

The Indonesian Government's Plan to Join BRICS Under the Leadership of Prabowo Subianto

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Abstract:

Purpose:

The objective of this study is to examine Indonesia's steadfast commitment to an active and independent foreign policy in the context of its potential membership in BRICS. This research aims to assess how Indonesia balances its national interests while navigating complex global dynamics and pursuing strategic partnerships.

Methodology:

This study uses qualitative explanatory research with discourse analysis to explore narratives on Indonesia's intention to join BRICS.

Findings:

Indonesia's intention to join BRICS reflects a strategic shift in its foreign policy, balancing economic opportunities and geopolitical challenges while testing its commitment to an independent and active stance. Indonesia's potential membership in BRICS reflects its growing geopolitical influence and its desire to shape the future of global economic governance. This move is driven by the country's ambition to diversify its international partnerships and enhance its bargaining power within major global institutions. By joining BRICS, Indonesia stands to gain greater access to emerging markets and increase its economic resilience on the world stage.

Implication:

Indonesia's potential membership in BRICS could serve as a gateway to unlock key economic opportunities, fostering enhanced trade, investment, and technological collaboration with emerging global powers. This strategic alignment may significantly bolster Indonesia's economic growth, providing access to new markets and reinforcing its role in the global economy.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known for adhering to the principle of an independent and active foreign policy, as mandated in the opening of the 1945 Constitution. This principle emphasizes that Indonesia does not align with any specific bloc and actively contributes to global peace efforts. Since the independence era, the independent and active policy has been the foundation of Indonesia's diplomacy, prioritizing autonomy in decision-making. Throughout its history, Indonesia has rarely been involved in formal, binding alliances, such as NATO or the Warsaw Pact, believing that such commitments could limit the freedom of its foreign policy. Even during the Cold War, Indonesia remained neutral and chose to pioneer the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as a concrete implementation of its independent and active foreign policy. It reaffirms Indonesia's ongoing effort to balance international interests without compromising its political sovereignty. However, a significant shift began to emerge at the start of President Prabowo Subianto's administration. In its foreign policy, the government officially announced plans to join BRICS, an economic alliance comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Foreign Minister Sugiono conveyed this intention at the BRICS Plus Summit in Kazan, Russia. The desire to become part of BRICS is driven by the government's aim to enhance geopolitical influence and expand economic access through non-traditional markets. While the potential benefits are substantial, this move raises questions

about how far Indonesia will remain committed to the principle of an independent and active foreign policy. BRICS is not only an economic bloc but also has geopolitical implications often viewed as an effort to counterbalance Western dominance (Syahdami, 2023).

The decision to join BRICS presents a dilemma, as it could appear that Indonesia is not adhering strictly to its independent and active foreign policy. On the one hand, this step opens significant opportunities for Indonesia to increase foreign investment, access technology transfer, and secure alternative funding. On the other hand, it could be perceived as a shift from an independent and active foreign policy toward alignment with a specific bloc. With its diverse members and differing visions, the challenge of maintaining an independent and active stance becomes more complex (Dharma et al., 2022). Moreover, this move requires Indonesia to maintain good relations with traditional partners, such as the United States and the European Union. This situation indicates that Indonesia's foreign policy under President Prabowo faces the challenge of balancing national interests with the long-standing principle of independence and active diplomacy.

Table 1. Allegedly Assertive Actions of China in the South China Sea 2009-2017

The Indonesian Presidency era	Year or period	Foreign policy
1. Ir Soekarno	1959-1965	Anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism
2. Soeharto	1965-1998	Pragmatic politics
3. Dr. B.J. Habibie	1998-1999	Constructive foreign policy and Repairs
4. Dr. Abdurrahman Wahid	1999-2001	humanist and pluralist foreign policy.
5. Megawati Soekarnoputri	2001-2004	proactive and balanced foreign policy.
6. Dr.H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono	2004-2014	ASEAN-Centric Foreign Policy
7. Ir. Jokowi Dodo	2014-2024	Strategic Partnership

