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Geopolitical and Social Network Analysis

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**MASTER'S PROGRAMS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
JENDERAL ACHMAD YANI UNIVERSITY**

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How India Leads the South Asian Regional Security Complex: Geopolitical and Social Network Analysis

Dika Atmawati Sukaedi & Ligar Yogaswara

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National Cyber and Crypto Agency of Indonesia

This research explores the regional security dynamics of South Asia through the lens of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. The research provides a comprehensive geopolitical analysis focusing on India's maritime interests and the broader regional landscape, encompassing both maritime and land-based security aspects. By employing Social Network Analysis (SNA), the study uncovers India's position as a dominant regional power, with Bhutan identified as the most vulnerable state and the Maldives distinguished as a unique entity with no military forces but significant economic growth driven by tourism. The research also includes a detailed examination of the regional security landscape, highlighting key factors such as military expenditure, energy resources, trade flows, and economic growth across South Asian countries. Geographic visualizations are utilized to map these variables, revealing intricate patterns of interdependence and vulnerability. The study extends beyond maritime strategies to analyze how India's military and economic influence shapes regional stability. This dual approach offers a nuanced understanding of South Asia's security environment, demonstrating how both maritime and terrestrial dimensions interplay to affect regional dynamics and contribute to international stability. Through this analysis, the study illustrates the relevance of the RSC theory in addressing complex security challenges in the South Asian context.

Keywords: South Asian Region, Regional Security Complex, India, Maritime Interests, Geopolitical Analysis, Social Network Analysis.

The dynamics of contemporary international relations present complex security challenges, particularly in regions like South Asia, where internal tensions intersect with broader geopolitical rivalries. South Asia remains one of the world's most volatile

regions, characterized by overlapping layers of internal and external security concerns. For instance, the persistent conflict between Afghanistan's Taliban and Pakistan underscores how unresolved historical grievances and cross-border militancy destabilize the region (Rajesh, 2024). Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghan territory, resulting in civilian casualties, and subsequent retaliatory actions illustrate the precarious interplay between state and non-state actors (Ahmed, 2024). These incidents highlight how domestic instability in one state reverberates regionally, requiring a nuanced understanding of interconnected security dynamics. Similarly, internal security challenges, such as communal violence in India, further exacerbate regional instability. The attack on the Anjuman Jama Mosque in Gurugram, allegedly by a Hindu right-wing mob, is not just an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of internal discord that can have cross-border implications (Arbar, 2023). Religious tensions and acts of violence within India often influence its regional interactions, as such incidents are closely monitored and, at times, exploited by neighboring countries to further their own geopolitical narratives.

These examples transcend mere cataloging of security incidents; they underscore the interconnectedness of regional security challenges that cannot be adequately addressed through bilateral or national-level analyses alone. The geopolitical competition between India and China, particularly their influence over smaller South Asian states like Nepal and Sri Lanka, further complicates the regional security landscape (Senanayake, 2020). For example, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has redefined traditional dependencies within the region, transforming China into an internal actor in South Asia's security complex rather than a mere external power (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This raises critical questions about how regional power dynamics are structured and why they require systematic analysis through a theoretical lens such as the Regional Security Complex (RSC).

Moreover, the interconnected nature of security threats in South Asia—ranging from maritime disputes in the Indian Ocean to insurgencies within India's own borders—necessitates an analytical approach that accounts for the interplay of internal and external factors. Social Network Analysis (SNA), with its ability to map and quantify relationships among states, offers unique insights into these multidimensional dynamics (Scott & Carrington, 2014). By visualizing the intricate connections between key actors, resources, and access points, SNA reveals patterns of interdependence that traditional analyses might overlook, making it a compelling tool to study the South Asian security complex.

This research, therefore, seeks to bridge the theoretical framework of RSC with empirical tools like SNA to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how India's strategic role as a regional power shapes South Asia's security dynamics. In doing so, it addresses not only the interconnectedness of regional security challenges but also the broader implications for stability and cooperation in an increasingly multipolar world.

Theoretical Framework

This research **uses** the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, pioneered by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, as a seminal framework within the realm of international security studies. This theoretical construct seeks to elucidate the intricate dynamics of security within regional contexts. Central to the RSC theory is the premise that a nation's security posture is not solely shaped by internal determinants but is profoundly influenced by the broader regional milieu in which it operates (Buzan, 2003). Buzan and Wæver (2003) argue that Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory emphasizes heightened security interdependence among states within a particular region. They specify that this interactivity is stronger within the region due to geographical proximity and shared security dynamics, while interactions with actors outside the region tend to be more diffuse. At the core of the RSC theory lie two pivotal concepts: interdependence and security. Interdependence manifests through multifaceted dimensions such as energy interconnections and economic linkages, while security considerations encompass a spectrum of traditional and non-traditional threats that permeate the regional security landscape. For example, Buzan identifies South Asia as a distinct RSC due to the enduring security rivalry between India and Pakistan, which not only influences regional stability but also diminishes the influence of external powers like the United States or China in resolving core issues (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This framework is critical because it explains why certain conflicts, such as the Kashmir issue, persist despite international mediation attempts; it is the regional security dynamics that primarily dictate the trajectory of such conflicts. By delineating the structural interdependencies within an RSC, this theory provides an essential lens for understanding the unique security challenges and cooperative opportunities within South Asia.

The South Asian region serves as a compelling case study for exploring regional security dynamics through the lens of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory. Comprising eight nations—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—South Asia is united under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985 to foster regional collaboration.

While the signing of the SAARC Charter and the establishment of its Secretariat marked significant steps toward institutionalizing cooperation, the region remains characterized by complex security challenges, including inter-state conflicts, cross-border terrorism, and nuclear rivalries. Its strategic geographical location as a crossroads between Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean further heightens its importance in global security dynamics (SAARC, 2020; Paul, 2005).

South Asia's unique blend of historical tensions and modern geopolitical pressures makes it particularly relevant for studying RSC theory. The region's internal conflicts, such as domestic insurgencies and ethnic tensions, are deeply intertwined with external influences, including the strategic involvement of major powers like China and the United States. These dynamics align with RSC theory's emphasis on the interconnectedness of regional security and the diminished interaction with actors outside the complex. By situating South Asia within this framework, this research seeks to illustrate how regional security is shaped by both cooperative and competitive forces, offering insights into broader patterns of regional interdependence and conflict (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Acharya, 2007).

Maritime diplomacy plays a crucial role in this research as a strategy to address regional security and foster cooperation in South Asia. It encompasses diverse actions, from collaborative initiatives like port visits, joint naval exercises, and humanitarian missions to more assertive strategies involving naval deployments and coercive signaling. This form of diplomacy is vital for addressing both traditional security threats, such as territorial disputes and piracy, and non-traditional challenges, including illegal fishing and environmental degradation. India, as a regional power, employs maritime diplomacy not only to assert its dominance but also to counterbalance China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (Brewster, 2014). Maritime diplomacy also extends beyond state-centric activities, involving civilian maritime actors, coastguards, and multilateral platforms, reflecting the complexity of contemporary maritime governance (Mière, 2014).

In the context of South Asia's Regional Security Complex, maritime diplomacy serves as a dual instrument of hard and soft power, allowing states to navigate the intricate dynamics of regional security. For India, it is both a defensive measure and a proactive tool to shape the regional order by fostering cooperation with countries like Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Indonesia. These partnerships secure critical maritime routes and resources while addressing shared security challenges. As Barry Buzan (2003) emphasizes, heightened interactivity among states in a geographically connected region

like South Asia is pivotal for addressing interdependent security concerns. India's use of maritime diplomacy thus exemplifies how states can balance regional competition with collaboration, reinforcing both their national security and the broader stability of the region.

On the other hand, this study employs the expertise of Geopolitics Analysts to examine the geopolitical landscape of South Asia. Geopolitics entails analyzing the geographic context vis-à-vis the economic, political, military, and cultural factors of a nation or group of nations, considering their evolving strategic goals and their ability to implement these goals effectively. The research draws upon various sources, including firsthand visits to the region, academic and public policy articles, as well as unclassified reports detailing the military capabilities of the involved parties, to analyze developments in South Asia within the provided conceptual framework. In the realm of international relations, geopolitics offers a methodological lens through which foreign policies are scrutinized. It seeks to grasp, interpret, and anticipate global political conduct by taking into account a range of geographical factors. These factors encompass diverse facets such as regional intricacies, environmental landscapes, geographic configurations, demographic compositions, natural resource endowments, and the practical utilization of scientific advancements within the specific geographical domain under examination (Evans, 1998). Osterud (1998) states that in its conventional sense, geopolitics delves into the interconnections between political influence and geographical context. It explores strategic recommendations founded on the historical significance of both land-based dominance and maritime supremacy. Throughout its tradition, geopolitics has maintained a steadfast focus on analyzing the power dynamics in global affairs, pinpointing pivotal international hubs, and understanding the interplay between naval prowess and terrestrial capabilities.

Lastly, this research incorporates Social Network Analysis (SNA) as outlined by Scott and Carrington (2014) to study the structure and dynamics of relationships among states in South Asia. SNA provides a methodological framework to identify key actors, measure interaction strength, and visualize networks of cooperation and conflict. By mapping these relationships, SNA captures the interconnectedness of states, illustrating how their roles and behaviors are shaped within a broader network. This aligns with Wendt's (1992) constructivist perspective, which argues that international politics is not merely dictated by material capabilities but also by social interactions that form shared norms and identities.

Wendt's theory emphasizes that state behavior is socially constructed through processes of socialization and norm diffusion. SNA operationalizes this by empirically examining how states interact, form alliances, and influence each other's identities and interests. For instance, states with high centrality in a network often act as norm-setters or brokers of cooperation, reinforcing their strategic importance. In South Asia, where India plays a central role, SNA helps illustrate how India's dominance is reinforced not only by its material power but also by its ability to shape regional norms and security dynamics through networked interactions.

By integrating Wendt's theoretical insights with SNA's empirical tools, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the South Asian security complex. It bridges qualitative theories of social construction with quantitative network analysis, offering a dual lens to explore how states like India and its neighbors navigate interdependencies, conflicts, and power dynamics. This synthesis enhances the theoretical rigor and empirical depth of the study, making abstract concepts like socialization and norm diffusion measurable and actionable in the context of regional security.

