

REINTERPRETING NEW INSTITUTIONALISM THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

New Institutionalism has long provided the core framework for understanding institutional formation and stability, emphasizing rules, norms, and legitimacy in shaping organizational behavior. However, traditional New Institutionalism focuses primarily on the logic of existence, explaining how institutions are created and maintained, while overlooking their logic of survival and logic of performance under dynamic change. This conceptual paper introduces Institutional Resilience Theory as a bridge linking New Institutionalism and Performance Regime Theory, revealing how institutions evolve from existence to performance. Institutional resilience—comprising learning, buffering, and adaptive capacities—enables institutions to sustain functionality under stress and transform stability into performance through feedback and interaction. The paper argues that performance represents a “resilient form of legitimacy,” thereby reinterpreting New Institutionalism from a dynamic perspective and extending its explanatory scope.

Keywords: New Institutionalism, Institutional Resilience, Performance Regime Theory.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membangun kerangka konseptual yang menghubungkan eksistensi, ketahanan, dan kinerja kelembagaan. Dengan menafsirkan kembali New Institutionalism melalui lensa Institutional Resilience Theory, studi ini berupaya menjelaskan bagaimana legitimasi kelembagaan berkembang menjadi kapasitas untuk bertahan (survival capacity), dan akhirnya menghasilkan kinerja kelembagaan (institutional performance). Artikel ini mengintegrasikan tiga kerangka teoretis utama—New Institutionalism, Institutional Resilience, dan Performance Regime—untuk menggambarkan siklus hidup kelembagaan dari stabilitas menuju adaptasi dan pencapaian nilai. Pendekatan yang digunakan bersifat konseptual dan normatif, dengan fokus pada sintesis teori dan analisis komparatif. Kerangka ini memberikan pemahaman yang lebih dinamis tentang keberlanjutan dan reformasi kelembagaan, terutama dalam konteks tata kelola publik di Indonesia yang menghadapi ketidakpastian dan tuntutan reformasi birokrasi.

Kata kunci: Ketahanan kelembagaan, New Institutionalism, Performance Regime.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions form the backbone of governance systems, providing stability, legitimacy, and predictability for collective action. Within public administration, New Institutionalism has traditionally served as the primary lens for explaining how institutions emerge and become sustained over time. It highlights the role of norms, rules, and shared understandings in shaping behavior, suggesting that institutional persistence is grounded more in legitimacy than efficiency (March & Olsen, 1984; Hall & Taylor, 1996). As a result, institutions tend to be analyzed as relatively stable entities whose endurance is shaped by historical trajectories and social expectations.

Yet, contemporary governance environments increasingly reveal the limits of this static understanding. Institutions today operate in conditions marked by complexity, interdependence, and recurrent disruptions—ranging from administrative reforms to political contestation, crisis events, and rapid societal change. These pressures expose a theoretical gap: while New Institutionalism explains

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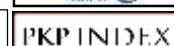
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why institutions exist, it offers limited insight into how they survive turbulence and how they produce performance in dynamic contexts. In other words, legitimacy alone does not guarantee institutional effectiveness when environments are uncertain and problems evolve quickly.

Recent developments in governance scholarship point toward Institutional Resilience Theory as a promising complement to traditional institutional analysis. Rather than viewing institutions as rigid structures, resilience theory conceptualizes them as adaptive systems capable of learning from disturbances, buffering shocks, and adjusting rules or routines in response to feedback (Duit & Galaz, 2021; Christensen & Lægreid, 2020; Gherghina, 2023). These capacities—learning, buffering, and adaptation—enable institutions to maintain legitimacy while responding flexibly to environmental demands. At the same time, public administration literature increasingly emphasizes performance as a relational, dynamic process. Performance Regime Theory argues that institutional performance emerges through interactions among learning, accountability, and stakeholder participation (Moynihan, 2011). Performance becomes not only an organizational output but also a mechanism that reinforces legitimacy and institutional vitality.