Source: Andi Pangeran, Kebijakan Luar Negeri Indonesia pada Era Pemerintahan Presiden Soekarno dan Presiden Joko Widodo (2021)

The shift in Indonesia's foreign policy demonstrates the country's adaptability and its capacity to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving global landscape. While Indonesia continues to adhere to the principles of an independent and active foreign policy, each administration has modified its approach in response to the changing dynamics of international relations. Under President Prabowo Subianto's leadership, the proposal for Indonesia to join BRICS appears to be at odds with the country's longstanding foreign policy framework, which has traditionally emphasized non-alignment and refrained from entangling commitments to specific geopolitical blocs. By pursuing membership in BRICS, Indonesia is committing to a major international alliance, potentially constraining its diplomatic flexibility. Given that BRICS is often perceived as a counterbalance to Western dominance, this shift raises concerns about the implications for Indonesia's diplomatic autonomy. The decision to align with such an economic bloc introduces complex geopolitical challenges, potentially fostering alignment with a particular faction rather than maintaining the neutral and independent foreign policy that has long characterized Indonesia's approach to international relations.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative explanatory research method, aiming to analyze the discourse surrounding Indonesia's plan to join BRICS. Through this approach, the study will explain how the narratives constructed by the government and political actors reflect Indonesia's geopolitical dynamics within a multipolar international

system. Discourse analysis will be used to examine how texts and discourses that emerge in speeches, policies, or official publications shape Indonesia's foreign policy views, particularly regarding the long-held principle of an independent and active foreign policy. The research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how changes in discourse influence Indonesia's foreign policy and how developing countries like Indonesia are adapting to the current global geopolitical challenges.

This study employs discourse analysis to examine the evolving narratives surrounding Indonesia's intention to join BRICS. The theoretical framework is constructed around three critical dimensions:

Governments Narrative. This study examines the government's narrative, domestic media and academic perspectives, and international discourse surrounding Indonesia's potential membership in BRICS. Government Narrative in Indonesia presents BRICS membership as a strategic move to expand diplomatic and economic opportunities while maintaining the country's commitment to an independent and active foreign policy. Official statements emphasize that BRICS functions as an economic cooperation forum rather than a geopolitical alliance, thus assuaging concerns that membership may restrict Indonesia's relations with Western powers. As Fairclough (2003) suggests, such narratives are instrumental in constructing both domestic and international legitimacy for foreign policy decisions. Data will be sourced from official documents, including presidential speeches and Ministry of Foreign Affairs declarations, to analyze how these narratives function in the political discourse.

Media and Academic. Media and Academic Perspectives within Indonesia present a dynamic and multifaceted discourse regarding the decision to join BRICS. On the one hand, membership is framed as a pragmatic response to global economic challenges, offering access to non-traditional markets and alternative financing mechanisms. On the other hand, critics argue that such a decision signifies a strategic pivot towards the East, potentially altering Indonesia's traditional foreign policy orientation. According to Habermas (1989), the media and academic spheres serve as crucial spaces for public expression and the formation of public opinion, reflecting broader socio-political processes. The analysis will involve a review of media articles and academic publications to map the evolving debates within Indonesian discourse.

International Discourse. On the international stage, International Discourse surrounding BRICS expansion is largely seen as a strategic initiative to counterbalance the hegemony of the Western financial system and the US dollar. As a prominent emerging economy in Southeast Asia, Indonesia is regarded as a significant addition to BRICS, enhancing the bloc's legitimacy as a representative of the Global South in the evolving multipolar world order. Van Dijk (2008) argues that international discourse is often utilized to position nations within the global system, reflecting broader geopolitical interests. This analysis will engage with international media outlets, such as *The Guardian*, and policy think tanks like the Brookings Institution to explore how Indonesia's potential BRICS membership is framed in global geopolitical narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

BRICS, an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, is an economic bloc established in 2009 with the main goal of creating a more equitable economic order and supporting the growth of developing countries. BRICS serves as a strategic cooperation forum to challenge Western dominance, particularly in the international financial system controlled by institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. Over time, BRICS formed the New Development Bank (NDB) as an alternative financing mechanism for its member states and partners. Indonesia, since the inception of BRICS, has closely observed the bloc's developments. (Alberto- Ravael, 2019).

