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Research article

Gradual Institutional Change in Food Security Governance: The Case of Majene Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

Local food security is usually assessed through availability and distribution, yet the institutions that govern it are seldom examined as products of change over time. Earlier research on Majene Regency, West Sulawesi, identified a dormant Food Security Council as the main coordination bottleneck, but its synchronic design could not explain how that condition arose. This article asks which mechanisms of gradual institutional change produced Majene's current food governance arrangements and what kind of interplay the resulting institutional layers generate. Combining Streeck and Thelen's typology of layering, drift, conversion, and displacement with the concept of institutional interplay, the study applies process tracing to eight semi-structured interviews and to regional and national documents covering roughly a decade up to January 2026, counting a change as institutional only when it durably altered authority, operative rules, or purpose. Layering added decree-based inflation and stunting teams beside a council that was never revoked; drift confined a broadly worded food reserve regulation to disaster relief, with 12 of 41 tonnes disbursed; conversion redirected the inflation forum twice, toward food security coordination and then toward inter-regional competition; and displacement moved extension authority twice, within the regency and then to the central government. Agency-based budgeting persisted throughout, which left each new layer without operating funds. Four of six formal interfaces show disruptive consequences and none shows synergy, whereas informal arrangements involving a philanthropic foundation and field personnel complement or substitute for formal coordination. The article contributes the concepts of second-order conversion and serial displacement and a case-derived proposition linking each mechanism to the interface it leaves behind.

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1. Introduction

The Food Security Council of Majene Regency has never been formally disbanded. No regulation revoked it, no official minutes declared its work concluded, and its name still appears in a number of regional planning documents. What happened instead was, in the words of one of the technical officials interviewed for this study, that the council simply "needs to be reactivated", an appeal that implicitly concedes the body, though still standing on paper, had long since stopped functioning. Beside it grew a set of leaner, newer institutions, a Regional Inflation Control Team for food price matters, and a separate team for stunting response, each carrying a narrow mandate that never truly inherited the broad remit the council once held.

This is no isolated case. The regional food reserve regulation, whose text opens the door to disbursement for stunting and inflation response alike, is in practice read narrowly, as though confined to disaster relief alone. Authority over the home-garden food programme, and separately over the coordination of women farmer groups, has moved back and forth between one regional agency and another, following shifts in central government policy, and its meaning has shifted with every move. Agricultural extension services, once folded together with the food security mandate itself before being carved out to the Agriculture Agency, were later transferred wholesale a second time, from the regency to the central government, on a date one informant for this study could name precisely, the first of January. Taken separately, these episodes look unrelated, taken together, they trace the same pattern, a local food governance system altered not through one sweeping decision but through an accumulation of small adjustments, each unremarkable at the moment it occurred, and some of them repeating within the very same policy domain.

Food security is thus increasingly understood as not merely a matter of production and distribution but also of the governance arrangements and institutions that manage it (Candel 2014; Taheri Hosseinkhani 2025) . Studies of food governance effectiveness, however, typically capture institutional conditions at one particular point in time, comparing the formal structures on the books against the informal norms and practices actually at work (Scott 2014) . Such an approach yields a clear picture of present conditions, yet tends to explain little about how that configuration came to be, whether it is the product of deliberate design or of small adjustments accumulated over years without ever being recognised as one coherent process.

Majene Regency, a coastal regency in West Sulawesi Province where dependence on external food supply exceeds sixty percent for strategic commodities (BPS Provinsi Sulawesi Barat 2024), offers a fitting setting in which to pursue this question. Its administrative profile is not unusual for the region, studies of decentralised governance in disadvantaged parts of eastern Indonesia consistently find that formal transfers of authority outpace the fiscal and administrative capacity needed to exercise it, producing local governments that hold nominal responsibility without the resources to discharge it fully (Shoesmith, Franklin, and Hidayat

2020). Prior research specific to Majene mapped local food governance conditions through Scott's three institutional pillars, regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive, and concluded that the absence of a single forum uniting the food sector, since the Food Security Council ceased to function, constitutes the central bottleneck to institutional integration. That conclusion is sound, but it is a snapshot of a single moment. It explains what Majene's food governance looks like today, but not how that condition came about, what mechanisms drove it, or whether the pattern of change follows a logic that theory can account for. The present article departs from that earlier study (Tamrin et al. 2026) in three respects: it treats time as the object of analysis rather than as background; it replaces Scott's pillars, which classify institutional elements, with mechanisms that explain how those elements change; and it asks not only which institutions exist, but how their coexistence affects each of them.

Majene is analytically useful for this question less because of its food deficit than because of the number of institutional events it absorbed within a short span. In roughly a decade, the regency saw the national council that anchored its own food security council dissolved, an inflation control team and a stunting team created under separate national instruments, a regional food reserve regulation enacted, programme authority reclassified more than once, and agricultural extension moved first between regency agencies and then out of the regency altogether. Each of these events originated in a different policy stream, yet all of them landed on the same small bureaucracy, one whose fiscal room is thin enough that every new mandate competes with existing ones for the same staff and budget. The case therefore resembles what Seawright and Gerring (2008) call a typical case for the population of fiscally constrained regencies in eastern Indonesia, while being unusually rich in observable sequences, which suits it to tracing mechanisms rather than to estimating how often they occur.

What is already known about this problem can be grouped into three bodies of work, each of which illuminates part of the Majene puzzle while leaving its temporal dimension in the shadow. The first, a food security governance literature, has established that fragmentation among agencies, levels, and sectors is a recurrent obstacle to effective food policy, and that integration is better understood as a process that can advance or unravel over time than as a fixed state (Candel 2014; Candel and Biesbroek 2016; de Wee and Jakoet-Salie 2025) . The second, an Indonesian literature on decentralisation and food policy, has shown how national food security agendas and repeated reassignments of authority reach regencies faster than the capacity needed to act on them (Neilson and Wright 2017; Shoesmith et al. 2020). The third, a literature on gradual institutional change, has demonstrated that layering, drift, conversion, and displacement can transform institutions without dramatic reform (Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Streeck and Thelen 2005) , yet its applications remain concentrated in the welfare, pension, and labour market institutions of advanced political economies (Béland 2007; Hacker 2004; Hacker, Pierson, and Thelen 2015) , and reviews of the approach note how rarely its mechanisms are operationalised through explicit indicators (van der Heijden 2011; Rocco and Thurston 2014). Read together, these literatures explain that local food governance is

fragmented and that institutions can change incrementally, but they do not explain how a specific local food governance configuration was produced through a sequence of gradual changes, nor why the institutional layers those changes leave behind tend to collide rather than cooperate.

This is the gap this article sets out to fill, by shifting the analytical lens from condition to process. Streeck and Thelen (2005) developed the gradual institutional change framework to explain how institutions can change fundamentally without passing through a moment of crisis or sweeping reform, but instead through four gradual mechanisms, layering, drift, conversion, and displacement. The framework emerged from comparative studies of advanced political economies, particularly European welfare and industrial relations systems, building on an earlier insight from historical institutionalism that political and institutional trajectories are often path dependent, so that small early events can lock in outcomes that grow steadily more costly to reverse (Pierson 2000). Its core premise, that institutional change is often incremental and non-linear, is well worth testing against local bureaucracies in a developing country such as Indonesia, where central policy is regularly absorbed by regional governments in a piecemeal fashion, without any genuinely planned transition.

Why examine food governance through institutional change rather than through coordination capacity or policy performance? The answer lies in the kind of problem the earlier study left open. A capacity explanation would expect Majene's coordination gaps to close once budgets or staff improve, and a performance explanation would read the dormant council as a failed programme. Neither expectation fits the evidence well, because the gaps in Majene arise from rules that were added, reread, redirected, or relocated while older rules stayed formally in force. A problem generated by the accumulation of rules can only be explained by examining how those rules changed and how the layers they left behind relate to one another, which is the analytical territory of historical institutionalism (Pierson 2004; Thelen 2004).

Building on this gap, the article asks two research questions. First, which mechanisms of gradual institutional change produced the food governance arrangements under which Majene Regency operated in early 2026, how can each mechanism be distinguished empirically from the others, which actors drove, negotiated, or adapted to it, and does any mechanism recur within the same policy domain? Second, what kind of interplay do the institutional layers produced by these mechanisms generate, including relations that cross the boundary between formal government bodies and informal or non-state actors, and under what conditions does that interplay become disruptive or synergistic? The object of explanation is the configuration of governance arrangements, meaning who holds authority over food functions, which rules govern the use of food resources, and how agencies coordinate, rather than food security outcomes such as availability, access, or consumption, which the study does not measure. Accordingly, the article pursues three objectives: to reconstruct the institutional trajectory of food governance in Majene Regency and classify its

changes using explicit indicators of the four mechanisms; to assess the interplay among the resulting layers through its observable consequences; and, as a separate normative step, to derive recommendations addressed to the specific institutional problems the analysis identifies.