Literature Review

Previous research has extensively explored the regional security complex (RSC) in South Asia, yet there is limited engagement with alternative theoretical frameworks or interdisciplinary approaches. While focusing on the RSC framework allows for a detailed examination of security interdependencies within the region, integrating perspectives from other theoretical lenses, such as balance of power theory or constructivist approaches, could provide valuable comparative insights and enhance the research gap. For instance, Sultan's (2021) study, "Changing Regional Security Complexes, Rising Powers and the Future of Strategic Stability in South Asia," highlights the dynamics of great power competition, particularly between the United States and China, and India's role in the Indo-Pacific strategy. Sultan emphasizes hybrid security challenges, such as non-traditional threats and foundational agreements between India and the U.S., but does not explore how methods like social network analysis (SNA) could quantify these dynamics. This gap underscores the need for methodological innovation in analyzing regional power structures.

Similarly, Sudirman's (2018) study, "The India-Pakistani Military and Nuclear Arms Race in Post-Cold War Period," uses RSC theory to address the nuclear arms race

and its impact on regional stability. While this research effectively examines the interplay of traditional and non-traditional security threats in a multipolar system, it does not account for the role of maritime diplomacy or networked economic interactions, both of which are critical to South Asia's security environment. By incorporating these elements, the current research aims to address a gap in the literature: the lack of an integrated analysis of maritime strategies and their implications for regional security dynamics. This approach not only expands the scope of the RSC framework but also highlights its practical application in understanding security interdependencies in a geographically and geopolitically complex region.

Furthermore, Senanayake's (2020) study, "Understanding The Dragon's Entry To South Asia: Revisiting The Regional Security Complex Theory," provides a valuable perspective on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its impact on South Asia's RSC. While Senanayake identifies China's transition from an external to an internal actor in the region, the study largely focuses on economic and infrastructural influences without addressing how India's maritime diplomacy and social network positioning challenge or reinforce these shifts. The current research builds on Senanayake's findings by incorporating tools like SNA to visualize and analyze India's dominant role in shaping regional dynamics. This methodological addition reveals not only India's bilateral and multilateral engagements but also its strategic use of maritime networks to counterbalance external actors like China.

By positioning South Asia as a unique case study, this research highlights the region's complex interplay of traditional and non-traditional threats, which are amplified by geopolitical rivalries and interdependencies. The focus on Social Network Analysis (SNA) and maritime diplomacy provides a fresh lens for understanding these dynamics, filling a significant gap in the literature. This dual approach strengthens the paper's contribution to both the theoretical development of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory and its empirical application to South Asia's evolving security landscape.

Research Methodology

This research specifically focuses on the South Asia region, comprising eight countries: India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The scope of the study is limited to this regional context to provide an in-depth analysis of the security dynamics and interactions among these countries. To map the regional landscape visually, data collection centers around nine key indicators for the year 2022.

These indicators include military expenditure, military GDP, energy resources (fossil and mineral), trade exports, trade imports, tourist arrivals, tourist departures, and economic growth (GDP). By utilizing this data, a comprehensive regional mapping visualization will be built to gain insights into the relative strengths and vulnerabilities of each country in South Asia.

To produce accurate and informative map visualizations, the researchers use QGIS (Quantum Geographic Information System) software, which enables geographic mapping by incorporating various data layers encompassing these indicators. Each data layer can be adjusted to display specific information such as the distribution of energy resources, trade flows, and military statistics. The use of QGIS also facilitates the integration of spatial and non-spatial data, resulting in interactive maps that can be used for further analysis.

In addition to mapping, this study employs Social Network Analysis (SNA) to analyze India's role as a major power in South Asia, particularly focusing on its maritime interests. SNA is particularly suited to this research because it provides a structural perspective on the complex relationships that define the region's security dynamics. By visualizing connections between states, access points, and resources, SNA reveals the hierarchical position of actors like India, highlighting their dominance or vulnerabilities. This method aligns closely with the principles of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which emphasizes the interplay of interdependence and security within regional complexes.

Several relevant news articles were collected (as shown in Appendix 1) and analyzed using MAXQDA tools for coding with keywords like "access" and "resources," as well as the actors (countries) involved in India's maritime engagements. The results of this coding were then exported into a format suitable for social network analysis, such as CSV or Excel, containing information about actors, access points, and resources, as well as the relationships between them.

Subsequently, the data was visualized using Gephi, where each actor, access point, and resource was represented as nodes, and their relationships were depicted as edges. Centrality measures such as degree, betweenness, and closeness centrality were calculated to identify the most influential actors. For example, India's high degree centrality reflects its extensive bilateral and multilateral engagements, while its betweenness centrality highlights its role as a mediator and facilitator in the regional security network.

Through this process, SNA facilitates the examination of India's bilateral and multilateral relationships with other countries, identifying key maritime routes and how natural resources are transported and managed. This dual focus on connectivity and resource flows enhances our understanding of India's strategic role in South Asia. Furthermore, the visualizations generated through SNA serve as an analytical tool, uncovering latent patterns within the security network. For instance, the size of nodes and the thickness of edges in the network diagrams indicate the degree of influence and strength of relationships, respectively, offering immediate insights into the hierarchical structure of South Asia's security dynamics. This integrated approach of SNA and RSC theory not only strengthens the validity of the findings but also bridges theoretical insights with empirical data. The results underscore India's pivotal role in the South Asian security complex, highlighting the interplay between its leadership position and the region's interdependent security landscape.

Geopolitics Analysis

Table 1.1. GDP of South Asian's Countries

Countries	Military Expenditure (USD) 2022	Military Expenditure (GDP) 2022	Energy Fossil 2018	Energy Mineral 2018	Trade Export 2022	Trade Import 2022	Tourist Arrival 2022	Tourist Departure 2022	Economic Growth by GDP 2022
Afghanistan	0,0	0,00%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0
Bangladesh	4806,3	1,13%	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,1
Bhutan	0,0	0,00%	0	0	0	0	2.090.000	0	0,0
India	81363,2	2,43%	276.915.201	908.499.215	452.684.213.646.747	732.565.993.392.928	1.433.000	21.600.000	7,2
Maldives	0,0	0,00%	0	0	158.399.891.643	3522642777.19	1.675.000	0	13,9
Nepal	428,3	1,14%	0	0	1.300.469.756.499	13.743.903.611.893	615.000	0	5,6
Pakistan	10337,5	2,63%	156.419.295	122.691.994	30.769.091.836	70.175.991.322.898	0	0	4,7
Sri Lanka	1053,5	1,43%	1	0	13.592.124.433	17.559.536.533.469	759.000	1.128.000	-7,8

Source: Gathered by the researchers from various sources including the World Bank, UNWTO, COMTRADE, OEC, and SIPRI.

In the context of South Asian regional data analysis, a comprehensive examination of nine distinct metrics collected from reputable sources, including the World Bank, UNWTO, COMTRADE, OEC, and SIPRI, underscores the multifaceted nature of economic and geopolitical assessments (OEC, 2018; World Bank, 2022; SIPRI, 2022; COMTRADE, 2022; UNWTO, 2022). It is noteworthy to mention that while the majority of the data pertains to the year 2022, certain variables, such as Energy Fossil and Energy Mineral, are sourced from 2018 due to limited availability from OEC. The findings of each data analysis are accompanied by a color-coded distribution, where darker hues correspond to higher values. This visual representation elucidates the nuances of each metric, accentuating the variations across countries within the South Asian region. Through this method, intricate patterns and disparities in data are rendered more discernible. Consequently, the data-driven insights combined with geopolitical

analysis provide a nuanced understanding of how economic conditions and strategic goals coalesce to shape the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, influencing both regional stability and international relations.

a) Military Expenditure (USD and GDP)

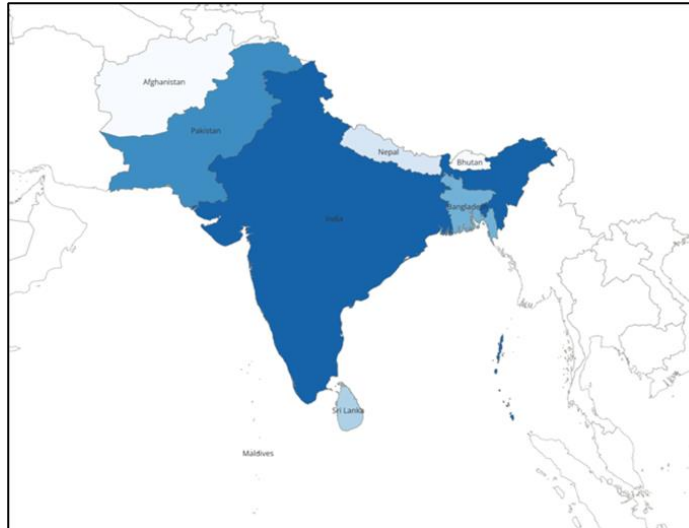


Figure 1. Geographical Visualization for Military Expenditure in USD

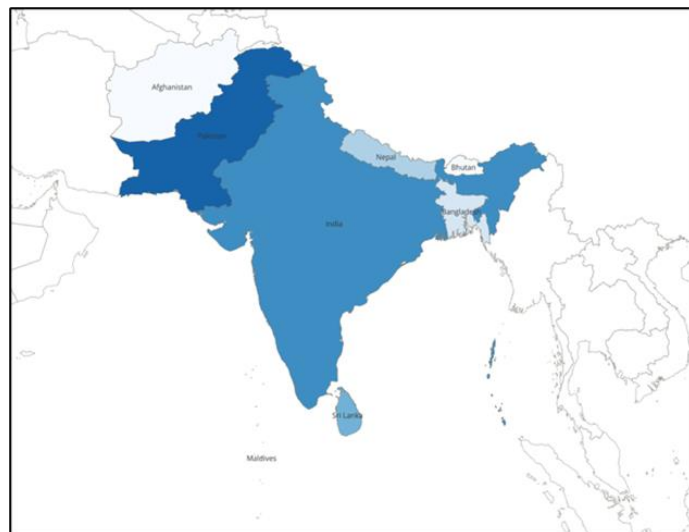


Figure 2. Geographical Visualization for Military Expenditure from Percent of GDP

Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide a visual representation of military expenditure in USD and as a percentage of GDP, respectively, across South Asian countries. The data reveals that India allocated the largest absolute amount to military spending in 2022, reflecting its role as the dominant power in the region. In contrast, Pakistan's military expenditure constitutes the highest proportion of its GDP, signifying a prioritization of defense relative to its overall economic size. These visualizations are not merely

descriptive; they substantiate the study's broader argument by emphasizing the varying strategic priorities within the region. For instance, India's substantial military budget highlights its efforts to maintain regional dominance and address both internal and external security threats. Meanwhile, Pakistan's high defense-to-GDP ratio underscores its focus on perceived security dilemmas, particularly in relation to India. By mapping this data geographically, these figures illuminate regional disparities and interdependencies that are central to understanding the dynamics of the South Asian Regional Security Complex (RSC). The stark contrast between India and Pakistan, as depicted, exemplifies the region's security asymmetries, which in turn shape the interplay of amity and enmity among states, a core tenet of RSC theory.

b) Energy Fossils and Energy Minerals

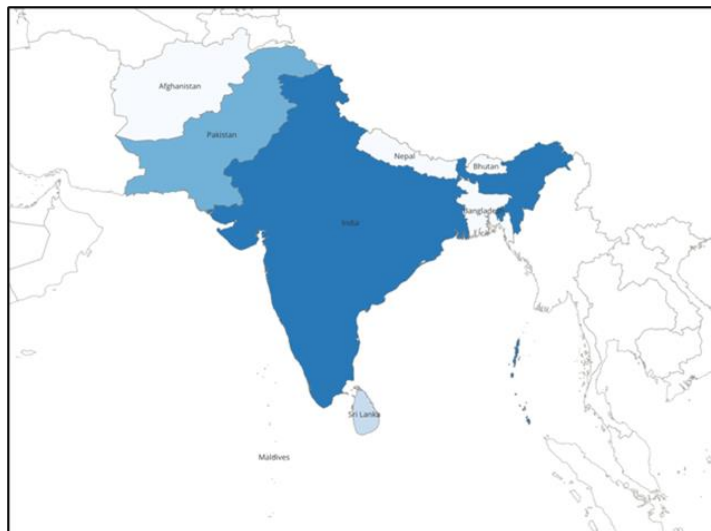


Figure 3. Geographical Visualization for Energy Fossils Income

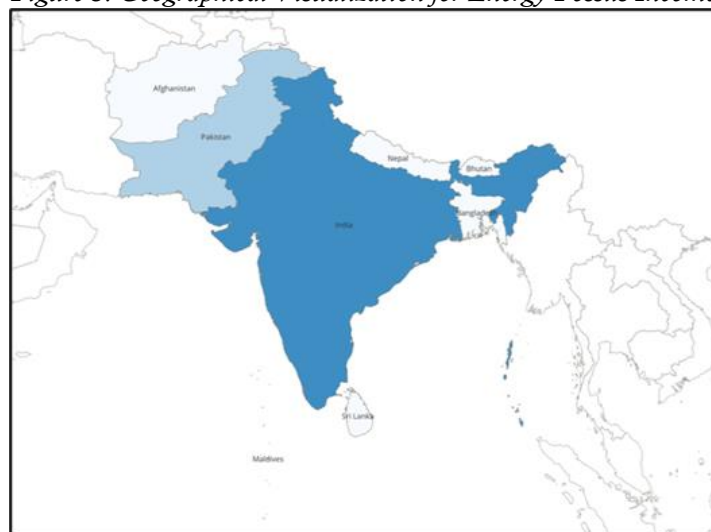


Figure 4. Geographical Visualization for Energy Minerals Income

The geographical visualization of energy fossil and mineral income underscores the profound disparities in resource distribution among South Asian countries. India's dominance in both energy fossils and minerals is a reflection of its vast natural resource base and industrial capacity, enabling it to secure a leading position in the region. This aligns with the principles of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which emphasizes the significance of internal and external interdependencies within a region. India's resource wealth not only sustains its domestic industrial and military needs but also bolsters its geopolitical influence over neighboring countries that lack such resources, fostering economic interdependence.

Pakistan, ranking second, benefits from its moderate resource availability, which it actively exploits to support its energy and economic needs. In contrast, resource-scarce nations such as Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives are heavily reliant on regional collaboration and imports, further enhancing India's role as a central actor in the South Asian security and economic landscape. This resource asymmetry also highlights the interplay between energy security and geopolitical stability within the region.

Geopolitical analysis reveals that resource-rich nations like India are strategically positioned to project power and influence over resource-deficient neighbors, creating a dependency that aligns with the RSC framework's emphasis on interdependence. Furthermore, India's ability to secure and utilize these resources strengthens its maritime and terrestrial strategies, as depicted in the earlier social network analysis. By addressing the energy needs of its neighbors or leveraging its resources in diplomatic engagements, India cements its role as a dominant actor in shaping the South Asian Regional Security Complex. This dynamic reflects how resource distribution not only drives economic priorities but also reinforces security interdependencies, shaping the broader regional order.

c) Trade Export and Trade Import

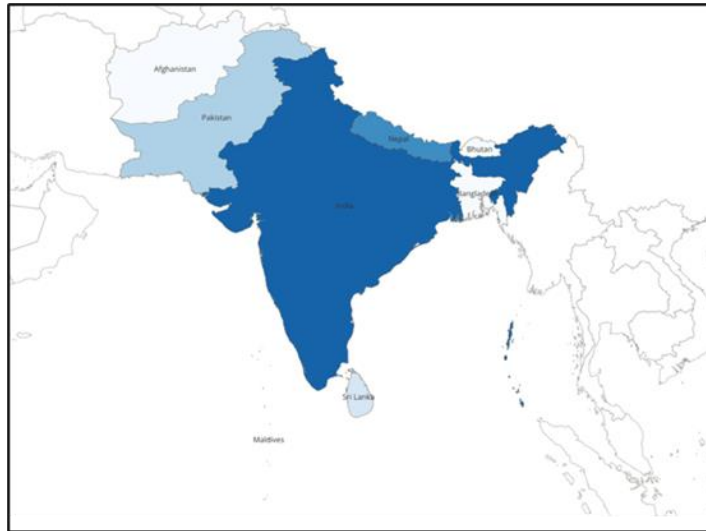


Figure 5. Geographical Visualization for Trade Export

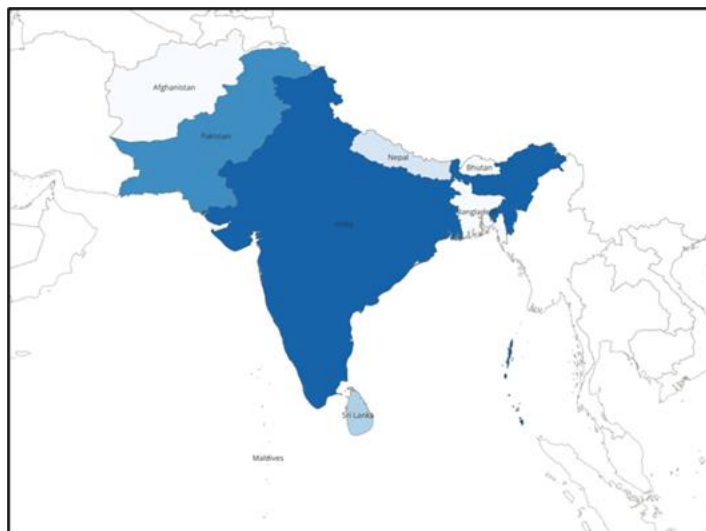


Figure 6. Geographical Visualization for Trade Import

From Figures 5 and 6, it is evident that India holds the leading position in both trade exports and imports within the South Asian region. This dominance can be attributed to its large population, which fuels economic activity across various sectors, and its strategic role as a key importer of advanced weaponry. These factors highlight India's critical role in regional economic and security dynamics, reinforcing its status as the strongest military and economic power in South Asia.

In the context of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, India's trade activities exemplify its central role in shaping interdependencies within the region. The substantial volume of exports and imports underscores India's ability to influence regional economic stability while maintaining its strategic military preparedness. The

focus on weapon imports reflects a proactive approach to security in a region characterized by historical and ongoing conflicts. By leveraging its economic and trade networks, India not only strengthens its economic position but also establishes itself as a pivotal actor in fostering regional security interdependence and stability. This interconnectedness underscores the theoretical concept that regional security is deeply rooted in both economic and military interactions.

d) Tourist Arrival and Tourist Departure

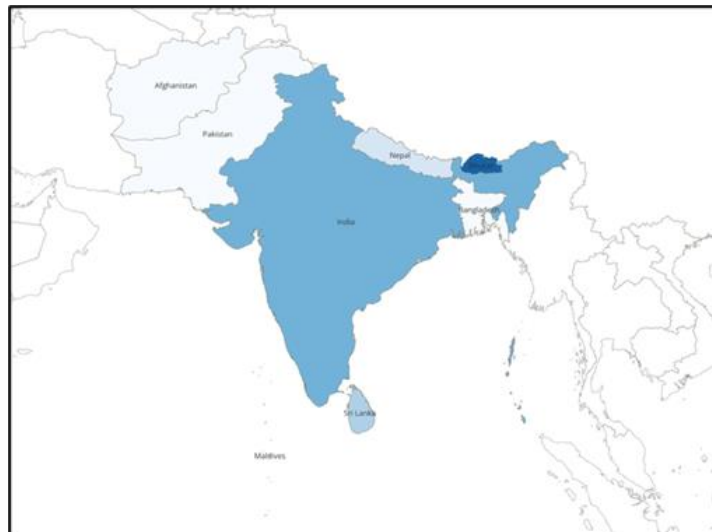


Figure 7. Geographical Visualization for Tourists Arrivals



Figure 8. Geographical Visualization for Tourists Departures

Bhutan emerges as a significant outlier in South Asia regarding tourist arrivals, as depicted in Figure 7. This prominence in tourism is tied to the nation's strategic branding as a high-value, low-impact destination, leveraging its pristine environment,

cultural heritage, and spiritual significance. Many visitors flock to Bhutan for pilgrimages and retreats, particularly in the Himalayan monasteries, while others are drawn by the promise of unspoiled nature and clean air. Conversely, Figure 8 reveals Bhutan's minimal outbound tourist activity, underscoring its inward-focused approach to cultural preservation and limited outward connectivity.