History of BRICS. The term BRIC was first introduced by Jim O'Neill, an economist at Goldman Sachs, in 2001. It referred to four emerging economies—Brazil, Russia, India, and China—that were projected to

dominate the global economy by 2050. Initially, BRIC was merely an economic concept, lacking any formal forum or cooperation among the mentioned countries. The first steps toward formal cooperation among BRIC nations occurred in September 2006, when foreign ministers from Brazil, Russia, India, and China held their inaugural meeting in New York City during the United Nations General Assembly. This meeting laid the foundation for a series of high-level discussions, which later evolved into a structured platform for multilateral collaboration. (Ade Pragiyani, 2019). In 2010, South Africa was invited to join BRIC, becoming the fifth member of the group. This addition prompted a name change to BRICS, with the "S" representing South Africa. The country's membership was officially recognized during the first BRICS Summit held in Russia in 2009, and it became a full member in 2011. (Sinan BARAN, 2024). The first official BRICS Summit was convened on June 16, 2009, in Yekaterinburg, Russia, attended by heads of state from Brazil, Russia, India, and China. The summit focused on addressing the global economic crisis and fostering a collective vision to strengthen the influence of BRICS members within international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. The bloc also aimed to promote dialogue, gradual cooperation, and transparency to establish a harmonious, peaceful, and prosperous world. In 2023, BRICS expanded its influence by inviting new members to join. During the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, the bloc introduced the term "BRICS+" to incorporate additional countries, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This strategic expansion reflects the bloc's ambition to enhance its competitiveness and geopolitical influence. Now, BRICS has evolved into a significant geopolitical and economic bloc, including membership expansion and institutional developments (Siny Isa, 2023).

Indonesian Foreign Policy. Indonesia's independence was born out of a struggle against colonialism, driven by the aspiration to achieve social justice and national welfare. After World War II, the newly independent Indonesia faced immense challenges in rebuilding its war-torn economy and addressing widespread poverty. With a population exceeding 75 million at the time, peace became a primary necessity to enable national development. The slogan "Indonesia that is sovereign, independent, just, and prosperous" symbolized the nation's collective goal—not just to escape colonial rule but also to establish a dignified standard of living for its people.

Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy, guided by the principles of the United Nations Charter, became a crucial instrument in realizing its national aspirations. Indonesia utilized its membership in the UN to advocate for global justice, particularly supporting decolonization efforts in nations still under colonial rule. For instance, Indonesia actively promoted the independence of countries in Asia and Africa. This independent and active stance allowed Indonesia to remain non-aligned while actively participating in global issues, such as promoting peace and advancing economic development. A key focus of Indonesia's foreign policy in the early years of independence was addressing the basic needs of its citizens. The government sought to import essential goods, including food (especially rice), consumer products, and medicines, to improve the population's living standards.

Additionally, Indonesia pursued foreign investment and technological support to rebuild infrastructure damaged by war and to accelerate industrialization and agricultural mechanization. This strategy underscores how foreign policy was closely aligned with the goals of sustainable national development. Indonesian cooperation also became a cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy. As a newly independent state, Indonesia prioritized fostering strong relations with neighboring countries that shared similar struggles against colonialism. Notably, Indonesia played a key role in initiating the 1955 Asian-African Conference, which served as a platform to advocate for the independence of nations in the Global South. These efforts reflected the ideals of Pancasila, emphasizing international solidarity and global peace. Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy enabled flexibility in engaging with major powers and developing countries alike, ultimately contributing to the vision of social justice and national prosperity. Overall, Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy provides a strong framework of flexibility for navigating various global challenges. On the one hand, this policy enables Indonesia to maintain its autonomy in making diplomatic decisions without being tied to major powers. On the other hand, it allows the country to take an active role in various international platforms, advocating for social justice and promoting

economic cooperation and development (Tanjung et al., 2023). This independent and active approach, rooted in the principles of peace and social justice, positions Indonesia as a significant player in global diplomacy (Mohammad Hatta, 1953).