The article extends existing research in three directions. Empirically, it moves the study of food governance institutions in Majene, and in Indonesian regencies more broadly, from a synchronic map of institutional pillars to a dated reconstruction of how the present configuration was produced, and it shows which arrangements persisted while others changed. Theoretically, it carries the gradual institutional change framework, applied mostly to the political economies of advanced states, into the bureaucratic setting of a regency in a developing country, and it qualifies the framework in two ways: by documenting that a mechanism can recur sequentially within a single domain, labelled here second-order conversion and serial displacement, and by linking each mechanism to the type of institutional interface it leaves behind. This second link is offered as a proposition derived from one case and open to testing elsewhere, not as a general law. Practically, the findings suggest that strengthening local food governance depends less on adding new institutions than on managing the relations among institutions that already exist, formal and informal alike.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Food Security and Institutional Governance

Local food governance refers to the way regional governments, communities, and other actors interact in managing the production, distribution, and consumption of food. International literature emphasises the importance of collaborative and adaptive governance in the face of food uncertainty (Taheri Hosseinkhani 2025; Vercher Savall and Ruiz-Martinez 2026), an emphasis that echoes a broader turn in public administration toward co-creation between government and non-government actors as a strategy for handling complex, cross-boundary problems that no single agency can resolve alone (Ansell and Torfing 2021). In the Indonesian context, a number of studies find a recurring pattern, weak coordination and overlapping roles among regional government agencies (Roidatua and Purbantara 2022; Sururi et al. 2020), a pattern consistent with wider evidence that Indonesia's decentralisation reforms devolved formal authority to regencies faster than they built the administrative capacity to exercise it, leaving local governments nominally responsible for functions they cannot always fully perform (Shoesmith et al. 2020). A similar pattern surfaces in a setting geographically far removed, (de Wee and Jakoet-Salie, 2025), studying South Africa's National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security, find local food policy failures rooted in institutions poorly connected to one another. This resemblance across contexts suggests that institutional fragmentation in food governance is not a problem specific to any single country but a fairly common feature of multi-level food governance more broadly. These studies, however, are largely synchronic and descriptive, explaining a condition of fragmentation at one particular moment, and rarely

tracing the historical process that produced it, a gap this article takes as its point of departure.

2.2 Gradual Institutional Change

Proposed the gradual institutional change framework as a response to the limits of the punctuated-equilibrium model within historical institutionalism, which assumes institutions change significantly only at critical junctures such as economic crises or regime transitions. The framework builds on, and departs from, the three leading traditions of institutional analysis, rational-choice, sociological, and historical institutionalism, whose respective strengths and blind spots in explaining institutional persistence and change (Hall and Taylor,1996) had earlier set out in an influential comparison, and it extends the historical-institutionalist emphasis on sequence and timing that (Thelen, 1999) had surveyed and that Thelen, 2004) later developed at book length through a comparative study of vocational training systems. Streeck and Thelen argue that institutions can also change fundamentally through the accumulation of small, gradual adjustments, operating through four mechanisms.

Layering refers to the addition of new rules, forums, or institutions on top of existing structures without eliminating them, so the old institution remains formally in place even as it loses practical relevance because its functions are absorbed by the new institution growing beside it. Drift, a mechanism whose conceptual roots trace to (Hacker's, 2004) study of how the practical reach of the United States' welfare state quietly narrowed even as its formal rules stayed on the books, refers to a change in an institution's practical meaning as the surrounding context shifts while its formal rules stay the same, so the institution gradually fails to achieve its original purpose, not because it was revised, but because it was left unadjusted to a changing environment. Conversion refers to a situation in which an old institution retains its form but is redirected toward a different purpose than the one for which it was created, as the coalition of actors controlling it shifts. Displacement refers to the direct replacement of an old institution by a new one, whether quickly or slowly, once the old rule loses legitimacy and is supplanted by a competing new rule.

Deepen the framework by adding a dimension of agency, showing that the four mechanisms are driven by different types of change agents (Mahoney and Thelen 2010), ranging from actors who openly oppose the old institution to actors who quietly exploit gaps in interpretation to alter an institution's meaning without altering its form. This emphasis on agency matters because it underscores that gradual change is not an automatic process, but the product of an interaction between institutional characteristics that leave room for interpretation and the strategic choices of actors who exploit that room, a dynamic consistent with (North's, 1990) broader observation that formal rules and the informal constraints surrounding them rarely change in lockstep, so that the two can drift apart for years before anyone treats the gap as a problem worth fixing. Read alongside (Peters's,2019) survey of the new institutionalisms, gradual institutional change sits closest to the historical-institutionalist tradition while borrowing the sociological tradition's attention to taken-for-granted practice,

an eclecticism this article treats as a strength rather than a weakness given the mixed formal and informal evidence the Majene case presents. Neither Streeck and Thelen nor Mahoney and Thelen dwell at length on the possibility that a single mechanism might recur more than once within the same policy domain, treating each instance largely as a discrete episode, a simplification this article revisits in light of Majene's evidence.

2.3 Institutional Interplay

The concept of institutional interplay developed out of the study of international regimes and global environmental governance, principally through the work of (Young, 2002) and (Oberthür and Gehring, 2006), who highlight how institutions of different origin, level, and sector interact with one another. Such interaction can be functional, when two institutions address the same substantive issue, or political, when both involve overlapping sets of actors. Young, along with Oberthür and Gehring, distinguish interaction that is synergistic, mutually reinforcing the achievement of each institution's goals, from interaction that is disruptive, mutually weakening or generating confusion over authority. Because the concept was built to describe institutions of different origin without restricting that origin to the formal state apparatus, it accommodates, in principle, relations between formal government bodies and informal or non-state institutional arrangements, a possibility explored empirically in this article but seldom foregrounded in the interplay literature itself, which has concentrated overwhelmingly on interactions among formal regimes and treaties.

This concept pairs naturally with gradual institutional change, yet the relationship between the two needs to be specified rather than assumed. Gradual change theory explains how new rules come to coexist with, reinterpret, or replace older ones, but it says comparatively little about what happens once they coexist. Interplay theory, conversely, explains how coexisting institutions affect one another, but treats their coexistence as given rather than as the product of a historical process. The two frameworks therefore answer sequential questions, the first about how institutional layers are produced and the second about what those layers do to one another, and it is their combination that allows the outcome of accumulated change, strengthened governance or its erosion, to be explained rather than merely described.

2.4 What Counts as Institutional Change, and Why It Is Gradual

Not every change in a regency's food programmes counts as institutional change, and the analysis would lose its discipline if it treated every new team or budget line as one. Following (North, 1990) and (Streeck and Thelen,2005), this article treats institutions as the formal and informal rules that allocate authority, prescribe how resources may be used, and define what a public body is for. The unit of analysis is accordingly the institutional arrangement governing a specific food governance function, observed through three elements: the authority arrangement, meaning which agency or level holds a function; the operative rule, meaning what a regulation or decree permits and how it is applied; and the purpose of a forum or

programme, meaning what it is actually used to do. Regulations, organisations, forums, and policy instruments enter the analysis as carriers of these elements rather than as units in their own right, while the relations among them are analysed separately as interplay.

A change qualifies as institutional only when it meets three conditions together. It must alter at least one of the three elements, either formally or in its enacted meaning; it must persist beyond a single planning or budget cycle, which excludes one-off activities and short pilot schemes; and it must leave an observable trace in governance practice, such as a shift in who convenes coordination, which agency proposes a budget line, or how a resource is actually disbursed. Changes that fail these conditions, for instance renaming a programme, holding an additional meeting, or moving funds within the same mandate, are recorded as background events but are not coded as mechanisms.

Change is characterised as gradual, in (Streeck and Thelen's, 2005) sense of incremental yet potentially transformative change, when two features appear together. The first is the absence of a single critical juncture: no one decision reconstituted the arrangement, and the change accumulated through several separate acts or non-acts over time (Pierson 2004). The second is formal continuity alongside substantive change, so that older rules or bodies remain on the books, or keep their form, while their effective role shifts. Because displacement is the mechanism closest to abrupt change, the analysis treats a displacement as part of a gradual trajectory only when it forms one step in a sequence affecting the same domain rather than a stand-alone rupture.

Two further distinctions guide the analysis. Gradual change is defined against what stays the same, so the study records, for each mechanism, the rules and practices that persisted, since persistence conditions how new layers can operate (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). The evidence also includes arrangements without any legal basis, so the study distinguishes formal institutions, understood as written rules enforced through official channels, from informal ones, understood as shared routines created and sustained outside those channels (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). An informal arrangement is described as complementary when it fills gaps within formal rules that work, and as substitutive when it achieves what ineffective formal rules were meant to achieve.

2.5 Analytical Framework: From Mechanisms of Change to Patterns of Interplay

The link between the two frameworks can be stated more precisely by asking what kind of institutional interface each mechanism leaves behind. Layering, because it adds a new rule or body without removing the old one, creates two institutions with overlapping remits at the same level, which is precisely the condition that (Oberthür and Gehring, 2006) identify as a source of functional interaction; whether that interaction becomes synergistic depends on whether a rule allocating tasks between the layers exists. Conversion keeps an institution's form while changing its purpose, so that the institution begins to operate in domains already

occupied by other bodies, generating functional overlap from within rather than from beside. Displacement removes authority from one agency or level and relocates it in another, producing a new lateral or vertical interface whose quality depends on the transition arrangements that accompany it. Drift, finally, creates no new institution at all; it opens a gap between what a rule was meant to achieve and what it actually delivers, and that gap is either left unfilled or absorbed by other actors, often informal ones. Each mechanism, in other words, carries a characteristic interplay risk, and this correspondence is what connects the two stages of the analysis.

(Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) offer a further bridge. They argue that which mechanism prevails depends on two properties of the setting: the strength of veto possibilities available to defenders of the status quo, and the degree of discretion actors enjoy in interpreting and enforcing existing rules. Layering tends to occur where veto possibilities are strong and discretion is low, drift where both are high, conversion where veto possibilities are weak and discretion is high, and displacement where both are low. Applied to a regency bureaucracy, this typology suggests that mechanisms driven from above, such as a transfer of authority imposed by central legislation, leave local actors little room to shape the terms of the new interface, whereas mechanisms driven locally, such as layering through a Regent's Decree, depend on whether local actors choose to write alignment rules at all. The framework thus anticipates, rather than merely records, where disruptive interplay is most likely to arise.

To avoid treating the four mechanisms as loose metaphors, a risk that reviews of the approach have repeatedly flagged (van der Heijden 2011; Rocco and Thurston 2014) , the analysis operationalises each mechanism through observable indicators and a decision rule that separates it from its nearest neighbour. Two questions are decisive: whether the formal rule or body has itself been changed, and whether the change in practice results from active redirection by actors or from passive non-adaptation to a changing context. Interplay is operationalised in parallel, by identifying for each pair of coexisting layers whether their relation is functional or political and whether its observable effects are synergistic or disruptive. Table 1 summarises these operational definitions, which served as the codebook for the analysis described in the next section.

The framework also specifies how institutional change reaches governance practice, since a new decree or a shifted programme cannot be assumed to alter how agencies work. Each mechanism alters the interfaces among layers, and each interface in turn shapes three observable practices: whether tasks are allocated or duplicated, whether resources follow mandates, and whether information moves across agencies. Disruptive interplay is identified through its observable consequences in these practices, namely overlapping mandates without allocation rules, delayed or lost decisions, competition for the same resources, unclear accountability, implementation gaps, and conflicting signals from above; synergistic interplay is identified through joint action, flows of resources or data, and service gaps filled. These

consequences are then traced back to the interfaces that produced them, which is how the analysis connects a mechanism to a change in practice without inferring that connection from the mechanism alone.

Table 1. Operationalisation of Gradual Change Mechanisms and Institutional Interplay

Concept	Observable indicators	Decision rule (distinguished from)	Evidence sought
Layering	New rule, body, or forum created; old rule or body not formally revoked; overlapping remit	Old institution remains formally in force (unlike displacement); change comes from addition, not from reinterpreting the old body (unlike conversion)	Decrees forming new bodies; absence of revocation; meeting records; accounts of parallel mandates
Drift	Formal rule unchanged; context or need changes; practice falls short of the rule's scope; no deliberate update	Change arises from non-adaptation, not from active redirection (unlike conversion); rule text still permits the neglected uses	Rule text versus applied practice; realisation data; diagnostic categories in planning documents
Conversion	Formal rule or body unchanged; goals, agenda, or users redirected by actors	Redirection is active and purposive (unlike drift); no new body is added (unlike layering)	Agenda shifts within the same forum; reframed programme purpose after a change of agency or policy
Displacement	Old rule or authority formally removed and replaced; authority relocated to another agency or level	Old arrangement ceases to operate formally (unlike layering); identifiable time marker of transfer	Legal or administrative act of transfer; dated informant accounts; changes in staffing and reporting lines
Synergistic interplay	Layers complement one another; information, resources, or tasks flow across them	Effects reinforce the goals of both layers	Accounts of joint action, data exchange, service gaps filled
Disruptive interplay	Overlapping mandates without allocation rules; lost budget or programme; conflicting criteria	Effects weaken, or confuse authority over, at least one layer's goals	Budget gaps, contested authority, inconsistent assessments
Persistence	Rule, body, routine, or resource arrangement remains unchanged across the period while adjacent elements change	No gap between rule and need is attributed to it (unlike drift); recorded for every mechanism	Legal status across documents; budget structure; accountability lines
Formal and informal arrangements	Formal: written rule enforced through official channels. Informal: recurring routine without mandate, agreement, or budget line	Informal arrangement classified as complementary or substitutive (Helmke and Levitsky 2004)	Partner lists; cooperation agreements; informant accounts of routines

Source: Research Data, Processed by the Author

3. Method

This article adopts a qualitative single-case design and applies theory-testing process tracing, in which the sequence and timing of events are examined for the observable implications of the mechanisms a theory posits (Beach and Pedersen 2019; Collier 2011). Majene Regency was selected as an information-rich typical case (Seawright and Gerring 2008): its fiscal and administrative profile resembles that of other disadvantaged regencies in eastern Indonesia, while the number of institutional events it absorbed within a short span allows mechanisms to be observed in sequence. The period of analysis runs from the reorganisation that separated

agricultural extension from the food security mandate, which informants placed before the current agency structure, to the transfer of extension authority to the central government on 1 January 2026. Regency documents provide dated anchors from 2019, the last period in which the Food Security Council is recorded as meeting, and the planning documents extend the horizon to 2029.

The empirical material comes from two types of source, each assigned a distinct role in reconstructing the chronology. The first consists of eight semi-structured interviews conducted in Majene Regency in 2026 as part of the multi-year research project that produced the earlier synchronic study (Tamrin et al. 2026). The second is a documentary corpus of four regency documents and the national instruments that frame them. Regional Regulation No. 11 of 2021 on Food Reserve Procedures supplies the rule text against which applied practice is compared, which is the core test for drift. The Food Security Agency's 2025 budget accountability report supplies the distribution of financial resources across programmes and shows whether new mandates carried operating funds. The Food Security Agency's 2025-2029 Strategic Plan supplies the agency's own diagnostic categories and its list of formal partners. The Preliminary Draft of the Majene Regency 2025-2029 Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) records the council's last meetings and its continued formal standing. National instruments, namely Presidential Decree No. 23 of 2017, Presidential Regulation No. 112 of 2020, Presidential Regulation No. 72 of 2021, and Presidential Instruction No. 3 of 2025, were consulted to date the vertical triggers of local change and to examine rival explanations. In this division of labour, documents fix the timing and formal status of events, whereas interviews supply the sequence of undocumented events, the actors involved, and the meaning those actors attached to each change.

Informants were selected purposively on the basis of three criteria: they held, or had recently held, a position with direct responsibility for a food governance function examined in this study; they had served long enough in that position, or in a related one, to describe arrangements before and after a given change; and, taken as a group, they covered each institutional layer under analysis, namely development planning, the Food Security Agency, the Agriculture Agency, agricultural extension, the regional secretariat unit that hosts the inflation control team, and a community-level food producer group. Table 2 lists the informants by position and code; these codes are used to attribute interview evidence throughout the findings.

Table 2. Informants

Code	Position and institution	Relevance to the analysis
1	Head of the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda)	Planning mandates, the stunting reduction team, cross-agency forums
2	Secretary of the Agriculture Agency	Origins of the Regional Inflation Control Team (TPID), inter-regional performance assessment, home-garden programme
3	Head of the Economic Affairs Section, Regional Secretariat (TPID secretariat)	TPID agenda and budget, national inflation assessments, extension history, field data exchange
4	Head of the Consumption and Food Safety Division, Food Security Agency	Food Security Council, interpretation of the food reserve, home-garden programme authority
5	Official of the Distribution Division, Food Security Agency	Food reserve stock, realisation, and valuation
6	Coordinator of Agricultural Extension Workers	Transfer of extension authority and relations with regency agencies
7	Representative of the Loka Pere' Women Farmer Group	Community experience of government and philanthropic support
8	Village Secretary of Adolang Dhua, Village Government	Implementation of food policy at the village level, changes in the Village Fund scheme between 2025 and 2026, and the village's position as the final link between regency programmes and household beneficiaries

Source: Research Data, Processed by the Author

Interviews were conducted face to face in Indonesian using a semi-structured guide, with follow-up questions that asked informants to date events and to compare arrangements before and after particular changes. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, was audio-recorded with the informant's consent, and was transcribed verbatim; passages used as evidence were translated into English by the authors. Informants were informed of the purpose of the research, participated voluntarily, could decline any question, and are identified in this article only by position code. Because the present analysis is conducted by the same research team, within the same research project, and on questions consistent with the purpose explained to informants at the time of the interviews, the reuse of the material remains within the scope of the consent originally given, and no information beyond the informants' official roles is disclosed.

Reusing the same data corpus under a different theoretical lens is an established practice known as qualitative secondary analysis, and it is legitimate provided the research questions and analytical framework genuinely differ from those the data originally served (Heaton 2004; Creswell and Poth 2018). That condition is met here: the earlier study asked which institutional elements characterise food governance in Majene, whereas this article asks how those elements came to be arranged as they are. The feasibility of the approach rests on the nature of the data, since most informants spontaneously offered time references and before-and-after comparisons, for instance the change in agricultural extension authority as of 1 January 2026, or the comparison of village fund allocations between 2025 and 2026, allowing the institutional trajectory to be reconstructed without collecting new longitudinal data.