This disparity aligns with the principles of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which emphasizes the interdependencies and differentiations among states within a region. Bhutan, as a landlocked country with minimal military spending, relies on its soft power—tourism and cultural diplomacy—rather than conventional security measures. This focus positions Bhutan as an exception within the South Asian security dynamic, where most nations prioritize traditional power projection.

Bhutan's reliance on eco-tourism for economic security further integrates it into the broader South Asian regional framework. However, its dependence on India for infrastructural and strategic support highlights the interconnectedness between economic activities, cultural diplomacy, and security arrangements, reinforcing its role as a cooperative rather than competitive regional actor. This underscores how smaller states leverage their unique advantages to navigate the broader geopolitical framework defined by more dominant states like India.

e) Economic Growth by GDP

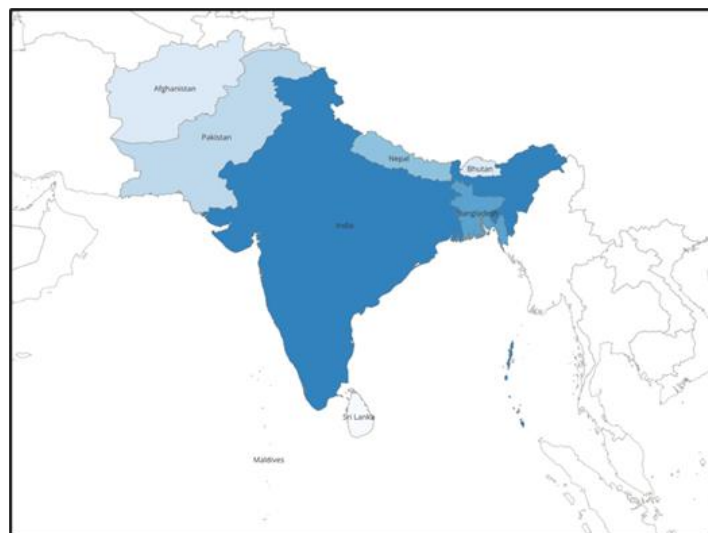


Figure 9. Geographical Visualization for Economic Growth by GDP

The Maldives is unique in the South Asian region for several reasons, particularly its economic model and approach to security. As highlighted in Figure 9, the Maldives achieved the highest economic growth rate in 2022, at 13.9%. This remarkable growth is

primarily driven by its reliance on tourism, unlike most other South Asian countries, where industrialization, agriculture, and trade dominate. The Maldives has tailored its economic strategy to capitalize on its natural resources, particularly its pristine beaches and marine environment, making it a global tourism hub. This dependence on tourism as a primary economic driver sets the Maldives apart, emphasizing a model of soft power and sustainable economic growth rather than traditional industrial or military strength.

Additionally, the Maldives is unique due to its lack of military expenditure and absence of significant military forces. Instead, it relies heavily on India for military training and defense support, showcasing an interdependent regional security arrangement. This distinct approach to security, combined with its economic reliance on tourism, positions the Maldives as a cooperative actor in South Asia's regional framework rather than a competitive one. Its unique circumstances illustrate how smaller nations in South Asia can thrive economically and ensure security through regional partnerships rather than unilateral measures.

Highlighting India, Bhutan, and the Maldives in this analysis serves to illustrate the spectrum of leadership, reliance, and interdependence within South Asia, reflecting the principles of Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory. India represents the apex of regional leadership, with its dominant military, economic, and geopolitical influence shaping the South Asian security architecture. Bhutan, on the other hand, exemplifies reliance on soft power, prioritizing diplomacy and environmental preservation over military strength. This contrast underscores how India's influence extends to training and supporting smaller nations like Bhutan in maintaining their security without direct conflict.

The Maldives, as a third focal point, showcases the interplay of economic innovation and regional dependence. Its reliance on India for security, while independently achieving economic success through tourism, reflects the dynamic interdependencies of the region. Together, these three countries highlight the varied ways South Asian states navigate their security and economic challenges. This selection strengthens the argument for India's leadership, as it demonstrates how India's role is pivotal across the spectrum—from direct influence over smaller states' military strategies to indirect support of their economic and security stability.

According to the RSC theory, the interdependent and interconnected nature of regional security is crucial in understanding these countries' security postures. India's robust military capabilities and significant economic indicators reflect its dominant role

in the region, influenced by both internal security challenges and external geopolitical rivalries. The country's need to address separatist movements and terrorism, alongside its border conflicts, necessitates a strong military presence, underscoring the interdependent security dynamics described by the RSC theory. Conversely, Bhutan's focus on diplomacy and minimal military expenditure, supported by Indian military training, highlights its reliance on regional stability and interdependency for security, rather than self-reliance on military prowess. Similarly, the Maldives' absence of a dedicated military budget and its reliance on Indian training further illustrate the region's collective defense strategy and economic interdependence. These countries' strategic choices emphasize the importance of regional security interconnections and collective approaches to address both traditional and non-traditional threats. Thus, the RSC theory adeptly captures the essence of how these nations navigate their security concerns within a complex and interdependent regional framework, highlighting the pivotal role of regional dynamics in shaping national security strategies.

Social Network Analysis

This section delves into India's role as the predominant power in the South Asian region, with a particular focus on its maritime interests. The preceding geopolitical analysis highlights India's superior position and sets the stage for a detailed examination of its strategic networking with other countries in this domain. Researchers have utilized news articles as the primary data source to process and visualize India's maritime engagements. Maritime interest is centered around two primary keywords: "access" and "resources." The analysis identifies three types of relationships based on these keywords: actor-to-actor, actor-to-access, and actor-to-resources. Here, "actor" refers to countries, "access" pertains to maritime routes and infrastructure, and "resources" denotes the natural assets that are either needed or transported via maritime channels.

India's maritime strategy involves building and maintaining relationships with other nations to secure and enhance its access to critical maritime routes and infrastructure. This includes partnerships, agreements, and collaborations that facilitate seamless navigation and operational efficiency in key maritime zones. Furthermore, India actively engages with countries to ensure a steady flow of essential resources, which are vital for its economic and strategic interests. These resources encompass everything from energy supplies to trade goods, underscoring the interconnected nature of maritime commerce and national security. Through this strategic networking, India aims to consolidate its maritime influence, safeguard its economic interests, and reinforce its

geopolitical stance in the region. The research underscores the importance of these relationships, illustrating how India's maritime strategy is pivotal in shaping its regional dominance and addressing the complex dynamics of access and resource distribution in the South Asian maritime landscape.

a) Actor to Actor Relations

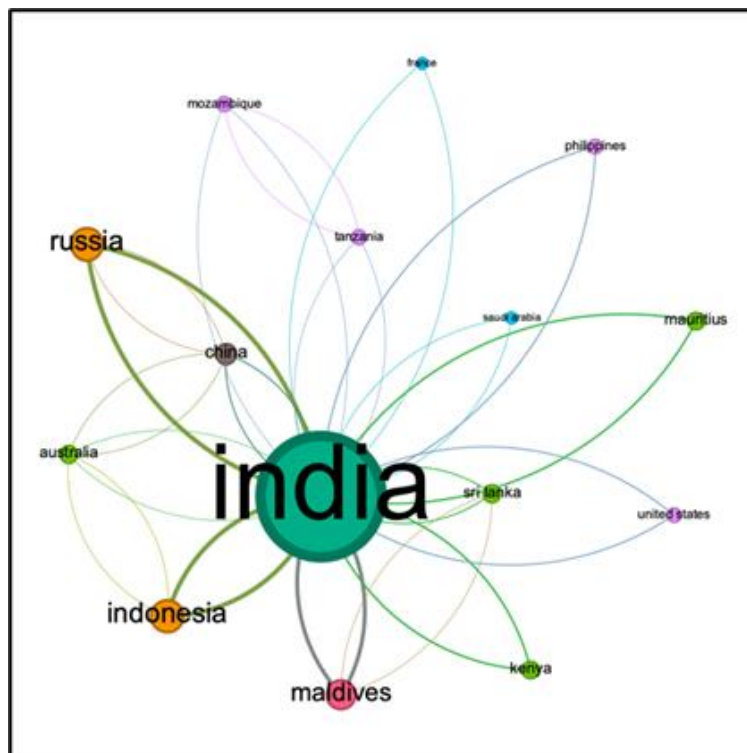


Figure 10. Relations between India and other Countries related to maritime interest

India's maritime interactions, as depicted in Figure 10, reflect a network that extends beyond the South Asian region to encompass a variety of global actors, such as Russia, Indonesia, the United States, and China. Employing Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's concepts of amity and enmity from Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory adds depth to these relationships. Amity, characterized by cooperation and mutual benefits, is visible in India's interactions with Indonesia, Russia, and Mauritius. These relationships focus on shared maritime interests, such as resource utilization, maritime security cooperation, and economic partnerships. For instance, India's extensive collaboration with Russia on maritime routes underscores a mutual amity driven by shared strategic interests in balancing China's growing naval influence.

On the other hand, the enmity between India and China, driven by strategic competition, is a socially constructed response to China's expanding maritime influence in the Indian Ocean. This rivalry is more than just a product of material competition; it is rooted in normative conflicts, where India seeks to redefine the balance of power and establish norms of maritime security that counter China's growing influence. This tension aligns with Wendt's notion that state behavior is shaped by the identities and norms that emerge through socialization, such as India's response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its growing naval presence. These dynamics demonstrate how India's maritime network is shaped not only by geographical proximity but also by the interplay of cooperative and competitive relationships, aligning with RSC theory's emphasis on regional interdependencies (Bhaumik, 2024).