Against this backdrop, this paper asks a guiding question: How do institutions move from existence, to survival, to performance? To address this, the study brings together New Institutionalism, Institutional Resilience Theory, and Performance Regime Theory into a unified conceptual framework. This integration provides a dynamic understanding of institutional evolution: legitimacy enables existence, resilience enables survival, and feedback-driven interaction enables performance.

By positioning resilience as the missing link between institutional stability and performance, this paper extends New Institutionalism beyond its traditional explanatory boundaries. The framework offered here contributes conceptually to institutional theory and also provides a foundation for future empirical work in governance systems—particularly in contexts characterized by uncertainty, such as Indonesia—where institutional continuity and reform must operate simultaneously

METHOD

This study adopts a conceptual and theory-building methodology. Rather than relying on empirical data, the analysis synthesizes and compares theoretical insights from New Institutionalism, Institutional Resilience Theory, and Performance Regime Theory. The purpose is to construct an integrative framework that links institutional legitimacy (existence), resilience (survival), and performance (outcome).

The methodological process follows a normative–analytical logic, which includes: Theoretical abstraction, identifying how each theory conceptualizes institutional stability and change. Comparative synthesis, examining overlaps and complementarities among the three frameworks. Integrative modeling, formulating a conceptual linkage that connects legitimacy, resilience capacities (learning, buffering, and adaptation), and performance outcomes.

This approach is suitable for governance studies where institutional mechanisms cannot be directly observed but can be inferred through theoretical generalization. By employing this method, the study aims to advance theoretical understanding rather than statistical verification, offering a basis for future empirical testing in public governance contexts such as Indonesia’s land acquisition and bureaucratic reform processes.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework

New Institutionalism: The Logic of Existence

New Institutionalism conceptualizes institutions as socially constructed systems of formal and informal rules that both constrain and enable behavior. Institutional endurance relies primarily on legitimacy instead of efficiency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The “logic of appropriateness” (March & Olsen, 1984) suggests that actors behave in ways that conform to institutional norms and collective expectations rather than utilitarian calculation.

However, this perspective has long been criticized for assuming institutional inertia—that is, institutions are viewed as stable entities resistant to change. Historical Institutionalism advanced this

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discussion by introducing the idea of path dependence, explaining how initial institutional choices constrain future reforms. Yet, it still treats institutions as relatively rigid and slow to adapt.

Recent developments, however, have revitalized institutional theory by reintroducing the dimension of change and agency. Peters (2019) argues that contemporary institutionalism must account for institutional dynamism, emphasizing how institutions evolve through interpretation, learning, and interaction with their administrative and social environments. This shift marks a move from seeing institutions merely as structures of constraint to viewing them as adaptive governance systems capable of modifying rules and routines in response to turbulence.

Therefore, while New Institutionalism effectively explains why institutions exist and persist through legitimacy, it remains incomplete without incorporating how they adapt, learn, and transform—a gap that subsequent frameworks such as Institutional Resilience Theory seek to address.

Institutional Resilience Theory: The Logic of Survival

Institutional Resilience Theory (Duit, 2016; Duit & Galaz, 2021; Ansell & Trondal, 2018) extends resilience thinking from ecology to institutional and governance systems. Institutions function as adaptive systems rather than static entities capable of learning, buffering, and reorganizing in response to turbulence and shocks. Institutional resilience is expressed through three interrelated capacities:

Learning capacity – the ability to acquire, reflect, and institutionalize new knowledge;

Buffering capacity – the ability to absorb uncertainty through redundancy, coordination, and contingency mechanisms;

Adaptive capacity – the ability to adjust institutional structures and norms based on feedback and evolving contexts.