Analysis proceeded in four stages. The first was data reduction, in which transcripts and

documents were read in full and every passage containing a time marker, a before-and-after comparison, or a shift in authority, mandate, or purpose was extracted into an event list. The second was chronological ordering, in which these events were arranged into a timeline for each policy domain, namely coordination forums, food reserves, the home-garden programme and women farmer groups, and agricultural extension. The third was mechanism coding, in which each event was assigned to one of the four mechanisms using the indicators and decision rules in Table 1, applied first deductively and then refined inductively where an event recurred or did not fit a single category (Saldaña 2021); coding was carried out by two of the authors independently, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. The fourth was interplay analysis, in which each pair of coexisting layers was assessed as functional or political and as synergistic or disruptive, following Young (2002) and Oberthür and Gehring (2006). Credibility was reinforced through source triangulation, comparing different informants' accounts of the same event, and technique triangulation, comparing interview accounts with documentary evidence (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Events supported by a single informant were retained only where no contradicting account or document existed, and the evidence base for each event is reported in Table 3.

Two procedures were added to strengthen causal inference. Each mechanism claim was first subjected to a hoop test, which required its core indicators in Table 1 to appear in at least one document or in the convergent accounts of two or more informants, and then, where the evidence allowed, to a smoking-gun test, which required evidence that a rival mechanism would struggle to explain, such as a dated legal act for displacement or a rule text broader than its applied use for drift (Collier 2011). Rival explanations were then examined explicitly for each event: changes in national policy, administrative restructuring, budget constraints, changes in leadership or political priorities, and external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Every event in the chronology is reported with its evidence base and the precision of its dating, distinguishing events dated by a document, events dated by informants, and events that can only be ordered relative to others (Table 3).

4. Results and Discussion

Analysis of the data shows that all four mechanisms of gradual institutional change can be identified in the trajectory of Majene's food governance institutions, though the clarity of their time markers varies. Displacement carries a sharp, widely acknowledged date, whereas drift unfolds almost imperceptibly until its accumulation becomes visible in realisation data. Table 3 sets out the chronology on which the classification rests, ordering the main institutional events by domain and indicating, for each, how precisely it can be dated and on what evidence. Table 4 then summarises the events that manifest each mechanism, the evidence supporting them, and the decision rule that assigns each event to one mechanism rather than another. The subsections that follow present the evidence mechanism by mechanism, and each closes by stating what persisted, which actors were involved, and why the most plausible rival explanation fits the evidence less well.

Table 3. Chronology of Institutional Events in Majene's Food Governance

Period or date	Domain	Institutional event	Dating basis	Evidence
Before 2019 (not dated in corpus)	Extension	Extension and women farmer group coordination separated from the food security mandate and moved to the Agriculture Agency (lateral displacement)	Ordinal, informant	I3; timing consistent with regional apparatus restructuring under Government Regulation No. 18 of 2016, not confirmed in corpus
2019 and 2020	Coordination	Food Security Council meets once in each year; no later meeting recorded	Document	RPJMD draft
26 November 2020	Coordination (national)	National Food Security Council dissolved and its functions moved to the Ministry of Agriculture; regency council not revoked	Document	Presidential Regulation No. 112 of 2020; RPJMD draft
2021	Food reserve	Regional Regulation No. 11 of 2021 adopted with a broad definition of emergency	Document	Regional Regulation No. 11 of 2021
After 2021 (local decree date not in corpus)	Coordination	Regional Stunting Reduction Team formed under the national stunting mandate (layering)	Approximate, national instrument and informant	Presidential Regulation No. 72 of 2021; I1
Decree year not in corpus	Coordination	TPID formed by Regent's Decree within the national inflation control structure; no operating budget line (layering)	Ordinal, informants and document	Presidential Decree No. 23 of 2017; budget accountability report; I2, I3
After TPID formation, before 2026	Coordination	TPID agenda widened to food security, the Free Nutritious Meals programme, and women farmer groups under a nine-indicator reporting framework (first conversion)	Ordinal, informant	I3
After the first conversion, before 2026	Coordination	TPID used as an instrument of inter-regional performance competition after a neighbouring regency's reward (second conversion)	Ordinal, informant	I2
Repeated across changes of minister	Home-garden programme	Authority over the programme shifts between the Food Security Agency and the Agriculture Agency; budget allocation lost for several years (conversion)	Approximate, informants	I2, I4
Two years before the interviews	Food reserve	Disbursement confined to disasters; 12 of 41 tonnes realised (drift)	Document and informants	Realisation data; I4, I5
2025	Planning	Strategic Plan lists ten problems, none on coordination; philanthropic partner absent from partner list (drift in self-diagnosis)	Document	Strategic Plan 2025-2029
About a year before the interviews	Informal	Philanthropic foundation supports the Loka Pere' group with a field companion, equipment, and market access	Approximate, informant	I7
1 January 2026	Extension	Extension authority and 82 extension workers transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture (vertical displacement)	Document and informant	Presidential Instruction No. 3 of 2025; National Civil Service Agency decisions; I6
At the time of interviews (2026)	Food reserve	Revision of Regional Regulation No. 11 of 2021 before the regional legislature	Informant	Informant accounts

Source: Research Data, Processed by the Author

Table 4. Mechanisms of Gradual Institutional Change in Majene's Food Governance: Evidence and Classification

Mechanism	Institutional event	Documentary evidence	Informants	Why this mechanism
Layering	TPID (Regent's Decree) and the Regional Stunting Reduction Team formed beside the Food Security Council, which was never revoked	RPJMD draft: council met once in 2019 and once in 2020, no later record; budget accountability report: no operating line for TPID	I1, I2, I3, I4	New bodies were added while the old body remained formally in force; the old body was bypassed, not reinterpreted
Drift	Food reserve disbursement applied only to natural disasters; strategic plan names no coordination problem	Regional Regulation No. 11/2021 (broad definition of emergency); 12 of 41 tonnes realised; Strategic Plan 2025-2029 (ten problems, none on coordination)	I4, I5	Rule text unchanged and still permits broader use; narrowing results from non-adaptation, not from a decision to redirect
Conversion	TPID redirected toward food security and stunting, then toward inter-regional performance competition; home-garden programme and women farmer group coordination reframed as they moved between agencies	Not recorded in the four documents; reconstructed from convergent interview accounts	I2, I3, I4	Same forum and programmes kept their form while actors actively redirected their purpose; no new body added
Displacement	Extension separated from the food security mandate and moved to the Agriculture Agency; extension authority and 82 extension workers transferred to the central government from 1 January 2026	Presidential Instruction No. 3 of 2025 on the Utilisation of Agricultural Extension Workers for the Acceleration of Food Self-Sufficiency, implemented through decisions of the Head of the National Civil Service Agency on the staged transfer of regional extension workers to the Ministry of Agriculture, effective 1 January 2026; the earlier lateral transfer is not documented in the corpus and rests on informant accounts	I3, I6	Old arrangement ceased to operate formally and authority was relocated, with a clear time marker

Source: Research Data, Processed by the Author

Layering: New Forums Built Over a Fading Council, Without the Budget to Match

Majene Regency's Food Security Council has never been dissolved through any formal decision. Data from the Preliminary Draft RPJMD record the council meeting once in 2019 and once in 2020, then falling silent in the years that followed with no accompanying explanation, an absence of activity without any accompanying termination of status. Rather than revitalising the council already in place, the regional government instead formed a Regional Inflation Control Team through a Regent's Decree to handle food inflation, and later a separate Regional Stunting Reduction Team, described by the Head of Bappeda (I1) as drawing together several agencies, including Bappeda, family planning, fisheries, and agriculture, in a structure that again resembles, on paper, what the council itself was meant to provide. The Secretary of the Agriculture Agency (I2), describing the inflation team's origins, confirmed that it rests on a Regent's Decree placing several agencies under the coordination of the regional secretary, a structure whose formality alone did little to guarantee the coordination it was meant to produce.

This pattern constitutes layering in Streeck and Thelen's (2005) sense, since a new institution was added on top of the old one without any formal process of replacement. What the budget accountability report adds to this picture is that the new layer was never matched with resources proportionate to its coordinating ambition. The Head of the Economic Affairs Section, who runs the TPID secretariat (I3), stated plainly that the team carries no operating budget whatsoever, not even funds for honoraria or refreshments at its own weekly meetings.

A similar resourcing gap appears at the agency level. Of the Food Security Agency's total 2025 expenditure of roughly Rp1.94 billion, some seventy-seven percent, about Rp1.49 billion, went to personnel salaries, leaving the Programme for Diversification and Community Food Resilience with barely Rp251 million and the Programme for Handling Food Insecurity with just over Rp10 million for the entire regency. Layering, in other words, is not merely a matter of adding forums on paper, it is a pattern of adding coordinating mandates while starving them of the operating capacity that coordination itself requires. The Head of the Consumption and Food Safety Division (I4) herself acknowledged the need to reactivate the council, explaining that a single unifying body was needed to bring every food-related sector together and resolve the cross-sector problems that arise when each agency works independently with no one coordinating, an implicit admission that the new, underfunded layer has yet to adequately take over the old layer's function.