India's pronounced interactions with external powers, despite the South Asian region's immediate geographical relevance, are not solely a result of landlocked neighbors' lack of maritime activity. Instead, these interactions stem from India's broader strategic ambitions and the necessity to assert its dominance in the Indian Ocean—a critical global trade artery. Bhaumik (2024) highlights that India's trilateral maritime exercises, such as "Dosti-16" with the Maldives and Sri Lanka, aim to enhance regional security cooperation and interoperability. These drills are part of India's strategic vision to foster stability in its immediate neighborhood while expanding its influence globally.

Additionally, India's "Act East" and "Extended Neighborhood" policies, which focus on diversifying partnerships across the Indo-Pacific and African regions, further illustrate Wendt's constructivist perspective. These policies are not merely about economic or military interests; they are about fostering norms of influence and establishing India as a pivotal maritime power globally. By expanding its network of alliances and interactions, India constructs its role in the global maritime order, aligning its regional dominance with broader international security norms.

In summary, Wendt's theory enriches the understanding of India's maritime strategy by emphasizing how India's identity and actions are shaped through social interactions, the diffusion of norms, and the construction of regional and global security dynamics. This framework allows us to see how India's role as a maritime leader is not just a reflection of its material power but also of its ability to shape and influence the shared norms that govern regional and global security, aligning both its regional and global strategies with its evolving identity.

b) Actor to Resources Relations

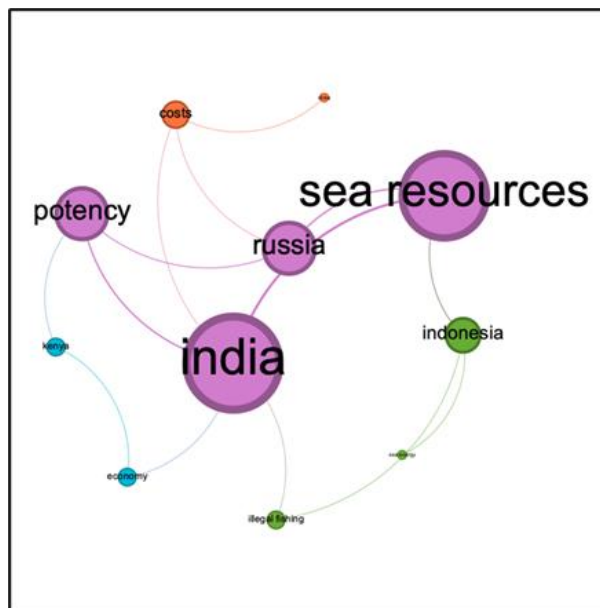


Figure 11. Relations between India and resources aspect of maritime security

Figure 11 illustrates the intricate web of India's maritime interactions centered around resource management, highlighting both collaborative and competitive dynamics. This analysis aligns with Wendt's (1992) assertion that international politics is shaped not just by material capabilities but by social interactions that influence shared norms and identities. Wendt's theory provides a critical lens to understand how India's maritime strategy is socially constructed through its interactions and relationships with other states.

India's frequent engagement with Russia, marked by shared interests in "sea resources," underscores a strategic partnership focused on resource exploitation and shared benefits. This relationship reflects an alignment of interests that fosters mutual amity, as per the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, where interdependence is leveraged to address common goals. Similarly, India's indirect linkage with Indonesia, addressing challenges like "illegal fishing," suggests a cooperative approach to securing maritime sustainability in the Indian Ocean. The ASEAN-India Forum 2023, as highlighted by Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Indonesia (2023), facilitated discussions to optimize resource utilization, demonstrating India's proactive stance in fostering regional partnerships.

However, consistent with Wendt's assertion that state behavior is shaped by social interactions, the dynamics of India's maritime strategy also highlight competitive elements. For instance, India's engagement with China under the keyword "costs" signals

underlying tensions in economic negotiations, such as shipping tariffs or resource allocation. This reflects a socially constructed enmity, where rivalry emerges from competing interests and contested norms of influence in the Indian Ocean Region. Similarly, while India's collaboration with Kenya emphasizes economic partnerships, the competition for maritime trade routes and resource access underscores the complexity of balancing cooperation and competition.

To better understand the dual dynamics of cooperation and competition, the methodological framework emphasizes both quantitative and qualitative data. The Social Network Analysis (SNA) visualization reveals the density of interactions and their thematic connections. Direct links, such as those with Russia, are interpreted as cooperative due to shared strategic objectives. In contrast, indirect connections, such as with China, require deeper contextual analysis, incorporating geopolitical tensions and economic rivalries. Wendt's constructivist perspective adds depth to these observations by explaining how these relationships are shaped through socialization and norm diffusion, highlighting the dual dynamics of amity and enmity in India's maritime strategy.

In conclusion, the emphasis on cooperation within India's maritime strategy does not negate the underlying competition inherent in resource interactions. Rather, it highlights India's ability to navigate these dual dynamics, leveraging cooperation to mitigate conflicts while asserting its leadership in the Indian Ocean Region. While India fosters collaboration to mitigate conflicts and secure resources, the underlying competition inherent in these interactions reflects the interplay of shared norms and contested interests. This nuanced approach aligns with RSC theory's emphasis on the interplay of amity and enmity, showcasing how regional powers balance collaboration and rivalry to achieve strategic objectives.

c) Actor to Access Relations

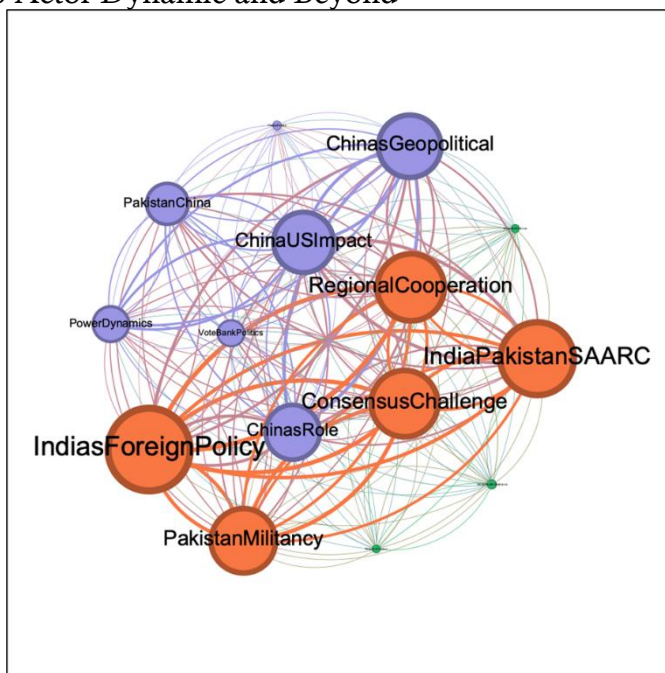
Wendt's theory of social construction is particularly relevant in explaining how India's maritime relationships are not solely shaped by material power or geographic proximity but also by the social dynamics and shared understandings that emerge through interaction. According to Wendt, state behavior is shaped through a process of socialization and norm diffusion, wherein states not only act based on their capabilities but also in response to the identities and norms they share with others. In the case of India, its centrality in the maritime network is reinforced by its ability to act as a norm-setter within the region. For instance, India's efforts to establish maritime security frameworks with countries like Sri Lanka and the Maldives reflect India's role in constructing a shared identity of regional stability, which goes beyond mere economic or military calculations.

The RSC theory's core concepts of amity and enmity are pivotal in analyzing India's maritime strategy. India's cooperative initiatives, such as its engagements with smaller nations like Mauritius and Sri Lanka, are aimed at fostering regional interdependence and securing maritime stability. These align with the "amity" aspect of the theory, where mutual benefits and trust dominate interactions. On the other hand, its relations with China highlight "enmity" through strategic competition. For instance, India's counterstrategies to BRI, including increased naval exercises and port investments, illustrate how rivalry and cooperation coexist within the same regional framework.

By incorporating conflictual dynamics into the analysis, the visualization could better represent India's maritime strategy's dual nature. For example, the interaction with China could include elements of territorial disputes, competition over energy corridors, and naval expansion. Similarly, interactions with countries like Indonesia and Sri Lanka may involve subtle competition for influence over shared maritime resources. These additions would provide a richer, more nuanced depiction of India's maritime network, emphasizing both its leadership in fostering regional stability and its proactive measures to mitigate security threats.

In conclusion, the visualization effectively highlights India's maritime dominance but would benefit from integrating conflictual elements to fully align with RSC theory. This expanded perspective not only underscores India's centrality but also provides deeper insights into the complex interplay of cooperation and competition shaping South Asia's maritime security landscape.

d) Actor to Actor Dynamic and Beyond



Figures 13.

Figure 13 illustrates the interconnectedness of key geopolitical issues in South Asia, segmented into three distinct clusters, each represented by a different color: orange, purple, and green. The central node, India's Foreign Policy, is the largest and most influential, interlinked with significant themes like India-Pakistan relations, SAARC, and Regional Cooperation, emphasizing India's strategic role in regional affairs. This central positioning reflects India's dominance in South Asian geopolitics, navigating complex relationships with neighboring states and managing both cooperation and competition. As highlighted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2022), India's foreign policy has evolved under changing regional dynamics, where "India's engagement with Pakistan and its role within SAARC underscore the challenge of fostering regional consensus amidst growing geopolitical tensions" (Carnegie Endowment, 2022).

The orange cluster highlights issues central to India's foreign policy, such as challenges in fostering regional consensus and the complexity of its relations with neighboring Pakistan. These dynamics are intensified by conflicts like Pakistan's Militancy and Kashmir-related violence, which remain at the heart of India-Pakistan tensions. The relationship between India and Pakistan remains a critical flashpoint in the region, with territorial disputes, terrorism, and the ongoing Kashmir conflict complicating diplomatic efforts (CFR, 2022). This cluster underscores the delicate balancing act India faces, managing cooperation with its regional neighbors while

confronting a persistent strategic rivalry with Pakistan. Moreover, it highlights how India's relationship with Pakistan influences the broader regional security environment, especially regarding nuclear deterrence and military posturing.

