

The Political Transition from the Old Order to the New Order in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The transition from the *Old Order* to the *New Order* marked a critical turning point in Indonesia's political history, reshaping the country's governance structure and state ideology. This study examines the factors driving the transfer of power, the process through which the transition occurred, and its implications for Indonesia's political development. Employing a qualitative historical approach, the research applies the historical method through the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography to reconstruct and analyze the events surrounding the transition. The findings reveal that the transfer of power was precipitated by a convergence of political and economic crises, escalating ideological conflicts, and the aftermath of the 1965 *September 30th Movement* (G30S), all of which substantially weakened President Sukarno's authority. The consolidation of military influence and the issuance of the *11 March Order* (*Supersemar*) facilitated the emergence of the *New Order* under Suharto's leadership. The study argues that although the transition succeeded in restoring political stability and accelerating economic development, it simultaneously institutionalized centralized political authority and curtailed democratic participation, thereby creating a long-lasting legacy that continues to influence Indonesia's political landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most consequential political transformations in twentieth-century Indonesia was the transition of power from the *Old Order* to the *New Order*. This transition not only brought President Sukarno's leadership to an end but also inaugurated a new political order that fundamentally reconfigured Indonesia's political institutions, civil-military relations, and national development agenda for more than three decades. A multidimensional crisis characterized by political instability, economic deterioration, and escalating ideological polarization among competing political forces precipitated this transition (Maulana et al., 2022). During the *Guided Democracy* period, Sukarno consolidated his position as the central political authority while promoting the *Nasakom* doctrine to reconcile nationalist, religious, and communist groups within a unified political framework. Rather than fostering long-term political cohesion, this strategy intensified ideological contestation among political actors and heightened tensions between the Indonesian National Armed Forces and the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* / PKI) (Mukti & Rodiyah, 2020).

Indonesia also experienced a profound economic crisis during the mid-1960s, which substantially weakened the political legitimacy of the *Old Order* government. Escalating inflation, declining industrial and agricultural productivity, and widespread shortages of essential commodities eroded public confidence in state institutions and exacerbated socioeconomic instability. Historical evidence indicates that the inflation rate exceeded 600 percent in 1965, illustrating the severity of the economic collapse confronting Indonesian society (Yustia & Arifin, 2023). The *30 September Movement* (*Gerakan 30 September* / G30S) in 1965 marked a decisive turning point by fundamentally altering the balance of political power. Lieutenant General Suharto subsequently expanded the military's political influence, assumed a dominant role in restoring national security and political order, and consolidated this authority through the issuance of the *11 March Order* (*Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret* / *Supersemar*) in 1966, which accelerated the transfer of power from Sukarno to the emerging *New Order* regime (Farida et al., 2025).

The transition from the *Old Order* to the *New Order* reshaped Indonesia's national leadership while fundamentally restructuring the country's political power configuration. The *New Order* regime consolidated its political legitimacy by

strengthening the military's institutional role, simplifying the party system, and exercising extensive control over political participation and public life. Although these policies contributed to sustained economic growth and relative political stability, scholars have criticized the regime for concentrating political authority, restricting civil liberties, and committing systematic human rights violations (Ritonga & Noviani, [2025](#)). This historical transition warrants careful scholarly examination because its consequences extended far beyond a change in political leadership, establishing institutional and political legacies that continued to shape Indonesia throughout the *Reformasi* era. This study, therefore, investigates the underlying causes of the transition from the *Old Order* to the *New Order*, examines the dynamics of power transfer, and evaluates its implications for Indonesia's political development.

Previous scholarship has investigated diverse dimensions of the transition from the *Old Order* to the *New Order*, including the political crisis of *Guided Democracy*, the expanding role of the military, the G30S incident, and the consolidation of the *New Order* regime. Most of these studies, however, address these issues independently rather than integrating them into a comprehensive analytical perspective. Existing research has devoted limited attention to explaining how the structural causes of the transition, the mechanisms of power transfer, and their long-term political consequences interact within a single conceptual framework. This study addresses that gap by examining the factors that precipitated the transfer of power, analyzing the process through which political authority shifted from Sukarno to Suharto, and assessing the transition's enduring influence on Indonesia's political development. Such an integrated analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of how this critical historical episode transformed Indonesia's political trajectory and continues to shape its post-*Reformasi* political landscape.