The defining feature of layering relevant here is that the old layer remains formally standing, so that no institutional vacuum exists on paper, even as a practical vacuum in coordination emerges, deepened rather than resolved by adding narrowly mandated, poorly funded institutions beside it instead of restoring the one body whose mandate was actually broad enough for the task.

Why this is layering rather than displacement or conversion follows from the decision rules in Table 1. The council was neither revoked nor replaced, since no act dissolved it and the RPJMD draft continues to name it, which rules out displacement; nor was it given a new purpose, since it was simply bypassed, which rules out conversion. What occurred was the addition of new bodies with overlapping remits beside an intact but inactive one, the defining signature of layering. In Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) terms, the setting combined low discretion, since forming a new team by Regent's Decree was administratively easier than reinterpreting or reviving the council, with the administrative and political cost of formally dissolving an existing body, conditions under which layering is the expected outcome.

What did not change matters as much as what did. The council's legal standing persisted, and so did the regency's agency-based budgeting, under which operating funds follow agency programmes rather than cross-agency mandates. That persistence explains why each new team arrived without money: a team created by decree belongs to no agency's programme structure, so no budget line followed it, even though the national decree that frames TPID charges its costs to the regency budget. The actors were the regent's office and the regional secretariat, which issued the decrees, and Bappeda, which sits at the centre of the stunting

team (I1); the Food Security Agency, the council's natural custodian, argued for reactivation (I4) but lacked the resources and authority to achieve it, which made it a would-be defender of the old layer rather than an effective one. One rival explanation attributes the council's silence to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic may account for the thin record of 2020 and 2021, but it cannot explain why the council stayed dormant in later years while the inflation team met weekly. A second rival, the dissolution of the national Food Security Council by Presidential Regulation No. 112 of 2020, explains better why the regency body lost its vertical anchor, yet it supports rather than contradicts the layering account: the national act removed the reason to convene the council without any local act removing the council itself, which is precisely the formal continuity that defines layering.

Drift: A Regulation That Narrowed in Practice, and a Plan That Stopped Naming the Problem

Unlike layering, which is visible through the addition of institutions, drift works more quietly, through the gradual narrowing of a rule's meaning while no one ever formally rewrites its text. Regional Regulation No. 11 of 2021 on Food Reserve Procedures defines an emergency in relatively broad terms, encompassing natural disaster, severe famine, and events beyond human capacity to prevent or avoid. Nothing in this definition explicitly restricts food reserve disbursement to natural disasters alone. Yet operational practice, sustained over several years, has consistently interpreted disbursement as applicable to disaster conditions only, so that its potential use for stunting or inflation interventions has never been exploited, a narrowing the Head of the Consumption and Food Safety Division (I4) confirmed directly, explaining that the reserve's purpose had, in practice, only ever meant disaster response, even though the underlying government regulation actually permits broader use, including food assistance, stunting response, and inflation control.

The accumulation of this narrowed meaning is visible in the realisation data. The food reserve disbursement target of forty-one tonnes has been realised at only twelve tonnes over the past two years, and officials in the Distribution Division (I5) note that the reserve is in fact penalised financially each year it goes unused, since its stock is valued against Bulog's purchase price, so that holding an ageing, undistributed reserve quietly erodes its own worth even as it sits untouched waiting for a disaster that rarely comes.

A second, subtler form of drift emerges from the Food Security Agency's own Strategic Plan for 2025 to 2029, and it concerns not a regulation but the agency's diagnostic vocabulary. The plan's problem-identification section lists ten distinct issues facing the agency, food-insecure villages, a low food consumption diversity score, food reserve volumes below target, land conversion, and extension workers judged insufficiently effective, among others, every one of them framed in production or technical terms. Not one of the ten is framed as a problem of cross-agency coordination, even though officials in that very same agency, when interviewed, raised the absence of coordination repeatedly and without prompting. The organisation's formal self-understanding has, in other words, drifted away from a reality its own staff describe candidly in conversation, not because anyone rewrote the plan to exclude

coordination as a concern, but because the template through which each agency diagnoses its own problems was never built to register a cross-agency failure in the first place.

Both instances qualify as drift in Streeck and Thelen's (2005) sense, an institution whose text or form remains unchanged while its meaning or its diagnostic reach shifts because it was left unadjusted to a changing context of need. The revision of the regional regulation now before the regional legislature can be read as an attempt to halt the first kind of drift by explicitly reaffirming the scope of food reserve disbursement. No comparable corrective is under way for the second, the Strategic Plan's blind spot toward coordination remains unaddressed, suggesting that drift in an organisation's self-diagnosis can be harder to notice, and therefore harder to reverse, than drift in a regulation's applied meaning.

The distinction between drift and conversion is essential here. In conversion, actors actively redirect an institution toward a new goal; in the food reserve case, no actor redirected the reserve toward disaster relief as a new purpose, since disaster relief was already one of its purposes. What changed was that the other permitted uses, stunting response, inflation control, and food assistance, fell out of practice while the needs they were meant to address grew, and no one adjusted operating procedures to keep pace. The gap between the twelve tonnes disbursed and the forty-one tonnes targeted is the observable trace of that non-adaptation, and it is this combination of an unchanged rule, a changing context, and passive neglect that meets the indicators of drift rather than conversion (Hacker et al. 2015) .

The drift episode also shows what persisted. The regulation's text persisted, and so did an administrative routine of treating reserve stock as a disaster buffer, a reading that no informant attributed to a decision by any identifiable actor. The change therefore had no visible agent; it was produced by the absence of anyone with both the authority and the incentive to read the rule more broadly, a non-decision of the kind Hacker et al. (2015) place at the centre of drift. The Food Security Agency, which administers the reserve, now appears as the actor trying to reverse the drift through the regulation's revision. Budget constraint is the most plausible rival explanation, since a small reserve might be withheld simply to preserve it. The evidence weighs against that reading, because unused stock loses value every year it is held (I5), which makes withholding the costlier option, and the gap between 41 and 12 tonnes is more consistent with a narrow reading of eligible uses than with a shortage of stock.

Conversion: A Forum Repurposed Twice, and Programmes That Changed Meaning With Every Move

Conversion appears in several episodes that, despite differing in institutional form, follow the same underlying logic, an old vessel is retained while its contents quietly change, and in this case the vessel itself was converted more than once. The Regional Inflation Control Team, originally formed purely to control food price inflation, gradually came to be used for discussing food security issues more broadly as well, including coordination with the Free Nutritious Meals programme and discussions of women farmer groups. The Head of the

Economic Affairs Section (I3) described the forum's agenda as now covering a nine-indicator framework to satisfy central government reporting requirements, adding that the team was in fact being steered deliberately toward food security concerns more specifically.

A second conversion then overtook the first. Once regional performance on these indicators began to be scored and rewarded by Bank Indonesia and the Ministry of Home Affairs, the same forum was converted again, this time into an instrument of inter-regional competition. News that the neighbouring regency of Polewali Mandar had received a reward of roughly one billion rupiah for its inflation performance sent Majene's officials scrambling to understand what they had missed, with the Secretary of the Agriculture Agency (I2) recalling how the team combed through the assessment platform afterward and concluded that Majene had simply moved too slowly to resolve the problems the indicators were tracking.

The forum's institutional form never changed, it remains a weekly meeting chaired by the regional secretary, yet its lived purpose shifted twice, first from pure inflation control toward broader food security coordination, then from coordination toward reputational competition with neighbouring regencies, a second-order conversion that the original 2005 framework, focused on single redirections of purpose, does not explicitly anticipate.

Programme authority shows a parallel pattern outside the forum itself. Authority over the Sustainable Home-Garden Food programme moved repeatedly between the Food Security Agency and the Agriculture Agency, following shifts in ministerial policy, its meaning converting from a household food security instrument under one agency to a production-enhancement instrument under the other. The Head of the Consumption and Food Safety Division (I4) recalled that during a previous national minister's tenure, the home-garden programme was, by the Ministry of Home Affairs' own classification, actually the Food Security Agency's responsibility, yet it continued to be implemented under Agriculture regardless.

Women farmer groups underwent the same kind of conversion. Coordination of these groups once sat together with extension work under the food security mandate before both were folded into the Agriculture Agency, a shift long enough ago that even officials who had studied the regency previously needed confirmation it had occurred, which the current Head of Economic Affairs Section (I3) supplied, recalling that extension work and food security had once been combined under one roof before extension moved first to Agriculture and, more recently, to the ministry altogether.

Taken together, these cases illustrate conversion in Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) sense, an institution whose form persists while its purpose shifts along with the coalition of actors controlling it at a given moment, and they show that conversion is not always a single redirection. A form can be converted, then converted again, each time absorbing a new purpose without ever formally announcing that its old purpose has been left behind.