The purple cluster is dominated by themes related to China's growing influence in the region, such as China's Geopolitical Role, China-US Impact, and Pakistan-China Relations. China's increasing footprint in South Asia, particularly through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), underscores the complexity of India's foreign policy, which must navigate both external threats, particularly from China, and internal political and social dynamics. As a result, India's foreign policy decisions are often a balancing act between asserting regional dominance and responding to the challenges posed by both domestic factors and external pressures (Loc, 2023). China's economic and political influence is reshaping regional dynamics, challenging India's strategic dominance in maritime security. This shift is not without friction, as India perceives China's growing role, particularly in Pakistan, as a direct challenge to its own influence in South Asia. India's response, marked by strategic rivalry, is not explicitly shown in this cluster but remains a critical element of regional power struggles.

The green cluster addresses the internal dynamics within South Asian countries, focusing on domestic issues like Sectarian Violence, Religious Tensions, and Vote Bank Politics. A growing concern is the rise of Islamophobia, reflected in the emergence of a subgenre of music dubbed "Hindutva pop." Artists like Prem Krishnavanshi have produced anti-Muslim songs that have gained traction, particularly in northern states such as Uttar Pradesh. These songs, often shared on social media platforms like YouTube, advocate hate and incite violence against the Muslim minority. As Krishnavanshi's song lyrics suggest, there is an open rejection of Hindu-Muslim unity, promoting divisiveness and fostering a hostile environment (Rehbar, 2022). This cultural shift is part of a broader trend fueled by the political polarization that has intensified since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, leading to heightened religious tensions and complicating India's foreign relations. Such internal issues are deeply connected to the broader geopolitical environment, influencing India's interactions with neighboring countries, including Pakistan and China.

India's central role, as represented by its largest node, underscores its leadership in navigating regional and global challenges. The interaction between themes in the orange, purple, and green clusters highlights the complexity of India's foreign policy. This balancing of cooperation (with regional partners) and competition (particularly with China and Pakistan) shapes South Asia's security and diplomatic landscape. India's

foreign policy is influenced not only by external threats but also by domestic political factors that shape its international actions. According to Khan and Naazer (2020), India's domestic political environment, particularly the rise of religious nationalism and the influence of the BJP, plays a significant role in shaping its foreign policy. India's efforts to maintain regional stability are complicated by its internal diversity and ongoing political debates, making its foreign policy a delicate balance between domestic interests and regional priorities.

Wendt's (1992) constructivist perspective aligns with this understanding of India's foreign policy dynamics, as it emphasizes that state behavior is not solely driven by material power, but also by social interactions that form shared norms and identities. This perspective is critical in understanding how India navigates its relationships with neighbors like Pakistan and China, not just through military might or territorial claims, but through the process of socialization, norm-building, and identity construction in the regional security complex. India's role as a norm-setter within the South Asian geopolitical landscape, particularly in shaping the norms surrounding security cooperation (with SAARC or regional security frameworks), can be seen as a product of these social interactions, as opposed to a purely material-driven strategy.

By integrating Wendt's theory, we can further explore how India's strategic rivalry with Pakistan and China is shaped not only by power dynamics but also by their mutual perceptions and constructed identities within the region. For example, India's ongoing engagement with Pakistan, despite deep-seated rivalry, involves a complex process of norm diffusion, where India attempts to frame the bilateral conflict within a cooperative, regional stability framework. Similarly, its response to China's increasing influence, while competitive, is also influenced by how India and China perceive each other's roles in the broader South Asian security complex, making these interactions a socially constructed battle for influence rather than solely a military contest.

In conclusion, while this visualization effectively captures India's prominent position in South Asia's geopolitics, it would benefit from explicitly representing the conflictual dynamics, particularly India's rivalry with China and Pakistan. Integrating Wendt's theory of social construction into this analysis would enhance the understanding of how these conflicts are not only shaped by material factors but also by the ongoing processes of socialization, identity formation, and norm diffusion that occur in the regional context. This expanded approach would offer a richer view of how India navigates the complex forces of regional integration and strategic rivalry, aligning with

the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which posits that security concerns are interlinked among neighboring states.

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the geopolitical and network analysis highlight India's central and dominant role in South Asian geopolitics, both in terms of military power, economic influence, and strategic relations with countries beyond the region. India's prominent position in the geopolitical network is clear, especially when considering its interconnections with key issues such as India-Pakistan relations, regional cooperation through SAARC, and its role in broader security dynamics. India's strategic positioning reflects its ability to navigate both cooperation and competition within the region, as well as its expanding influence globally, as illustrated by its active engagements with countries like Russia and Indonesia.

The network analysis reveals a notable pattern in India's extensive interactions with nations outside South Asia, emphasizing that India's foreign relations are not confined to its immediate neighbors but extend to key global players. This finding underscores India's broader strategic outreach and its importance in shaping the political and economic landscape beyond the region. In contrast, countries like Bhutan and the Maldives, while relatively smaller and less active in global networks, demonstrate that factors such as economic growth (as in the case of the Maldives) or military capacity limitations (as seen with Bhutan) influence their international positioning.

The visualization of the interconnected themes—divided into three color-coded clusters—sheds light on the complexity of India's foreign policy and regional interactions. The orange cluster, focusing on India's foreign policy, highlights the challenges India faces in fostering regional consensus, particularly in its relationship with Pakistan, which remains marked by territorial disputes and violence. The purple cluster, dominated by China's increasing influence, showcases the challenge India faces in the Indian Ocean region, as China's growing presence, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), directly impacts India's maritime security and strategic dominance. Meanwhile, the green cluster, addressing internal issues such as sectarian violence and religious tensions, illustrates how domestic instability in countries like India and Pakistan influences broader geopolitical dynamics.

From the perspective of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory, which suggests that security concerns are deeply interconnected within a region, India's

centrality within South Asia emphasizes its role in shaping regional stability. India's foreign policy is not only a response to external threats but is also shaped by domestic factors, including political debates and internal diversity. These elements complicate India's international positioning as it strives to balance its domestic priorities with its regional and global ambitions.

Integrating Wendt's (1992) constructivist perspective into this analysis further deepens our understanding of India's foreign policy. Wendt argues that state behavior is socially constructed, shaped not only by material power but also by social interactions, shared norms, and identities. This is particularly relevant in understanding how India navigates its relationships with Pakistan and China, where strategic rivalry is intertwined with processes of norm-building and identity construction. For example, India's engagement with Pakistan, despite ongoing tensions, involves complex efforts to reframe the bilateral conflict within a framework of regional stability. Similarly, its response to China's rising influence is not only driven by power competition but also by the identities that India and China construct in relation to one another within the South Asian security context.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that India's geopolitical influence extends far beyond material power, involving the social processes of norm-building, identity formation, and regional cooperation. Integrating Wendt's theory provides a richer understanding of how India interacts with its neighbors, not just through competition, but through efforts to establish shared norms that support regional stability. This approach aligns with the Regional Security Complex theory, which highlights the interdependence of security concerns among neighboring states and emphasizes the dynamic between cooperation and rivalry in shaping regional outcomes. By expanding on these theories and integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and evolving security landscape in South Asia.

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Appendix I

News Articles with Google Operator of "India" and "Maritime Interest", "Faith Relations in India and Pakistan", "China-Pakistan Relations to India", "India and SAARC", "Vote Bank in India"

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The Spread of Democracy in China: Reflecting the Failure of Political Reform

Muhamad Ibnu Armandhani

Department of International Relations, Universitas Jenderal Achmad Yani

The spread of democratic ideas and economic growth in China, as proposed by modernization theory, has not led to political reform toward democracy in the country. Various literatures have attempted to explain this failure by emphasizing economic and social learning factors that clash with China's national interests, rather than focusing on the context of their dissemination. Generally, this article aims to explain China's failure to reform its politics toward democracy by focusing on the context in which democratic ideas have spread in China. Specifically, this article seeks to elucidate the relevance and continuity of the spread of democratic ideas during the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the Tiananmen Movement of 1989, and the Umbrella Movement of 2014, linking these events to the third, fourth, and fifth waves of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS). This article adopts a constructivist paradigm and the theory of constitutive localization to explain the failure of political reform in China. The findings suggest that local Chinese political ideas have influenced the spreading process of democratic ideas, contributing to China's failure to achieve political reform toward democracy.

Keywords: China, Democratization, Constitutive Localization

Since the 20th century, China's long history of engaging with democratic ideas reflects its people's enduring spirit in the struggle for democratization. During the May Fourth Movement period, Chinese intellectuals adopted democratic ideas—with the term "Mr. Democracy"—to escape from the dark ages (Schmalzer, 2022, p. 306). In the same century, during the Tiananmen Movement period, various elements of Chinese society gathered in Tiananmen Square to demand political reform toward democracy (Nathan, 2001, p. 3). Moreover, in the 21st century, more than one million Hong Kongers demanded universal suffrage, as reflected in the Umbrella Movement of 2014 (Hui, 2015, p. 111). However, the long history and rich experience of spreading democratic ideas in China have not met the expectations of people's spirit to reform its politics toward democracy.

Furthermore, according to Lipset's hypothesis, economic growth in a country should foster political reform toward democracy (Lipset, 1959, p. 75). However, this prerequisite has become the focus of debate in the study of global democratization.¹ Despite this, modernization theory—the relationship between economic growth and democratization—remains the primary framework for explaining democratization in a country. As highlighted in the seminal work "Democracy's Third Wave," economic growth was a leading factor in forming the third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991, p. 22). Despite the ongoing debate, China experienced economic growth above five percent from 1991 to 2019, reaching a GDP per capita of \$10,144 in 2019 (The World Bank, 2024). However, as reported by Freedom House, China's political rights score was -1 out of 40 in 2019 (House, 2019).

Despite China's significant experience with democratic ideas and economic growth—factors often considered prerequisites for democratization—the country has not transitioned to political democracy, raising critical questions among scholars. There are arguments based on economic factors that China is not yet economically "rich" enough to become a democratic country (Rowen, 2007, p. 15). Moreover, from a social learning perspective, the promotion of democratic ideas by external actors, especially the United States, has been perceived as a threat by the Chinese, thus creating strategic distrust and becoming an obstacle to China's political reform (He, 2013, p. 42).