METHOD

This study employs the historical method within a qualitative research framework to examine the transition of power from the *Old Order* to the *New Order* and its implications for Indonesia's political development. The historical method provides an appropriate analytical approach, as the study examines past events through the systematic examination and critical evaluation of historical evidence. Kuntowijoyo ([2013](#)) explains that historical research consists of four principal stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. During the heuristic stage, this study collected relevant materials, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official documents, and previous scholarly studies addressing Indonesia's political conditions during the *Old Order* and *New Order* periods. The study subsequently subjected these materials to both external and internal source criticism to evaluate their authenticity, credibility, and relevance to the research objectives.

The interpretation stage analyzed historical evidence concerning the political and economic crises, ideological conflicts, the *30 September Movement* in 1965, the issuance of the *11 March Order*, and Suharto's consolidation of political power. The historiographical stage synthesized and organized these findings into a systematic and chronological narrative to explain the background, process, and political consequences of the transition from the *Old Order* to the *New Order*. This study strengthened the credibility of its findings by applying source triangulation, comparing evidence from multiple historical sources and scholarly publications relevant to the research topic. Integrating these complementary sources enabled the study to minimize interpretative bias while producing a more comprehensive and empirically grounded reconstruction of Indonesia's political transformation during the mid-twentieth century.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Political, Economic, and Ideological Drivers of the *Old Order*–*New Order* Transition

The transition of political power from the *Old Order* to the *New Order* emerged from the cumulative interaction of political, economic, and social crises that intensified throughout the early 1960s, rather than from a single abrupt event. During the *Guided Democracy* period, President Sukarno promoted the *Nasakom* (*Nationalism, Religion, and Communism*) doctrine to integrate Indonesia's principal political forces within a unified ideological framework and preserve political stability. Instead of fostering national cohesion, this policy intensified ideological rivalry among nationalist groups, the military, and the Indonesian Communist Party. The PKI's expanding political influence generated growing apprehension within the military establishment and anti-communist factions, thereby deepening political polarization and undermining the stability of the *Old Order* government (Indrayanti & Saraswati, [2022](#)).

The Sukarno administration simultaneously confronted a severe economic crisis that substantially weakened the state's governing capacity and political legitimacy. Ineffective economic management, extensive public expenditure on

ambitious national projects, and the financial burden imposed by the *Konfrontasi* campaign against Malaysia placed extraordinary pressure on Indonesia's fiscal system. By 1965, inflation had reached approximately 650 percent, while declining industrial and agricultural production and shortages of essential commodities significantly reduced public welfare and eroded confidence in the government (Sari et al., [2024](#)). These deteriorating economic conditions reinforced political dissatisfaction and created an environment conducive to institutional change.

The *30 September Movement* in 1965 constituted a decisive turning point in Indonesia's political history after six senior Army generals were assassinated during the incident. Major General Suharto immediately led a military operation to restore political order and suppress individuals and organizations accused of involvement in the movement. The *New Order* government officially identified the PKI as the principal architect of the incident. However, scholars continue to debate the origins, motivations, and actors associated with the G30S, reflecting the enduring historiographical complexity of this episode (Daffa, [2025](#)). These competing interpretations demonstrate that the G30S remains one of the most contested events in modern Indonesian political history.

The political consequences of the G30S rapidly weakened Sukarno's authority as the Army and various social groups intensified demands for the dissolution of the PKI and the implementation of effective economic reforms. Student organizations further strengthened this political pressure through the *Tritura (Three Demands of the People)* movement, which mobilized widespread public opposition to the existing government. President Sukarno issued the *11 March Order* on 11 March 1966, granting Suharto broad authority to undertake measures necessary to restore national security and political order. This transfer of authority initiated the formal transition of power from Sukarno to Suharto and marked the establishment of the *New Order* regime as Indonesia's dominant political system (Hastangka & Ediyono, [2023](#)).