These episodes are classified as conversion rather than layering because no new body was created: the same weekly forum under the same decree absorbed new agendas, and the same

home-garden programme retained its name while its purpose was reframed by whichever agency held it. They are classified as conversion rather than drift because the change was purposive, with I3 describing the forum as being deliberately steered toward food security and I2 describing an active response to external rankings. The actors who redirected these institutions resemble what Mahoney and Thelen (2010) call opportunists, officials who do not contest an institution's existing form but exploit its ambiguity to pursue new objectives, in this case central reporting requirements and fiscal rewards.

Conversion left the forum's legal basis, chairmanship, and weekly rhythm unchanged, and that persistence is what made redirection cheap. The initiators were the regional secretariat staff who run the forum (I3) and agriculture officials who read external rankings as a signal to act (I2), while the central actors who set the indicators, Bank Indonesia and the Ministry of Home Affairs, shaped the redirection from outside without directing it. No actor in the data resisted either conversion, which helps explain why both occurred without friction and also why neither was recorded in planning documents. National policy is the obvious rival explanation, since the indicators and rewards came from Jakarta. Yet national incentives explain why the forum's agenda changed, not why the change took place inside an existing forum rather than through a new body or the dormant council; the choice to reuse the forum was local, and that choice is what makes the episode conversion. For the home-garden programme, the shifts followed changes in ministerial classification, so national policy supplied the trigger while the local consequence, a programme whose meaning changed with its holder, constitutes the conversion.

Displacement: Extension Authority Displaced Twice Over

Displacement is most visible, and most precisely dated, in the transfer of agricultural extension authority from Majene Regency's Agriculture Agency to the central government, effective from the first of January 2026. Eighty-two extension workers, previously under the regency's authority, now fall entirely under the ministry's authority, spanning eight working areas across every subdistrict, a transition the Coordinator of Agricultural Extension Workers (I6) could date with unusual precision, naming the first of January without hesitation when asked exactly when authority had passed to the centre.

What this displacement obscures, if read in isolation, is that it was not the first. Extension work and the food security mandate were once housed together at the regency level before an earlier reorganisation split them, moving extension into the Agriculture Agency, where women farmer group coordination went with it, as already noted above. Only afterward did the 2026 reform displace extension authority a second time, lifting it out of the regency altogether. The domain of agricultural extension has therefore been displaced twice within a relatively short span, first laterally between regency agencies, then vertically from the regency to the centre, a sequence that Streeck and Thelen's (2005) classic definition, framed around the replacement of one institution by a rival, does not by itself distinguish from a single, one-off event.

Unlike layering, drift, or conversion, which unfold indistinctly and resist precise dating, the second, vertical displacement carries a clear, universally acknowledged time marker, making it the closest of the four mechanisms to the textbook case. Even so, the speed of this second displacement was not matched by adequate transitional preparedness at the regional level, reflected in the continuing uncertainty over the division of roles between extension workers now under the ministry and regency agencies that still require daily coordination with them for farmer group development. Reading the two displacements together suggests that recurrence itself carries a cost, each successive transfer of authority arrives with less institutional memory of the previous one, and less regional capacity to negotiate the terms of transition, than the last.

The classification as displacement rests on two observations. First, the old arrangement did not persist alongside the new one, as it would under layering: extension workers ceased to be regency personnel, and the Agriculture Agency no longer exercises formal authority over them. Second, the transfer was an explicit and dated reallocation of authority rather than a reinterpretation of an existing rule. That the same domain was displaced twice, first laterally and then vertically, is what this article calls serial displacement, a recurrence that the original framework, which treats displacement as the rise of a rival institution against an incumbent, does not distinguish from a single event (Streeck and Thelen 2005). In the typology of Mahoney and Thelen (2010), the regency's weak capacity to veto a centrally legislated transfer, combined with the low discretion left to it in implementation, is precisely the configuration associated with displacement.

Displacement changed authority and staffing, but much persisted: the farmer groups, the field work, and the regency agencies' reliance on extension workers for daily contact with farmers all remained, which is why the transfer produced uncertainty over roles rather than a clean break. The initiator was the central government acting through Presidential Instruction No. 3 of 2025, an actor close to what Mahoney and Thelen (2010) call insurrectionaries, in that it replaced rather than amended the old arrangement, whereas the regency's agencies and the extension coordinator (I6) acted as adapters who negotiated working arrangements after the fact. The rival explanation that both transfers simply reflect administrative restructuring is accurate as a description of their triggers, but it does not account for the cumulative pattern: each transfer moved the same function further away from the agency responsible for food security, and the second arrived before the consequences of the first had been settled.

Synthesis: What Changed, When, Why, by Whom, and What Persisted

Table 5 draws the four mechanisms together along the dimensions a claim of gradual change must address. Two patterns stand out. Every mechanism left something formally intact, whether a legal status, a rule text, a decree, or a field routine, and in each case the persistent element shaped how the change played out. The triggers, in addition, came mostly from above, while the form each change took locally, adding a team rather than reviving the council, reusing a forum rather than creating one, reading a rule narrowly rather than broadly, was

decided or allowed to happen within the regency.

Table 5. What Changed, When, Why, by Whom, and What Persisted

Dimension	Layering	Drift	Conversion	Displacement
What changed	De facto coordination authority moved to new decree-based teams	Applied meaning of the reserve rule narrowed; planning categories omit coordination	Purpose of TPID (twice); meaning of the home-garden programme and women farmer group coordination	Formal authority over extension (twice) and 82 personnel
When	Council silent after 2020; teams formed under 2017 and 2021 national instruments	Regulation of 2021; narrowing visible over the two years before 2026; plan of 2025	Ordered sequence after TPID formation and before 2026	Before 2019 (lateral); 1 January 2026 (vertical)
Why (trigger)	National council dissolved; national mandates for inflation and stunting teams; a decree was cheaper than reviving the council	No actor with the authority and incentive to reinterpret the rule	Central reporting requirements; fiscal rewards; ministerial reclassification	Apparatus restructuring; Presidential Instruction No. 3 of 2025
Who drove it	Regent's office and regional secretariat	No identifiable agent (non-decision)	TPID secretariat and agriculture officials (opportunists)	Central government (insurrectionary)
Who resisted, negotiated, or adapted	Food Security Agency sought reactivation but lacked resources	Food Security Agency now seeks reversal through revision	No resistance recorded	Regency agencies and extension coordinator adapted after the fact
What persisted	Council's legal status; agency-based budgeting	Rule text; disaster-buffer routine	Forum's decree, chair, and weekly rhythm	Farmer groups, field work, regency reliance on extension
Rival explanation weighed	COVID-19 (fits 2020 to 2021 only)	Budget constraint (unused stock loses value)	National policy (explains the agenda, not the reuse of the forum)	Restructuring (explains triggers, not cumulative direction)

Source: Research Data, Processed by the Author

Actors and Their Positions in the Trajectory

Read across the four mechanisms, the actors occupy four positions. Central institutions, namely the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Bank Indonesia, and the national council whose dissolution unmoored its regency counterpart, set triggers and rules but did not manage their local consequences; they hold legal authority and fiscal incentives, and their relationship with the regency runs upward through reporting rather than through negotiation. Regency initiators, the regent's office and the regional secretariat, created and redirected forums by decree, an exercise of authority that came cheaply because it required no budget. Sectoral agencies acted mainly as negotiators and adapters: the Food Security Agency pressed for the council's reactivation and for wider use of the reserve, the Agriculture Agency absorbed and then lost functions, and Bappeda convened cross-agency discussions without a formal mandate to do so (I1). Field and non-state actors, including extension workers, village security personnel, the women farmer group, and the philanthropic foundation, held the least formal authority but controlled two resources the formal layers lacked, a physical presence in villages and flexible funding. What the data do not show is equally telling. No actor openly resisted any of the changes, and the actor with the strongest interest in an integrated arrangement, the Food Security Agency, had the weakest resources

with which to defend it, so that gradual change in Majene resembles less a contest between reformers and defenders than a sequence in which defenders were absent or too weak to matter.

How Resources Were Distributed Across Institutional Layers

The finding that layers were added without matching resources can be specified across four kinds of resource. Financial resources stayed with agencies rather than mandates: some 77 percent of the Food Security Agency's 2025 expenditure went to salaries, the two programmes most relevant to diversification and food insecurity received about Rp251 million and just over Rp10 million, and the inflation team had no operating line at all. Human resources moved upward, since the 82 extension workers who formed the regency's main field presence now answer to the ministry, so that regency agencies must request what they once directed. Authority was distributed by decree without allocation rules: each new body received a remit, but no rule placed that remit relative to the council or to agency programmes, and programme authority followed national classifications that changed with ministers. Information travelled formally upward, along each agency's reporting line and toward two national assessment regimes with different criteria, and informally sideways, through extension workers sharing production data with village security personnel. These distributions shaped interplay directly. Where authority came without money, as with TPID, coordination depended on goodwill; where money followed classifications that kept shifting, as with the home-garden programme, budget lines were lost; and where information flowed only upward, the regency's own planning documents could not register the coordination problem its staff described.

