sector Organizations, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London, 2010.

66 See in Adam Holesch and Anna Kyriazi, "Democratic Backsliding in the European Union: The Role of the Hungarian-Polish Coalition," East European Politics, Vol. 38 No. 1, 2022; See also Meral Ugur-Cinar, "Elections and Democracy in Turkey: Reconsidering Competitive Authoritarianism in the Age of Democratic Backsliding," Political Quarterly, Vol. 94 No. 3, 2023.

67 Id.

Turkey provides an important lesson for Indonesia: when the change in the Ministerial Law opens up normative space for the President to enlarge the cabinet structure and add political posts. In addition, there is a real risk that formal rules will be used to formalize patronage and expand executive control capacity. This kind of practice becomes much more difficult to correct when supervisory institutions have been weakened or absorbed by new legal arrangements. Turkey's lessons show that without such measures, legal changes that appear to be technical have the potential to accelerate the consolidation of executive power with serious consequences for the quality of democracy.

Furthermore, the political and legal direction reflected in the revision of the Law on State Ministries in 2024 is increasingly clear that this change is driven more by short-term political interests than by the long-term vision of building a stable and accountable government system.[68] The phenomenon put forward by Schappele is increasingly relevant in the context of Indonesian legal politics, especially when the revision of the Law on State Ministries in 2024 becomes one of the legal instruments that has the potential to erode the principles of constitutional democracy.[69] The erosion of democracy in this context does not occur through military coups or explicit repressive measures, but through a more subtle process, namely by redesigning state institutions to gradually narrow the space for the opposition, reduce government transparency, and weaken checks and balances mechanisms.[70]

In addition, changes in cabinet posture that are too large often have long-term consequences that are difficult to correct (path dependency).[71] In this regard, the decision to eliminate the limit on the number of ministries will not only have an impact on the current regime, but will also create a precedent that will allow future governments to continue to increase the number of ministries indefinitely.[72] In such

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68 See in Saiful Risky, Sholahuddin Al-Fatih, and Mabarroh Azizah, "Political Configuration of Electoral System Law in Indonesia from State Administration Perspective," Volksgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum and Konstitusi, 30 Juni 2023, p. 119–30.

69 See in Id.; Then compare with Dina Kartikasari and Saiful Risky, "The Idea of Independent Judicial Ethics Courts in Indonesia," JAPHTN-HAN, Vol. 4 No. 1, 2025, p. 65–85.

70 Brett R. Bessen, "Populist Discourse and Public Support for Executive Aggrandizement in Latin America," Comparative Political Studies, 2024.

71 See Kathleen Thelen, "Historical institutionalism in comparative politics," Annual Review of Political Science, 1999.

72 See for example Kurnia Yunita Rahayu, Iqbal Basyari, and Nina Susilo, "Kabinet Prabowo Kian Gemuk, Sejumlah Risiko Membayangi," Kompas.id, 2025, https://www.kompas.id/artikel/reshuffle-jilid-ke-iv-kabinet-kian-gemuk.

conditions, it will be more difficult for the new government to restore the effectiveness of the bureaucracy because it is already accustomed to a fat, inefficient, and full of overlapping political interests.

Another implication of the revision of the Law on State Ministries is the potential for instability in the institutional design of government. In a mature democratic system, the formation of ministries must be based on administrative needs and efficiency in the implementation of public policies.[73] However, by giving the President absolute authority to determine the number and structure of ministries, this revision has the potential to create institutional uncertainty, where any regime change could be accompanied by a drastic change in the cabinet posture. [74] This will result in inconsistencies in public policy and increased uncertainty for the bureaucracy in carrying out its duties.

In the author's view, the revision of the Law on State Ministries in 2024 is part of the political and legal dynamics that have the potential to change the direction of Indonesia's government system in the long term. If this revision is not properly monitored, Indonesia may experience the phenomenon of constitutional regression, where legal changes are actually used as a tool to narrow democracy and strengthen the centralization of executive power. [75] Therefore, it is very important for all elements of the nation, both academics, legal practitioners, the House of Representatives, and civil society, to continue to monitor and evaluate the implications of this policy so as not to lead to the weakening of the democratic system that has been fought for during the reform era.

Thus, to create a democratic legal politics and make legal products responsive, lawmakers need to limit the number of ministries in Indonesia to 34 (thirty-four) ministries as per the old Ministry Law. This is not without reason, the authors argue that: first, the 34 ministries can actually restore the historical legal foundation that once showed a balance between the division of government tasks and inter-agency control mechanisms. It is a restorative effort against institutional design that has

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73 Sorin and Şandor, "ICT and public administration reforms," Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, no. 36, 2012.

74 Melis G. Laebens, "Beyond Democratic Backsliding: Executive Aggrandizement and its Outcomes," Gothenburg, 2023.

75 Jaime Olaiz González, "Regression Through Transformation: Constitutional Change in Times of the so Called 'Fourth Transformation,'" Cuestiones Constitucionales, no. 45, 2021.

never, relatively, demonstrated a level of coordination and accountability that is easier for the legislature and the public to monitor. Second, functionally, the 34 ministries reflect a compromise between the need for ministerial specialization (so that every state affair receives adequate technical attention) and the need for horizontal coordination (so that there is no fragmentation of tasks that leads to duplication of programs and inefficiencies).