Dynamics and Institutional Mechanisms of the *Old Order–New Order* Power Transition

The transition of political power from the *Old Order* to the *New Order* unfolded gradually through a sequence of political developments between 1965 and 1968 rather than through a single constitutional transfer of authority. The *September 30th Movement* in 1965 significantly weakened President Sukarno's political position despite his continued status as the formal head of state. Major General Suharto simultaneously expanded the Army's political influence, progressively reducing Sukarno's capacity to control national affairs and enabling the military to assume a dominant role in maintaining security and shaping the country's political trajectory (Mustafa, [2022](#)). This redistribution of political authority created the institutional conditions that facilitated the emergence of the *New Order* regime.

Student movements and civil society organizations also played a decisive role in accelerating the political transition by mobilizing widespread public opposition to the *Old Order* government. Organizations such as the *Indonesian Student Action Union (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia / KAMI)*, the *Indonesian Student and Youth Action Union (Kesatuan Aksi Pelajar Pemuda Indonesia / KAPPI)*, and several other civic groups organized large-scale demonstrations demanding the implementation of the *Tritura (Three Demands of the People)*, which called for the dissolution of the PKI, cabinet restructuring, and comprehensive economic reform. These coordinated demonstrations reflected declining public confidence in Sukarno's administration while substantially increasing political pressure on the government (Farida et al., [2025](#)). The growing alliance between student activists, civil society organizations, and the military further accelerated the erosion of the *Old Order's* political legitimacy.

The transition reached a critical turning point on 11 March 1966, when President Sukarno signed the *11 March Order*. This presidential directive authorized Lieutenant General Suharto to undertake measures considered necessary to restore national security and public order. Suharto immediately exercised this authority by dissolving the PKI and ordering the arrest of several cabinet ministers alleged to be connected to the G30S incident. These decisive actions substantially strengthened Suharto's position within the state apparatus while further diminishing Sukarno's political authority (Diprose et al., [2019](#)).

The *Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara)* institutionalized the transfer of power through a series of political decisions adopted during its General Sessions in 1966 and 1967. The MPRS revoked several of Sukarno's principal policies, reduced his constitutional authority, and rejected his *Nawaksara* accountability speech together with its supplementary documents because they failed to provide a satisfactory explanation of Indonesia's political conditions following the G30S incident. These decisions significantly accelerated the constitutional and political transfer of authority from Sukarno to Suharto by eliminating the remaining institutional

foundations of the *Old Order* administration (Pratama et al., [2019](#)). The Assembly, therefore, served as the principal constitutional instrument legitimizing Indonesia's political transformation.

The transition concluded during the MPRS Special Session on 12 March 1967, when the Assembly revoked President Sukarno's executive authority and appointed Suharto as Acting President of the Republic of Indonesia. The 1968 MPRS General Session subsequently confirmed Suharto as the President of the Republic of Indonesia, thereby formalizing the establishment of the *New Order* government. This constitutional appointment officially ended the *Old Order* era. It inaugurated a new political regime that prioritized political stability, economic development, and the institutional expansion of the military's role in state governance (Purnomo et al., [2023](#)). These developments completed one of the most significant political transformations in Indonesia's modern history.

Political Consolidation and Developmental Governance under the *New Order* Regime

Following his formal inauguration as President in 1968, Suharto implemented a series of political and economic policies designed to consolidate state authority, restore national stability, and accelerate economic development. The *New Order* administration regarded political stability as the essential foundation for national reconstruction after the prolonged political turmoil and economic deterioration that characterized the final years of the *Old Order*. The government therefore adopted an integrated strategy that strengthened state control over political institutions, economic management, and social life to facilitate long-term national development (Setiadi, [2019](#)). This governance model established the institutional framework that shaped Indonesia's political and economic trajectory for more than three decades.