Ir. Soekarno's Foreign Policy. During the Soekarno era (1945–1965), Indonesia's foreign policy was firmly rooted in an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist stance. This orientation was driven by the historical context of Indonesia's struggle for independence and its commitment to opposing any form of domination by major powers. Soekarno emphasized the importance of maintaining national sovereignty while actively resisting neo-colonial influences, which he viewed as a continuation of the exploitation that Indonesia had experienced under colonial rule. This principle was evident in Soekarno's active engagement in international forums, including his leadership in the Bandung Conference of 1955, which fostered solidarity among newly independent nations. Through his confrontational approach, Soekarno sought not only to assert Indonesia's independence but also to position the country as a champion of global decolonization and justice, reinforcing its commitment to dismantling imperialist structures worldwide (Irma Harun August 2020).

Suharto's Foreign Policy. During President Soeharto's tenure, Indonesia's foreign policy adopted a pragmatic and calculated approach, particularly as the country experienced significant economic growth by the end of the 1980s. This period marked a shift toward more active participation in both regional and global affairs, driven by Soeharto's ambition to enhance Indonesia's stature on the international stage. Soeharto's foreign policy was characterized by balancing national interests with the country's economic goals, which led him to pursue strategic alliances that would benefit Indonesia's development. His diplomatic efforts were often shaped by a careful calculation of Indonesia's position as a medium-sized power, seeking to assert influence while maintaining stability within the Southeast Asian region, particularly within ASEAN. This pragmatism allowed Indonesia to engage with major global powers and regional neighbors in ways that strengthened its sovereignty and economic prospects without overstepping the bounds of regional stability. Soeharto's approach revealed a careful navigation of Indonesia's diplomatic relations, prioritizing economic growth while ensuring security and sovereignty. (Michael, 1993).

Dr. B.J. Habibie's Foreign Policy. Under the leadership of President B.J. Habibie, Indonesia's foreign policy underwent profound transformations as the country navigated its transition from authoritarianism to a more democratic governance structure. Habibie's foreign policy can be characterized as both constructive and reparative, driven primarily by the necessity to restore Indonesia's international standing following the collapse of Soeharto's regime. A pivotal moment in Habibie's foreign policy was his handling of the East Timor issue, where Indonesia's previous approach under Soeharto had attracted widespread global condemnation. Habibie's decision to offer East Timor the option of independence marked a decisive, constructive move aimed at rehabilitating Indonesia's image within the international community.

Furthermore, Habibie's response to the anti-Chinese riots and his "silence response" to China's protest exemplified a delicate balancing act between preserving domestic stability and managing sensitive diplomatic relations. His approach to foreign policy was shaped by the dual pressures of international expectations and the political legitimacy of his newly formed government, both of which guided his decisions to either seek compromise or adopt a more assertive stance in certain contexts. Ultimately, Habibie's foreign policy strategy was designed to repair Indonesia's international reputation, fostering a more cooperative relationship with the global community during a period of profound political transition (Kai He, 2008).

Dr. Abdurrahman Wahid Foreign policy. Under President Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia's foreign policy adopted a pluralistic and humanist approach, reflecting his broader vision of promoting democracy, human rights, and regional cooperation. Wahid, often characterized by his inclusive and open-minded leadership style, sought to distance Indonesia from a purely Western-oriented foreign policy while maintaining strategic relations with both Western countries and Asian nations. His administration emphasized the importance of upholding Indonesia's territorial integrity, especially in light of the East Timor crisis, but also focused on fostering stronger

ties with neighboring countries through ASEAN. Despite the tensions over East Timor, Wahid's foreign policy was marked by an emphasis on diplomacy, dialogue, and building bridges, aiming to balance national interests with broader global principles of justice, peace, and mutual respect. This humanist and pluralistic vision sought not only to enhance Indonesia's position on the international stage but also to promote a foreign policy that respected the diverse cultures, religions, and peoples both within Indonesia and across the region. (Smith Anthony, 2000)