Recent research has situated resilience more explicitly within complex governance environments. Duit and Galaz (2021) emphasize that institutional resilience depends on adaptive governance arrangements that enable cross-sectoral coordination and policy learning in responding to climate-related uncertainty. Christensen and Lægreid (2020) demonstrate how institutional resilience also involves meaning-making and communication during crises, showing that resilience is not only structural but also interpretive and relational. Similarly, Gherghina (2023) conceptualizes resilience as a core feature of democratic and institutional stability, emphasizing its role in preserving legitimacy and coherence under political and societal pressures.

Together, these developments indicate that resilience has become a central analytical lens in contemporary institutional theory, linking crisis response, legitimacy, and adaptability. Hence, institutional resilience represents a logic of survival: it ensures continuity amid disruption by allowing institutions to maintain legitimacy while flexibly adjusting operational boundaries. Resilient institutions thus balance stability and change, demonstrating the capacity to endure shocks, learn from disruption, and evolve toward renewed equilibrium.

Performance Regime Theory: The Logic of Performance

Performance Regime Theory (Moynihan, 2011) reframes performance as a dynamic institutional process rather than a static outcome. Performance emerges from the continuous interaction of three institutional logics: Learning logic – feedback loops promote continuous improvement; Accountability logic – performance sustains legitimacy through transparency; Participation logic – multiple actors co-create value through collaboration.

Recent scholarship further extends this framework by emphasizing the behavioral and motivational dynamics behind performance regimes. Kroll and Vogel (2021) demonstrate that performance management not only structures accountability but also stimulates public service motivation, thereby linking institutional performance with individual commitment and collaborative engagement. Likewise, Van Dooren, Bouckaert, and Halligan (2022) highlight that modern performance regimes operate through networked governance and interactive learning, where performance information is used not only for control but also for dialogue, coordination, and collective sense-making.

In this view, performance becomes the product of resilient institutional behavior. The ability to balance learning, accountability, and participation reflects institutional vitality, connecting resilience to measurable governance outcomes and to the broader co-production of public value.

Table 1: Summary of Theoretical Frameworks

Theory	Core Logic	Key Concepts	Main Contribution
New Institutionalism	Logic of Existence	Legitimacy, social norms, rule-based behavior	Explains why institutions exist and persist through legitimacy.
Institutional Resilience Theory	Logic of Survival	Learning, buffering, adaptation	Explains how institutions survive and remain stable under stress.
Performance Regime Theory	Logic of Performance	Learning, accountability, participation	Explains how institutions convert resilience into measurable performance.

Source: Author's synthesis based on DiMaggio & Powell (1983)

As summarized in Table 1, the three theoretical perspectives highlight different yet complementary dimensions of institutional evolution. New Institutionalism explains the foundation of legitimacy and stability; Institutional Resilience Theory emphasizes the mechanisms that sustain continuity through learning, buffering, and adaptation; while Performance Regime Theory demonstrates how resilience transforms into measurable governance outcomes. Together, they provide an integrated lens for understanding how institutions evolve from mere existence to effective performance.

Mechanism Analysis: Legitimacy–Resilience–Performance Transformation

Institutional resilience bridges New Institutionalism and Performance Regime Theory by connecting legitimacy maintenance with performance generation. The transformation mechanism unfolds through three interrelated capacities:

Learning capacity facilitates reflexive updating of norms, transforming legitimacy from symbolic to substantive; Buffering capacity ensures continuity during external disturbances, preserving structural legitimacy; Adaptive capacity converts feedback into institutional reform, producing observable performance outcomes. These capacities form an interactional chain: learning provides cognitive input, buffering stabilizes the system, and adaptation translates institutional responses into performance. Together, they constitute a dynamic pathway from legitimacy to performance.

Theoretical Integration: From Existence to Performance

By bringing these theoretical perspectives together, this study puts forward a three-stage way of understanding institutional evolution. Existence logic (New Institutionalism): institutions come into being and maintain stability primarily through legitimacy; Survival logic (Institutional Resilience): institutions continue to function by developing learning, buffering, and adaptive capacities; Performance logic (Performance Regime): institutions, in turn, translate resilience into value through ongoing interaction and feedback.