The *New Order* government centralized political authority by institutionalizing the military's influence through the doctrine of the *Dual Function of ABRI* (*Dwifungsi ABRI*). This doctrine assigned the Indonesian Armed Forces (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*) a dual mandate as both the guardian of national defense and security and a sociopolitical institution actively involved in governance and public policymaking. The government consequently placed military personnel in strategic positions across national and regional state institutions, thereby expanding the military's influence over the civilian bureaucracy and political decision-making processes (Maulidia et al., [2019](#)). This institutional arrangement substantially strengthened executive authority while reducing the autonomy of civilian political institutions.

The *New Order* administration also restructured Indonesia's political party system to minimize political fragmentation and limit electoral competition, which the government perceived as potential threats to national stability. In 1973, the government consolidated existing political parties into three principal political organizations: the *Functional Groups* (*Golongan Karya* [Golkar]), the *United Development Party* (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* [PPP]), and the *Indonesian Democratic Party* (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* [PDI]). Although Indonesia formally retained a democratic political system, Golkar's overwhelming electoral dominance, supported by the state bureaucracy and the military, produced an uneven political landscape that significantly constrained meaningful political competition (Marpaung et al., [2024](#); Safitri et al., [2024](#)). These institutional reforms enabled the regime to consolidate its political legitimacy while maintaining tight control over electoral politics.

The government pursued an ambitious developmental agenda through the *Five-Year Development Plan* (*Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun* [Repelita]), which emphasized sustained economic growth, macroeconomic stability, and structural modernization. Policymakers encouraged foreign investment, expanded cooperation with international financial institutions, and implemented agricultural modernization through the *Green Revolution*, enabling Indonesia to achieve substantial economic growth and rice self-sufficiency by the mid-1980s. Despite these achievements, rapid economic expansion also intensified social inequality and institutionalized corruption, collusion, and nepotism as enduring features of the political economy (Pakpahan et al., [2024](#)). These structural contradictions eventually weakened the developmental legitimacy that had initially strengthened the *New Order* regime.

The *New Order* government reinforced its political dominance by imposing strict controls over press freedom, civil society organizations, and student activism. State authorities required mass media organizations to support official government policies, while licensing regulations and repressive measures systematically restricted criticism of the regime. The government also employed the national education system to reinforce political legitimacy by disseminating official interpretations of Indonesian history, nationalism, and development (Aspinall & Hicken, [2022](#)). These strategies

succeeded in maintaining long-term political stability but simultaneously entrenched authoritarian governance, creating structural tensions that ultimately contributed to the emergence of the *Reformasi* movement in 1998.

Political Consequences and Institutional Legacy of the *Old Order*–*New Order* Transition

The transition from the *Old Order* to the *New Order* fundamentally transformed Indonesia's political system by restructuring the distribution of state power and redefining the relationship between the government and society. The *New Order* established a highly centralized political system that concentrated authority in the presidency while relying extensively on military support to maintain political control. Unlike the preceding period, characterized by intense competition among ideological and political groups, the new regime maintained political stability through the stringent oversight of political institutions and civil society organizations. This centralized governance model enabled the government to implement national development programs more effectively, although it simultaneously restricted opportunities for meaningful public participation in political decision-making (Colombijn, [2013](#)).

The *New Order* further consolidated its political authority by institutionalizing the *Dual Function of ABRI* (*Dwifungsi ABRI*), which significantly expanded the military's role in state governance. Under this doctrine, the Indonesian Armed Forces (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* [ABRI]) assumed responsibility not only for national defense and security but also for sociopolitical affairs and governmental administration. The government appointed military officers to strategic positions within the legislature, the civil bureaucracy, and regional administrations, thereby making ABRI one of the principal pillars sustaining the *New Order* regime. This institutional arrangement preserved political stability while simultaneously narrowing democratic space and strengthening state dominance over civil society (Ritonga & Noviani, [2025](#)).