These explanations do not fully elucidate the influence of the process of spreading democratic ideas in China on its failure to reform its politics toward democracy. As Przeworski and Limongi have argued, democracy is not simply a product of economic growth (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997, p. 162). In other words, endogenous explanations are not the leading factor in a country's democratization. Moreover, the topic of spreading democratic ideas—the third-generation explanation—has shifted from intersubjective engagement or social learning to the context of how a country with a different history and political culture can adopt democratic ideas as a foreign concept (Chandler, 2013, p. 222). Therefore, this third-generation perspective needs more attention to explain China's failure to reform its politics, with emphasis on the process of spreading these ideas.

¹ Some intellectuals argue that there is no relationship between economic growth and democratization. Others, however, argue that there is a positive relationship between economic growth and democratization. See (Boix & Stokes, 2003; Przeworski et al., 2000; Wucherpfennig & Deutsch, 2009).

To address this, this article will implement the constructivist paradigm and constitutive localization theory as a framework for explaining the process of spreading democratic ideas in China. Moreover, this article argues that China's local political ideas—*tianming* and *min-ben*—have influenced this process, leading to China's failure to reform its politics toward democracy. This argument is based on survey results from the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), which show the relevance and continuity of the acceptance and spread of democratic ideas during the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the Tiananmen Movement in 1989, and the Umbrella Movement in 2014.

This article explains why China has failed to reform its politics toward democracy despite its experience with economic growth and the spread of democratic ideas. It first discusses how constructivism and constitutive localization are helpful in explaining the phenomenon of spreading democratic ideas. This is followed by an examination of the demand variable from constitutive localization theory in explaining the relevance and continuity of these three democratic movements in China to the results of the third, fourth, and fifth waves of the ABS survey.² Lastly, this article connects the understanding of democratic ideas spread across China from these three democratic movements to the survey results from ABS.

The Origin of Identity and Constitutive Localization

The spread of democratic ideas is a pivotal topic in International Relations studies that can be understood in the context of constructivism and constitutive localization. In the basic assumptions of constructivism, democratic ideas are viewed as shared knowledge—an idea, knowledge, or belief shared socially and adopted by some countries around the world (Wendt, 1999, p. 141). As shared knowledge, democratic ideas have been socially shared and adopted by some countries, reflected by the third wave of democratization that produced a political transition in 95 countries (Huntington, 1991, p. 3).

The definition of democracy has many nuances. According to Larry Diamond, David Collier, and Steven Levitsky, more than 550 types of democracy have been identified (Diamond, 1997, p. 2). However, this article will refer to Joseph Schumpeter's minimalist definition because it can identify and distinguish the identity of a country as either democratic or non-democratic. Schumpeter (1943, p. 269) explains, "The

² The third wave of ABS survey was conducted in 2011-2012 in China and 2012 in Hong Kong. The fourth wave was conducted in 2015 in China and 2016 in Hong Kong. Moreover, the fifth wave was conducted in 2019 in China and 2019-2021 in Hong Kong.

democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote." In other words, the electoral aspect is essential in identifying a country's identity. The wave of democratization has also referred to this definition in explaining the adoption of a minimalist approach that resulted in a country's transition (Huntington, 1991, p. 16). Moreover, several scholars have used this minimalist definition to understand democratic ideas (Dahl, 1971; Przeworski et al., 2000). Therefore, this article will refer to a minimalist definition when explaining the spread of democratic ideas in China.

In relation to identity construction, spreading democratic ideas could transform a country's identity. This is based on the constructivist assumption that emphasizes the notion that the interest and identity of a country are influenced by intersubjective engagement (Chandler, 2013, p. 216). In other words, a country's identity is not permanent but can be changed. Moreover, identity as a democratic country can be classified as a type of identity that refers to the regime type (Wendt, 1999, p. 226). In the constructivist sense, there are two mechanisms for constructing a country's identity—imitation and social learning mechanisms (Wendt, 1999, p. 324). However, these mechanisms fail to fully explain the process through which democratic ideas spread and influence a country's identity.

In the imitation mechanism, a country will change its identity according to the identity of another country that it perceives as successful (Wendt, 1999, p. 325). However, the imitation mechanism only focuses on explanations related to demand, understanding why a country needs to change its identity. Moreover, in the social learning mechanisms, interaction between actors will produce a learning process for identity construction (Wendt, 1999, p. 327). However, in the historical context of spreading democratic ideas, engagement between actors in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq has taught us that domestic problems influence the acceptance of democratic ideas in a country (Chandler, 2013, p. 221). In other words, the success or failure of a country adopting democratic ideas cannot only be explained through the involvement of external actors; there are also domestic factors—historical experience or political culture—that influence the process of spreading democratic ideas.

To address this gap, this research will implement Amitav Acharya's constitutive localization theory to explain the spreading process of democratic ideas in China. Constitutive localization is a process of localizing or spreading foreign ideas in a country by local actors to construct the country's identity (Acharya, 2009, p. 19). During this

process, two variables contribute to adopting foreign ideas: demand and local ideas. The first is the demand variable, which is vital in understanding why local actors need to adopt or spread foreign ideas in their country (Acharya, 2004, p. 246). Second, the stronger the contradiction between local and foreign ideas, the greater the possibility of localization or rejection rather than full acceptance of foreign ideas in a country (Acharya, 2004, p. 248). In this research, these two variables will be instrumental in explaining the process of spreading democratic ideas in China that influence China's failure to reform its politics, which will be discussed in the next section.

China's Demands on Democracy

As a matter of genealogy, the spread of democratic ideas in China—reflected by the May Fourth Movement and the Tiananmen Movement—could have occurred based on intellectuals' demand to adopt democracy in order to modernize China or achieve economic growth, especially when the government was on the verge of losing its mandate from heaven (*tianming*). In China, democratic ideas have been viewed as instruments for national salvation and welfare (S. Zhao, 2000a, p. 48). In other words, the demand for these ideas did not arise when the Chinese people were economically prosperous but rather within the discourse of modernization.

During the May Fourth Movement period, one notion dominated: modernization could only be achieved if China adopted and implemented Western ideas, particularly democracy. In this period, Chinese intellectuals viewed democracy as a means to achieve national salvation, including China's unity, strength, and prosperity (Mitter, 2004, p. 119). Chen Duxiu—the prominent Chinese intellectual and one of the founders of the CCP—narrated that China needed Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science because only these "gentlemen" could save China from darkness (Gu, 2001, p. 589).

The political conditions during the May Fourth period influenced Chinese intellectuals' motivation to adopt democracy. Due to the government's inability to govern effectively, Chinese intellectuals viewed the political condition as inadequate for achieving modernization. After the 1912 Revolution, which had established a republic in China, there was a betrayal of republican spirit, exemplified by Yuan Shikai's attempt to restore the monarchy and the signing of the 21 Demands with Japan (Tse-tsung, 1960, p. 10). Moreover, the people's representatives were more responsive to Shikai's bribes than to the desires and needs of the populace (Eastman, 1974, p. 142). Therefore, Chinese intellectuals saw Mr. Democracy as the savior of China from its dark times.

Similarly, in the Tiananmen Movement period, the demand was rooted in the discourse of modernization and government performance. In February 1989, the Chinese people narrated that the government had lost its mandate of heaven (*tianming*)—legitimation based on performance (Schell, 1994, p. 33). Since Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy showed negative results in the 1980s—such as inflation and corruption—Chinese intellectuals and demonstrators viewed this as a consequence of the regime's reluctance to undertake political reform (Gungwu, 1990, p. 43). Fang Lizhi (1991, p. 51)—a prominent Chinese intellectual—said, "The problem has to do with the authoritarian political system in China. Therefore, without reforming China's political system, it would be impossible to bring about modernization. This is a basic reason why the Chinese people need democracy." Demonstrators also called back Mr. Democracy to the Tiananmen Movement, arguing that democracy was needed in China to achieve modernization ("May 4 Declaration: Let Our Cries Awaken Our Young Republic!", 1990, p. 16).

Some intellectuals, especially those from the neo-authoritarianism group, rejected democracy as the leading factor for modernizing and achieving economic growth in China. Wu Jiexiang—one of the intellectuals from Neo-authoritarianism—stated that a "new authoritarian regime" was needed in China because it could act as an "express train" to achieve democracy through market development (Jiexiang, 1990, p. 42). The underlying logic of the Neo-authoritarian group was that modernization is only possible through authoritarian rule (Petracca & Xiong, 1990, p. 1099). However, the discourse of democratization during the Tiananmen Movement period occurred when the regime demonstrated its inability to achieve modernization or economic growth. Moreover, Jiexiang's statement highlights that China's economic growth under its authoritarian regime did not lead to political reform toward democracy.

Despite criticism from Neo-authoritarian groups, from Chen Duxiu to Fang Lizhi, they have shown that the demand for democratic ideas was based on the people's spirit toward modernization. When the government failed at modernization and national salvation, Chinese intellectuals, without hesitation, adopted democracy to achieve modernization. Thus, the history of spreading democratic ideas in China contradicts the basic logic of modernization theory. On one hand, economic growth in a country should create a strong demand for democratization. On the other hand, the May Fourth Movement and the Tiananmen Movement periods have proven that democracy was adopted when the government shows its inability to achieve Chinese modernization, especially when it loses its mandate from heaven.