Interplay Among Institutional Layers: Formal Disruption, Informal Repair

Table 6 classifies each interface among the layers by the mechanism that produced it, its type, and the observable consequences that justify its classification. Of the six formal interfaces, four show disruptive consequences, one shows a gap that drift left open, and one, between the stunting team and the other coordination bodies, shows overlap without observable effects in the data; none shows synergistic effects. All three informal arrangements, by contrast, show synergistic effects. The description of formal interplay as predominantly disruptive therefore rests on this distribution and on the specific indicators listed for each interface, rather than on a general impression.

Table 6. Interfaces Among Institutional Layers: Observable Consequences and Classification

Interface	Mechanism	Type	Observable consequences	Classification	Evidence
TPID and Food Security Council	Layering; conversion	Functional; formal	Overlapping mandate without allocation rule; council dormant; TPID without budget	Disruptive	RPJMD draft; budget report; I1, I3, I4
Stunting team and other coordination bodies	Layering	Functional; formal	Overlapping membership and remit; no joint decisions or conflicts observed	Indeterminate	I1
Food Security Agency	Conversion;	Functional;	Contested authority to propose	Disruptive	I2, I4

and Agriculture Agency (home-garden programme)	lateral displacement	formal	the programme; budget allocation lost for several years		
Regency agencies and centrally managed extension workers	Vertical displacement	Functional and political; formal	Unclear division of roles; requests replace direction	Disruptive	Presidential Instruction No. 3 of 2025; I3, I6
Bank Indonesia and Ministry of Home Affairs assessments, as received by the regency	External regimes; conversion of TPID	Political; formal	Conflicting criteria; rankings that officials cannot reconcile	Disruptive	I2, I3
Food reserve rule and stunting or inflation needs	Drift	Functional; formal	Permitted uses left unused; 12 of 41 tonnes; stock losing value	Gap left open	Regional Regulation No. 11 of 2021; I4, I5
Foundation, Loka Pere' group, and formal programmes	Fills gaps left by layering and drift	Functional; informal	Equipment, mentoring, and market access provided; foundation not a registered partner	Synergistic (substitutive)	Strategic Plan; I7
Extension workers and village security personnel	Fills gaps after displacement	Functional; informal	Regular exchange of planting and production data	Synergistic (complementar)	I3
Informal cross-agency gathering	Compensates for dormant council	Functional; informal	Regular discussion across agencies without a mandate	Synergistic, limited	I1

Source: Research Data, Processed by the Author

Assessing these mechanisms through the lens of institutional interplay, the relations that have formed among institutional layers lean sharply toward the disruptive wherever the layers in question are both formal government bodies, and this disruption is not confined to the local level. The relationship between the Regional Inflation Control Team and the fading Food Security Council is functionally disruptive, since the two effectively claim overlapping mandates over food issues in general, yet no formal mechanism affirms a division of authority between them. The Head of Bappeda (I1) confirmed as much directly, stating that no forum carries an explicit planning mandate the way TPID does, even though an informal gathering exists where relevant matters are regularly discussed across agencies.

The relationship between the Food Security Agency and the Agriculture Agency in the case of the Sustainable Home-Garden Food programme is likewise disruptive, reflected in the loss of the programme's budget allocation for several years due to uncertainty over who held authority to propose it within the budget planning cycle, a tangible loss arising not because the programme was without value, but because the transfer of authority was not accompanied by a clear handover mechanism.

Disruptive interplay also originates from above the regency itself. Bank Indonesia and the Ministry of Home Affairs run separate assessment regimes for regional inflation performance, using different indicators and, by the account of TPID secretariat staff (I3), arriving at rankings that regional officials struggle to reconcile, since the criteria Bank Indonesia had applied in previous years bore little resemblance, by the same staff's admission, to whatever method the Ministry of Home Affairs was now seen to be using.

From the regency's vantage point, these two national assessment regimes function as

institutions of unclear relation to one another, functionally overlapping yet politically distinct, and the confusion they generate locally, illustrated earlier by Majene's scramble to understand Polewali Mandar's reward, is itself a form of disruptive interplay, one that originates in the interaction between two national institutions and cascades downward to shape local bureaucratic behaviour, well beyond what (Young,2002) and Oberthür and Gehring (2006), writing primarily about interaction among international regimes, would have had in view. The resulting scramble to match a better-scoring neighbour also carries a whiff of the isomorphic pressure (DiMaggio and Powell,1983) describe, regional agencies converging on whatever practices the highest-scoring jurisdiction is seen to follow, less because those practices are known to work locally than because failing to be seen matching them carries its own cost.

Set against this, the most consistently synergistic interplay in the data does not occur between formal government layers at all, but between the formal apparatus and actors outside it. The Loka Pere' Women Farmer Group has, for more than a year, been supported by a private philanthropic foundation that placed a resident field companion in the village, supplied processing equipment, and helped open market access as far as Makassar, filling gaps in equipment, mentorship, and market linkage that no government programme in the data was shown to fill as consistently, with group members (I7) noting that the funding involved had grown substantial enough to extend beyond agriculture into waste management activities as well.

Yet this relationship is institutionally invisible. The Food Security Agency's own Strategic Plan lists eight categories of formal partner, including the police, the military, the national statistics agency, the national logistics agency, the postal service, local community groups, a provincial university, and the media, complete with three written cooperation agreements, but the philanthropic foundation appears nowhere on that list, despite being, by informants' own account, the most consistently present outside actor in the community's daily experience of support. The same pattern of quiet, unregistered synergy recurs at the level of field data exchange, with the Head of Economic Affairs Section (I3) noting that village security personnel routinely request planting and production data directly from agricultural extension workers, a relationship that functions smoothly precisely because it operates informally, outside any documented institutional arrangement, resembling the self-organising local arrangements (Ostrom,1990) found could sustain collective action perfectly well without top-down design, provided the actors involved had repeated dealings with one another and something concrete to gain from cooperating.

The phrase informal margins needs precision. It refers here to working relationships that operate without a written mandate, a cooperation agreement, or a budget line in any regency document, yet recur often enough for informants to describe them as routine. Three such arrangements appear in the data: the foundation's support for the Loka Pere' group, the data exchange between extension workers and village security personnel, and the informal cross-agency gathering that the Head of Bappeda described (I1). Following Helmke and Levitsky's

(2004) typology, they do not play the same role. The data exchange is complementary, because it works within a functioning formal extension system and simply shortens the path information takes. The foundation's support is closer to substitutive, because it provides equipment, mentoring, and market linkage that formal programmes were meant to provide but, on the available evidence, did not provide consistently. The cross-agency gathering is also substitutive in part, since it performs some of the council's convening role without contradicting any formal rule. Informal arrangements in Majene therefore complement formal institutions where these work and compensate for them where they do not, and in neither case do they compete with formal rules, which is one reason they remain synergistic.

The overall pattern that emerges is therefore more layered than a simple synergistic-versus-disruptive dichotomy suggests. Gradual institutional change in Majene Regency tends to produce disruptive interplay when it occurs among formal government institutions competing for similar mandates without an explicit alignment mechanism, whether that disruption originates locally or, as with the dual national assessment regimes, from above the regency altogether. It tends to produce synergistic interplay, by contrast, at the informal margins of the system, where non-state actors and field-level personnel absorb coordination needs that the formal layers have left unmet, precisely because these relationships are not weighed down by the same contested claims to mandate that afflict formal bodies. That the regency's own strategic planning documents fail to register these informal synergies as institutional assets is itself a further instance of the drift in self-diagnosis identified earlier, a plan that neither names its coordination problem nor credits the relationships that are, in practice, already solving part of it.

This pattern qualifies Streeck and Thelen's framework in a specific and limited way. In Majene, the governance consequences of accumulated gradual change depended not only on which mechanism operated but also on whether the interface each mechanism created was governed, and here the formal interfaces were left ungoverned while informal actors managed some of them by default. The claim concerns governance arrangements and practices, namely coordination, the allocation of authority, and the use of resources; the study does not measure food availability, access, or consumption, and it does not claim that the changes improved or weakened food security as such. Read in this way, the finding helps explain why the earlier synchronic study identified the absence of a unifying forum as the central bottleneck, while showing that coordination in the regency has not disappeared but has moved partly outside the institutions officially tasked with it.

Why Formal Interplay Turns Disruptive: Theoretical Significance

The finding that interplay among formal layers is predominantly disruptive calls for explanation rather than description, and the Majene evidence points to three mutually reinforcing conditions. The first is the absence of allocation rules. Oberthür and Gehring (2006) and Gehring and Oberthür (2009) show that interaction between institutions becomes synergistic when the output of one is adapted to the other, typically through explicit

rules dividing tasks; where no such rule exists, overlap turns into rivalry. In Majene, every new layer was created by a decree that defined its own remit but said nothing about its relation to existing bodies, so that the overlap produced by layering and conversion was never translated into a division of labour.