The *New Order* administration also restructured Indonesia's party system through the 1973 political party merger, which reduced electoral competition to three principal political organizations: *Golongan Karya* (Golkar), the *United Development Party* (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* [PPP]), and the *Indonesian Democratic Party* (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* [PDI]). Golkar benefited from extensive institutional support from the state bureaucracy and the military, enabling the organization to dominate Indonesia's electoral politics throughout the *New Order* period. Elections consequently functioned primarily as instruments for legitimizing the existing political order rather than as competitive mechanisms for democratic representation and political accountability. This political configuration substantially constrained democratic development and weakened opposition forces' capacity to influence national policymaking (Maulana et al., [2022](#)).

The political stability established under the *New Order* created favorable conditions for implementing long-term national development strategies and sustaining economic growth. The government executed successive development programs with relatively limited political disruption compared with the instability that characterized the final years of the *Old Order*, enabling Indonesia to achieve considerable economic expansion from the 1970s through the early 1990s. At the same time, centralized political control facilitated the institutionalization of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (*Korupsi, Kolusi, dan Nepotisme* [KKN]), while restrictions on press freedom and recurrent human rights violations generated increasing public dissatisfaction with the regime (Farida et al., [2025](#); Yustia & Arifin, [2023](#)). These structural weaknesses gradually eroded the political legitimacy that had initially supported the regime's developmental achievements.

The accumulation of these political and institutional problems ultimately precipitated a profound legitimacy crisis for the *New Order* government. Indonesia's economic crisis in 1997–1998 exposed the fragility of a political system that relied heavily on Suharto's personal leadership while lacking robust democratic institutions to manage systemic challenges. Widespread student demonstrations and reform movements across the country intensified public pressure and compelled Suharto to resign on 21 May 1998. His resignation formally ended the *New Order* era and inaugurated the *Reformasi* period, which introduced democratization, political decentralization, and a substantial reduction in the military's involvement in practical politics.

CONCLUSION

The transition of power from the *Old Order* to the *New Order* constituted a defining turning point in Indonesia's modern political history, emerging through a complex sequence of political developments shaped by interconnected structural and institutional factors. Political instability, ideological polarization, severe economic deterioration, and the 30

September Movement in 1965 collectively undermined the legitimacy of Sukarno's administration. It facilitated the rise of a new political order under Suharto's leadership. The transfer of authority unfolded progressively through the expansion of the military's political influence, the issuance of the *11 March Order*, and Suharto's formal inauguration as President of the Republic of Indonesia in 1968. These developments institutionalized a new governing framework that fundamentally reoriented Indonesia's political trajectory for the following three decades.

The *New Order* government consolidated its authority by implementing policies that prioritized political stability, centralized governance, and sustained economic development. The institutionalization of the *Dual Function of ABRI* (*Dwifungsi ABRI*), the restructuring of the political party system, and the implementation of national development programs contributed to governmental stability while supporting rapid economic growth. At the same time, the regime reinforced an authoritarian political structure by restricting political participation, exercising strict control over the mass media, and expanding state dominance over political and social institutions. These policies strengthened the government's administrative capacity but substantially limited democratic accountability and civic participation.

The consequences of the transition extended well beyond the replacement of national leadership and fundamentally transformed Indonesia's political institutions and governance patterns. Although the *New Order* established a relatively stable political system for more than three decades, it also institutionalized structural problems, including weakened democratic institutions, widespread corruption, collusion, and nepotism (*Korupsi, Kolusi, dan Nepotisme* [KKN]), as well as persistent human rights violations. The cumulative effects of these governance failures eventually generated a profound crisis of political legitimacy that culminated in the *Reformasi* movement of 1998. The transition from the *Old Order* to the *New Order*, therefore, represents not merely a change in political leadership but a transformative historical process whose institutional and political legacies continue to shape Indonesia's contemporary political landscape.

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