34 is not a mystical number but a design consideration: large enough to accommodate the country's main portfolios, security, economic, social, infrastructure, legal, and governmental affairs, but small enough to keep the mechanisms of Presidential cabinet meetings, coordinating ministries, and legislative supervision effective and measurable. Quantitatively, the 34 ministries are not just nostalgic for the old structure. The posture of the cabinet with 34 ministries has gained legal-historical legitimacy because it restores a framework familiar to policymakers and the public. In practical terms, the short-term (static) solution that can be applied immediately is to make changes to Article 15 of the Law on State Ministries, especially by restoring the provisions of the limit on the number of ministries as a normative fence for the President in shaping a cabinet. This change is urgent because it can immediately provide legal certainty and close the excessive discretionary space that has been used through institutional regulatory loopholes, in this case, the President's Office.[76]

Meanwhile, a much more fundamental long-term strategic step is to make limited amendments to the 1945 Constitution, especially in Article 17, so that the principle of limiting the number of ministries obtains the highest constitutional position and is not easily changed only through momentary political accommodation. In this regard, the author proposes a new normative formulation in the form of adding paragraph (5) to Article 17 of the 1945 Constitution, which

[76] This can be evidenced by several controversial Presidential Regulations. For example, Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 137 of 2024 concerning Special Advisers to the President, Special Envoys to the President, Special Staff to the President, and Special Staff to the Vice President, as well as Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 5 of 2025 concerning the Management of Forest Areas, where these two regulations provide space for active TNI soldiers to sit in civilian positions, but these civilian positions are not rigidly regulated in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia or the Law Ministry of State. See more in Saiful Risky and Dina Kartikasaari, "Supremasi Sipil Vs. Supremasi Militer: Pejabat Pembantu Presiden Non-Kementerian dalam Bingkai Reformasi Konstitusi," Simbur Cahaya, Vol. 32 No. 1, 2025, p. 101–131.

reads: “The establishment of state ministries as referred to in paragraph (4) shall not exceed 34 (thirty-four) ministries” (in Bahasa Indonesia: “*Pembentukan kementerian negara sebagaimana dimaksud dalam ayat (4) tidak lebih dari 34 (tiga puluh empat) kementerian*”). This provision is intended to be a strict, binding, and inviolable constitutional boundary without going through a strict constitutional amendment procedure, while providing a signal that the formation of the cabinet posture is no longer subject to pragmatic political negotiations,[77] but to the design of governance that is rational and based on the principles of accountability and the effectiveness of executive functions.

Conclusively, these restrictions are not just a technical solution, but a structural correction to the tendency to expand executive power that over the past two decades has become increasingly difficult to control through ordinary oversight mechanisms. By presenting strict constitutional limits, the practice of sharing a cabinet posture can be redirected to consideration of the functional needs of the state, not the political calculation of the coalition that is transactional. This step is ultimately expected not only to strengthen the effectiveness of the government but also to ensure that Indonesia’s institutional development remains within the corridor of the rule of law.

Conclusion

The expansion of the President’s power in determining the posture of the cabinet after the revision of the Law on State Ministries functions as an instrument of executive aggrandizement that erodes the checks and balances mechanism in the Indonesian Presidential system. The study’s main findings suggest that the enlargement of the cabinet posture and changes in institutional norms have operated at some level as a channel for consolidating executive power, through the practice of political patronage, bureaucratic politicization, and legal engineering. Meanwhile, the capacity of judicial supervision in the Constitutional Court Decision No. 128/PUU-XXIII/2025 can contain some of these practices, but its effectiveness

[77] See for example in Febriansyah Ramadhan et al., “Towards a structural constitution: contribution of Presidential Succession Law to the Constitution of Indonesia,” Legality : Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum, Vol. 33 No. 2, 2025, p. 361–395.

is limited by implementation gaps and inter-institutional compatibility. The decision also validates that the swelling of the cabinet posture occurs in two ways: the number of ministries and the number of deputy ministers. This is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia's political history; this pattern has been repeated from the Old Order era to the New Order era, so the 2024 change marks the transformation of old practices into formal institutional designs.

The findings of this study support the theoretical claim that modern forms of executive aggrandizement tend to work in a gradual and multi-tactical manner: changes in legal norms are used to restructure the capacity of ministries so as to consolidate power without the need for unconstitutional measures. As a solution, the author recommends a two-track approach: short-term steps that will be implemented immediately in the form of a revision of Article 15 of the Law on State Ministries, and long-term strategic steps in the form of a limited amendment to Article 17 of the 1945 Constitution by adding a binding constitutional paragraph on the limit on the number of ministries. With these limitations, this reform can restore the orientation of the formation of the cabinet to the functional needs of the state, not political calculations, and to restrain the pace of executive aggrandizement for the sake of the continuity of Indonesia's constitutional democracy.

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