The second condition is resource scarcity combined with agency-based accountability. With some seventy-seven percent of the Food Security Agency's expenditure absorbed by salaries and the inflation team operating without any budget of its own, the layers were not merely overlapping but competing for the same thin margin of operating capacity, while each remained accountable upward through its own agency's performance indicators. Candel and (Biesbroek, 2016) argue that policy integration requires alignment across policy frames, subsystem involvement, goals, and instruments; in Majene, the Strategic Plan's silence on coordination suggests that alignment failed at the level of frames before it could be attempted at the level of instruments. The third condition is vertical asymmetry. The changes initiated from above, the transfer of extension authority and the dual inflation assessment regimes of Bank Indonesia and the Ministry of Home Affairs, left the regency with weak veto possibilities and little influence over the terms of each new interface, so that the disruption they generated could be absorbed locally but not negotiated.

These findings speak to the gradual change literature in three ways. First, they confirm, in a setting far removed from the advanced political economies in which it was developed, the central claim of (Streeck and Thelen, 2005) that fundamental change can accumulate without a critical juncture, and they corroborate the argument of (Hacker et al.2015) that drift and conversion are hidden faces of change operating through non-decisions and reinterpretation rather than open reform. Second, they qualify the literature's tendency to treat each mechanism as a discrete episode: in Majene, conversion occurred twice in the same forum and displacement twice in the same domain, suggesting that recurrence is not incidental but a pattern likely to arise wherever central policy is repeatedly absorbed piecemeal. Third, they refine the observation of van der Heijden (2011) that layering can yield incoherent institutional arrangements by specifying when it does so, namely when layers are added without allocation rules and without resources proportionate to their mandates.

The synergy found at the informal margins is equally significant theoretically. Cleaver (2012) describes institutional bricolage as the process through which actors assemble working arrangements from whatever formal and informal materials are at hand, and the philanthropic support for the Loka Pere' group, together with the informal data exchange between village security personnel and extension workers, fits this description closely. These relations are synergistic not because informal actors are inherently more cooperative, but because they carry no competing claim to a formal mandate and operate in the gaps that drift and displacement have left open. The theoretical significance of the finding lies in this correspondence: the outcome of gradual change is shaped not only by which mechanism operates, but by the interface each mechanism creates and by whether that interface is

governed. The article therefore advances, as a proposition derived from a single regency rather than as a general claim, a hypothesis that future studies can test in other regencies and policy domains, namely that layering and conversion without allocation rules tend to produce functional disruption, displacement without transition arrangements tends to produce vertical disruption, and drift tends to produce gaps that are either left open or filled informally.

Policy Implications

The recommendations that follow are normative inferences rather than findings. The evidence establishes which interfaces are ungoverned and what consequences follow from them, whereas whether the remedies proposed here would work is a question this study cannot test. With that distinction in place, Table 7 links each recommendation to the problem and the mechanism it addresses, and the paragraphs below set out the reasoning behind them.

Table 7. From Identified Institutional Problems to Recommendations

Problem identified	Mechanism or interface	Recommendation	Responsible actor	Dimension
Council dormant while new teams overlap without allocation rules or budget	Layering; TPID and council	Regent's Regulation revitalising the council as an umbrella body, with TPID and the stunting team as working groups, a mandate map, and an operating budget line	Regent; Bappeda; regional secretariat	Coordination; authority
Shifts in programme authority lose budget allocations	Conversion; Food Security Agency and Agriculture Agency	Handover protocol completing transfers before the budget planning cycle and recording them in both agencies' work plans	Bappeda; both agencies	Authority; continuity
Reserve rule narrowed to disasters; stock loses value	Drift; reserve rule and needs	Name stunting response, inflation control, and targeted food assistance as triggers in the revised regulation; standard procedure for stock rotation	Food Security Agency; regional legislature	Accountability; continuity
Roles of centrally managed extension workers unclear	Serial displacement; regency and centre	Joint annual work plan and subdistrict data-sharing protocol; central transitional guidance on roles	Agriculture Agency; Ministry of Agriculture	Authority; coordination
Conflicting national assessment criteria	External regimes; conversion of TPID	Harmonised indicators or a published crosswalk between them	Bank Indonesia; Ministry of Home Affairs	Accountability
Strategic Plan omits coordination; informal partners invisible	Drift in self-diagnosis; informal margins	Revise the Strategic Plan to name coordination and register philanthropic and community partners; add a shared coordination indicator to agency performance agreements	Food Security Agency; Bappeda	Accountability
National reforms arrive without local transition terms	Recurring conversion and displacement	Institutional change check led by Bappeda, identifying the bodies, budget lines, and partners a new national instrument affects before local implementing decrees are issued	Bappeda; regional secretariat	Management of change; continuity

Source: Research Data, Processed by the Author

Three of these recommendations respond to coordination and authority problems inside the regency. Revitalising the council as an umbrella body addresses layering directly, since the difficulty in Majene lies not in a shortage of forums but in the absence of a rule placing them relative to one another, and attaching a budget line answers the resource gap that the

persistence of agency-based budgeting created. The handover protocol responds to the lost home-garden allocation, the clearest case in which a change of authority without transition terms produced a concrete loss. The revision of the food reserve regulation now before the regional legislature responds to drift, although it would reverse drift only if the new triggers come with a procedure for rotating stock; without one, the narrow reading may simply reassert itself.

The remaining recommendations address accountability, continuity, and the management of change. Accountability in Majene runs vertically through each agency's own indicators, which is one reason coordination never appeared in the Strategic Plan, so a shared coordination indicator in the performance agreements of the agencies involved would make the cross-agency interface somebody's responsibility. Continuity is threatened mainly from above, as programme classifications shift with ministers, and central ministries should therefore keep such classifications stable across changes of leadership, while the ministry now responsible for extension should issue transitional guidance on the division of roles. Because conversion and displacement recurred within the same domains, the regency would also benefit from treating each new national instrument as an institutional change to be managed rather than a directive to be absorbed, which is the purpose of the change check proposed in Table 7. Registering informal partners formally calls for some care, since part of their synergy may come from operating outside formal mandates, a question future research should examine.

5. Conclusion

This article asked which mechanisms of gradual institutional change produced Majene Regency's current food governance arrangements and what kind of interplay the resulting layers generate. The answer to the first question is that the present configuration emerged from four mechanisms accumulating over roughly a decade, without any single reform. Layering added regent-decreed inflation and stunting teams beside a food security council that lost its national anchor in 2020 but was never revoked. Drift narrowed a broadly worded food reserve regulation to disaster relief in practice, and left the agency's strategic plan without any category for coordination. Conversion redirected the inflation forum twice and reframed programmes as they moved between agencies, while displacement moved extension authority twice, first within the regency and then to the central government in January 2026. Throughout this sequence, agency-based budgeting and sectoral accountability persisted, and that persistence explains why each new layer arrived without operating resources. The answer to the second question is that four of the six formal interfaces show disruptive consequences, ranging from lost budget allocations to conflicting assessment signals, and none shows synergy, whereas the three informal arrangements, involving a philanthropic foundation, field personnel, and an informal cross-agency gathering, complement or partly substitute for formal coordination.

The study makes two empirical and two theoretical contributions. Empirically, it replaces a

synchronic map of Majene's food governance with a dated reconstruction of how that map came about, and it identifies the actors and the distribution of resources behind each change. Theoretically, it shows that mechanisms can recur within a single domain, which the article terms second-order conversion and serial displacement, and it links each mechanism to the interface it leaves behind, proposing that layering and conversion without allocation rules tend to produce functional disruption, that displacement without transition arrangements tends to produce vertical disruption, and that drift tends to produce gaps that are either left open or filled informally. These propositions derive from one regency and should be read as hypotheses for comparative testing rather than as general conclusions. Practically, they point to managing the relations among existing institutions, through an umbrella mandate, handover protocols, broader reserve triggers, and joint extension planning, rather than to adding new ones.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. As a single-case study, the analysis cannot establish how common these patterns are among Indonesian regencies, and its findings should not be extended beyond regencies with similar fiscal constraints and exposure to the same national reforms. The trajectory rests on retrospective accounts and a limited documentary corpus, so the dating of drift and conversion is approximate and some events can only be ordered relative to one another; the analysis also reuses data collected for a different question. The informants cover the principal regency layers but not the provincial government, the national ministries, or the philanthropic foundation, whose perspectives might reveal further mechanisms or forms of interplay. The study, moreover, examines governance arrangements rather than food security outcomes, so it cannot say whether the changes it traces improved or weakened food availability or access. Future research could trace policy archives, meeting minutes, and budget documents over a longer period, compare Majene with regencies exposed to the same central reforms in order to test whether serial displacement and second-order conversion are general patterns, and examine whether formal recognition of informal partners strengthens or weakens the synergy they now provide.

5. Ethics Approval

Participation in this study was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and the use of the collected data for academic purposes. The confidentiality of respondents' information was maintained throughout the research process.

6. Author Contributions

Saddam Husain Thamrin contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, and manuscript preparation. Bulkis contributed to methodology, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. Novayanti Sopia Rukmana contributed to supervision, validation, critical review, and editing of the manuscript. Febrianto Syam contributed to literature review, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript review. All authors reviewed and approved the

final version of the manuscript.

7. Declaration on the Use of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in Writing

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing of this manuscript.

8. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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11. Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to applicable institutional policies and confidentiality requirements.

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