Megawati Soekarnoputri's Foreign Policy. Indonesia's foreign policy under President Megawati Soekarnoputri can be characterized as proactive, with a primary focus on enhancing national security and actively participating in global efforts to combat terrorism. Following the Bali Bombings in 2002, which threatened national stability and disrupted the investment climate, Megawati implemented a foreign policy more responsive to international terrorist threats. Through cooperation with major powers, such as the United States, Indonesia sought to strengthen the capabilities of its law enforcement agencies, including the National Police (Polri), in addressing terrorism-related threats. Furthermore, Indonesia played an active role in the global campaign against terrorism, not only to safeguard domestic security but also to restore the country's reputation in the international arena, which the incident had tarnished. Megawati's foreign policy, grounded in the principles of an independent and active stance, succeeded in balancing the desire to maintain national sovereignty with contributing to global peace and security (Fernando Fahrudin, 2023).

The foreign policy of Dr. h. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Under the leadership of President H. Dr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Indonesia's foreign policy, adopted a distinct Asia-centric approach, emphasizing regional cooperation, integration, and stability within the broader context of Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific. This approach was driven by the desire to strengthen Indonesia's position as a key player in regional affairs while fostering closer ties with neighboring countries and global powers. Yudhoyono's administration recognized the importance of ASEAN as a central pillar of Indonesia's foreign policy, focusing on regional diplomacy to promote peace, stability, and economic prosperity. A notable aspect of Indonesia's Asia-centric foreign policy during Yudhoyono's presidency was the active engagement in enhancing regional cooperation through ASEAN, as well as initiatives such as the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). This orientation allowed Indonesia to play a central role in promoting dialogue on regional security and economic issues, reflecting its growing influence as a democratic and emerging power in Asia (Jenerio et al., 2024). Moreover, Indonesia's foreign policy was shaped by a commitment to maintain regional stability, address economic challenges, and contribute to the development of a regional architecture that fosters multilateral collaboration among Asian countries. Yudhoyono's vision of Asia's rising prominence in global geopolitics also led to a deeper engagement with major Asian powers, particularly China, Japan, and India. By strengthening these strategic partnerships, Indonesia not only sought to secure economic opportunities for itself but also aimed to contribute to the peaceful rise of Asia as a whole. Thus, President Yudhoyono's Asia-centric foreign policy was designed to reinforce Indonesia's regional leadership while promoting the values of peace, stability, and mutual prosperity in Asia (Windy Candra Emil, 2018)

Ir. Joko Widodo's foreign policy. Under the leadership of President Joko Widodo, Indonesia's foreign policy has been strategically focused on fostering mutually beneficial partnerships with a diverse range of countries, both regionally and globally. Jokowi's foreign policy prioritizes strengthening Indonesia's position as a major economic power in Southeast Asia by emphasizing economic cooperation, trade, and investment. Regionally, Indonesia has committed to deepening ASEAN integration and promoting constructive cooperation within the Indo-Pacific framework. On the global stage, Indonesia has sought to enhance its relationships with major powers, including the United States, China, and Japan, while maintaining a principled stance of independence and safeguarding national sovereignty. This strategic approach aims to leverage international partnerships to support national development, boost competitiveness, and reinforce Indonesia's diplomatic standing in the global arena (Priamarizky, 2024).

The landscape of Prabowo Subianto's foreign policy. In 2023, Indonesia was invited as part of the BRICS Plus forum, marking the beginning of the government's interest in formally joining. However, serious initiatives only began in 2023 when Indonesia expressed its intent to join under President Joko Widodo's administration, a plan which was further reinforced under President Prabowo Subianto in 2024. This move has sparked debate about its alignment with Indonesia's long-standing foreign policy principle of an independent and active stance.

Factors Driving the Desire to Join BRICS.