Taken as a whole, this framework offers a view of institutions as living systems that move through a continuous life cycle. In this cycle, legitimacy provides the foundation for existence, resilience supports ongoing survival, and performance reflects the effectiveness that results from adaptation. To some extent, institutional resilience may be seen as the crucial link that allows static legitimacy to evolve into dynamic performance.

Theoretical Dialogue: Dynamic Capabilities and Public Value

The notion of institutional resilience parallels the concept of dynamic capabilities, as both emphasize the ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure organizational competencies in response to environmental change. Dynamic capability theory explains how organizations sustain effectiveness by continuously sensing opportunities, seizing them through adaptive actions, and transforming internal processes to remain relevant in changing environments.

Recent studies have extended this concept to the public sector, emphasizing that dynamic capabilities are equally critical for innovation and performance in government institutions. Hartmann and Spicka (2020) argue that public organizations—though not driven by market competition—require dynamic capabilities to transform innovation into tangible performance. They identify strategic learning, inter-organizational collaboration, and knowledge recombination as key mechanisms linking institutional flexibility with governance outcomes.

In parallel, Performance Regime Theory aligns closely with Public Value Theory (Moore, 1995), which holds that public performance should be measured not merely by efficiency, but by the generation of collective and democratic value. More recent research (Nabatchi & Sancino, 2023) expands this perspective by emphasizing that public value is increasingly co-created through governance networks, where collaborative performance and institutional learning strengthen legitimacy and trust. Building on this development, Sancino and Horner (2024) further reimagine public value for complex governance networks, arguing that adaptive, multi-actor systems must balance efficiency with inclusiveness, legitimacy, and shared purpose to sustain long-term institutional performance.

Hence, institutional resilience can be interpreted as a public-sector form of dynamic capability: its core function is to sustain legitimacy while co-creating public value through adaptive and participatory governance. In this view, resilience represents not passive endurance but an institutionalized capacity to learn, coordinate, and transform in pursuit of shared societal outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study puts forward a conceptual framework that connects institutional existence, survival, and performance in a more dynamic way. Rather than treating institutions as fixed entities, it extends New Institutionalism by incorporating resilience as a core analytical lens. In doing so, the framework explains how institutions sustain legitimacy while adapting to changing environments.

Theoretically, the framework integrates stability and adaptability within institutional analysis, suggesting that resilience represents the missing dimension of legitimacy in institutional theory. It also connects institutional resilience with the dynamic capabilities and public value traditions, demonstrating how learning, coordination, and feedback transform institutional continuity into measurable governance performance. Practically, this framework offers a useful tool for understanding how governance systems maintain stability while pursuing reform in contexts of uncertainty and interdependence.

Building on recent developments in resilience governance (Duit & Galaz, 2021; Christensen & Lægreid, 2020; Gherghina, 2023) and public value creation (Nabatchi & Sancino, 2023; Sancino & Horner, 2024), the study highlights the importance of linking legitimacy, adaptability, and performance within a unified institutional process. Future research might explore these relationships empirically, particularly how learning, buffering, and adaptation interact to mediate the link between institutional design and governance outcomes.

Possible dimensions for measurement could include learning capacity (e.g., information sharing and policy reflection), buffering capacity (e.g., redundancy mechanisms and coordination platforms), and adaptive capacity (e.g., rule modification and feedback integration). In practice, these constructs could be assessed using performance reports, institutional feedback records, or inter-agency network analyses.

While this paper presents a conceptual framework, it is explicitly designed to be empirically testable. The proposed dimensions of learning, buffering, and adaptive capacity offer a clear roadmap for future research. Specifically, this framework can be operationalized and tested in the context of Indonesian public governance, such as by analyzing performance reports from bureaucratic reform units, conducting network analysis of inter-agency coordination during crises, or interviewing policymakers on their institutional learning processes.

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