1. **Economic Potential and Market Diversification** BRICS offers substantial opportunities for Indonesia to expand access to non-traditional markets and strengthen its economic competitiveness. The member states of BRICS have rapidly growing economies and represent nearly half of the world's population, making it a strategic bloc for trade and investment cooperation. By joining, Indonesia is expected to increase foreign direct investment (FDI) flows and leverage infrastructure funding through the NDB. This move also responds to dissatisfaction with the reliance on traditional global financial institutions like the IMF, which is often criticized for its perceived unfair loan policies.
2. **Geopolitical Implications in a Multipolar System** In geopolitical terms, Indonesia's desire to join BRICS reflects an effort to align itself with the evolving reality of a multipolar international system. The dominance of the Western bloc, particularly the United States and the European Union, has prompted developing countries to seek alternatives to enhance their economic and political sovereignty. By becoming a BRICS member, Indonesia hopes to increase its geopolitical influence both in the Asia-Pacific region and globally without being entangled in bloc rivalries.
3. **Need for Alternative Funding and Infrastructure** A primary reason for Indonesia's interest in joining BRICS is the need for more flexible infrastructure financing that is not subject to the stringent conditions imposed by traditional financial institutions. Funding from the NDB is considered to support domestic infrastructure development without the political pressure typically associated with loans from Western countries. By utilizing NDB funding, Indonesia can expedite key national projects that are priorities for the Prabowo administration.

Discourse Analysis About;

1. **Government Narrative: Opportunities Without Compromising the Independent and Active Principle** In various speeches and official statements, the Indonesian government has emphasized that joining BRICS is not a commitment to a particular bloc but rather a strategy to expand diplomatic and economic space. This narrative seeks to address criticisms that BRICS membership could threaten the principle of an independent and active foreign policy. The government stresses that BRICS is not a geopolitical alliance but an economic cooperation forum, and thus, Indonesia's membership will not restrict its relations with Western countries (Fairclough, 2003).
2. **Media and Academic Perspectives** The media and academics in Indonesia have highlighted the dynamic discourse surrounding this decision, offering a range of opinions. Many view joining BRICS as a pragmatic response to global economic challenges. However, there are also criticisms suggesting that this decision could lead to perceptions of a shift in Indonesia's foreign policy toward the East. This discourse is also linked to the Prabowo administration's political strategy to enhance its international legitimacy (Habermas, 1989).
3. **International Discourse: BRICS and Global Power Balance** On the global stage, the discourse surrounding BRICS expansion is often associated with efforts to counterbalance the dominance of the US dollar and the Western financial system. Indonesia, as a major developing country in Southeast Asia, is seen as a strategic addition to BRICS. International discourse underscores that Indonesia's membership in BRICS could strengthen the legitimacy of the bloc as a representative of the Global South in a multipolar world order.

Indonesia's plans to join BRICS reflect a paradigm shift in foreign policy in response to the evolving global dynamics. This decision is driven by economic, geopolitical, and alternative funding needs, yet it still faces challenges in maintaining the independent and active foreign policy principle. The evolving discourse indicates

that this move is an attempt by the government to maximize opportunities without compromising its foreign policy autonomy. Further analysis is required to under.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Indonesia's decision to seek membership in BRICS marks a significant shift in its foreign policy, especially considering its long-standing adherence to the principle of an independent and active foreign policy. The desire to join BRICS, an economic alliance that challenges the dominance of Western powers, aligns with Indonesia's strategic interests in expanding economic opportunities, accessing alternative funding, and enhancing its geopolitical influence in a multipolar world. This move, however, raises important questions about the country's commitment to maintaining its non-alignment and independent decision-making. While the government emphasizes that joining BRICS is not about becoming part of a geopolitical bloc but rather a pragmatic economic strategy, the perception of a potential shift towards a closer alignment with Eastern powers persists.

The analysis of the discourse surrounding Indonesia's BRICS ambitions reveals a complex interplay of economic, political, and diplomatic factors. From a practical standpoint, BRICS offers significant benefits in terms of trade, investment, and infrastructure funding while also providing Indonesia with a platform to elevate its role on the global stage. However, maintaining the balance between leveraging these opportunities and staying true to the principle of non-alignment presents a challenge. The results of this study indicate that Indonesia's pursuit of BRICS membership reflects a nuanced approach to adapting to a rapidly changing global order, yet further research is needed to assess the long-term implications of this shift on Indonesia's foreign policy and international standing.

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