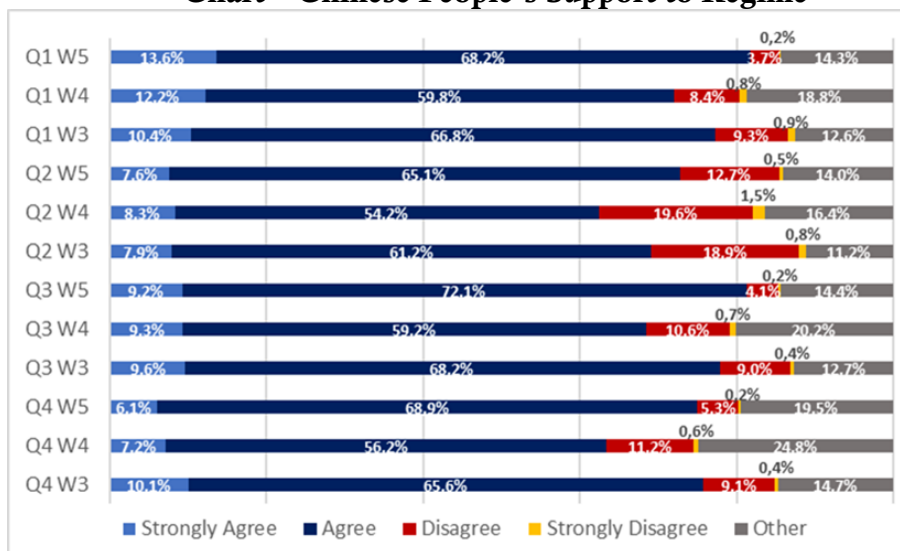
This contradiction can be understood by recognizing the influence of the Chinese local political concept, particularly the *tianming* (mandate of heaven) idea, which influenced the demand for democracy in China. In *tianming*, the government acquires the mandate (*ming*) from heaven (*tian*)—the legitimation to rule—if it demonstrates performance or the ability to govern its people (D. Zhao, 2009, p. 419). To maintain this mandate, the government must maintain public order, state security, and create welfare for its people (D. Zhao, 2009, p. 421). If the government shows its inability to govern, heaven will signal the creation of a rebellion from the people (Schell, 1994, p. 21). This was reflected during the Tiananmen Movement when the Chinese people viewed the regime's legitimacy based on morality and economic performance (D. Zhao, 2009, p. 423). Therefore, government performance is critical in maintaining people's support for the regime and its legitimacy from heaven.

Chinese history has shown that the demand for democratic ideas arises when the government shows its inability. By the same logic, when the government has the performance to achieve modernization or economic growth in China, it retains its mandate from heaven or the people's support. The relationship between the government's performance in achieving China's economic growth and the results of the three waves of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) can prove this statement.

In the chart below, three waves of ABS survey results occurred when China experienced economic growth, reaching a GDP per capita from \$6,152 in 2011 to \$10,155 in 2019 (The World Bank, 2024).³ The chart indicates that most Chinese people still support the regime's continuity. If we refer to the logic of modernization theory or endogenous explanation, economic growth in China should be a solid basis for creating popular demand for reforming Chinese politics toward democracy. However, the ABS survey results have proven that economic growth in China generates popular support for the regime, thus maintaining the mandate of heaven.

³ The number of GDP per capita of \$6,000 is often considered a benchmark for economic development related to democratic transition. However, China showed the relevance with Przeworski's argument, which a country reaches the level of \$6,000, transition to democracy become less likely. See (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997).

Chart—Chinese People’s Support to Regime



Source: Asian Barometer Survey

Notes:

Q1: I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of.

Q2: A system like ours, even if it runs into problems, deserve the people’s support.

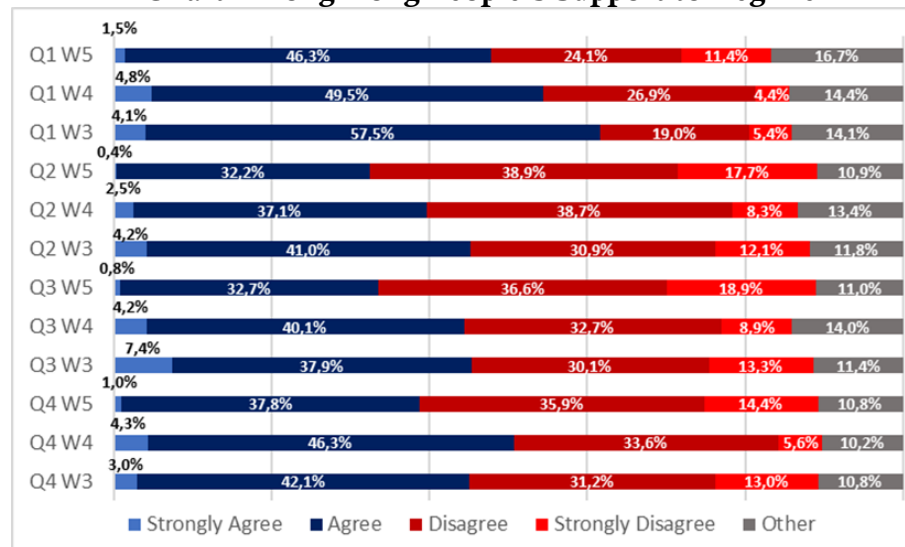
Q3: Thinking in general, I am proud of our system of government.

Q4: Over the long run, our system of government is capable of solving the problems our country faces.

The demand created by the Umbrella Movement of 2014 in Hong Kong could prove the importance of local political ideas in adopting democracy in China because Hong Kong has a historical experience and political culture that are quite different from those in mainland China. During the Umbrella Movement period, the demand for democratic ideas was not only about implementing universal suffrage in Hong Kong but also aimed to create public awareness of the importance of civil disobedience in Hong Kong's political culture, especially to sustain Hong Kong's core values. In Hong Kong's political culture, Benny Tai—one of Hong Kong's intellectuals—realized that Hong Kong's political system had always been imposed by its masters, whether by Britain or China (Tai, 2018, p. 152). Thus, Hong Kong intellectuals adopted and narrated democracy as a struggle to actualize Hong Kong's core values (Hui, 2015, p. 117).

The Umbrella Movement, however, failed to implement universal suffrage. Nevertheless, the motivation and objectives of Hong Kong intellectuals were achieved. Benny Tai stated that the Umbrella Movement succeeded in recreating Hong Kong's political culture—Hong Kong's core values—because the public has become much more receptive to civil disobedience as a means of democratization, and the seeds of democracy have been planted in Hong Kong (Tai, 2019, p. 68).

Chart—Hong Kong People’s Support to Regime



Source: Asian Barometer Survey

Notes:

Q1: I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of.

Q2: A system like ours, even if it runs into troubles, deserve the people’s support.

Q3: Thinking in general, I am proud of our system of government.

Q4: Over the long run, our system of government is capable of solving the problems our country faces.

There is a contradiction between the demand in Hong Kong and mainland China. During the Umbrella Movement period, the political idea of *tianming* did not apply in Hong Kong. Instead, intellectuals adopted democratic ideas as a struggle to actualize or realize Hong Kong's core values (Hui, 2015, p. 117). The results of the waves of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), which relate to the support of the Hong Kong people for the regime, can prove this contradiction.

In the chart above, most Hong Kong people do not support the regime's continuation, with responses of "disagree" and "strongly disagree." This is because Hong Kong's political ideas—Hong Kong's core values—are an essential aspect of its political discourse. The regime's legitimacy was not perceived by Hong Kong people based on *tianming*, but rather on general elections. Therefore, most people in Hong Kong rejected the regime's continuation, indicating a significant difference from the support seen in mainland China.

Thus, the difference in viewing government legitimacy affects the spread of democratic ideas in mainland China. The government's performance is an essential foundation for the legitimacy of the CCP regime. People have a solid reason to support the continuation of the CCP rather than readopting democratic ideas that could reform the Chinese political system. As Suisheng Zhao (2000b, p. 5) has said, "Democracy in

Chinese political and intellectual discourse has never been regarded as an end in itself, but only as a means to gain national power and wealth under a wise and enlightened ruler." Therefore, the achievements of economic growth in China have strengthened popular support for the regime, thus influencing the prospect of China's transition to democracy.

The Influence of Local Political Ideas on China's Understanding of Democracy

Democracy Idea in the May Fourth Movement of 1919

During the May Fourth Movement period, the spread of democratic ideas in China reflected a process of cultural selection, adopting aspects of democratic ideas that were in line with local political ideas or Confucian teachings. Although the May Fourth Movement period was known for Confucian iconoclasm, Chinese intellectuals had a Confucian background that encouraged the acceptance of democratic ideas in China (Yu, 2016). Therefore, Chinese intellectuals understood and conveyed popular sovereignty as a democratic idea in China because it was congruent with the local political idea of *min-ben*.

The political idea of *min-ben* contains two words: people (*min* or *minwei*) and roots (*ben* or *bangben*)—people as the root of the state (Shi & Lu, 2010, p. 125). In their relation to popular sovereignty, both ideas emphasize the importance of people as the country's highest political authority (Herr, 2019, p. 211). Additionally, the *min-ben* ideas emphasize the ruler's importance in producing prosperity for its people, and those in power should not betray the people (Wang & Titunik, 2000, p. 74). This understanding was reflected in the reinterpretation of democratic ideas by Chinese intellectuals during the May Fourth Movement period.

Edward X. Gu, in his research, explained that the understanding of Chinese intellectuals in the May Fourth period toward democracy was based on Rousseau's argument of popular sovereignty (Gu, 2001, p. 597). According to Gu (2001, p. 596), Chen Duxiu expressed, "The democratic state is the genuine state, in which the state is the public property for all the citizens, people are masters of the country, and the rulers are servants of the people. In a genuine state, some individual rights can be sacrificed in order to safeguard the rights of all the people." Moreover, Gao Yihan (Gu, 2001, p. 596), in the same vein, said, "The sovereignty of the state and people was integrated after Rousseau, and therefore the government is no more than a servant for the public to

impose the sovereignty of the state, that is, popular sovereignty. If the government fails to do so, people can substitute it by carrying out popular sovereignty as masters substitute their servants." In the *min-ben* ideas, rulers, based on Confucian teachings, are supposed to be public servants who serve their people to achieve the common good and represent the will of the people (Herr, 2019, p. 213). Therefore, both Duxiu and Yihan comprehended democracy in the context of popular sovereignty, describing the government as a servant of the people and the people as the highest political authority.

Chinese intellectuals, however, did not advocate for the importance of democratic institutions in China. They only narrated democracy as far as pingmin zhuyi or shumin zhuyi (principle of the common people) (Gu, 2001, p. 597). Duxiu, when criticizing constitutionalism and political parties, quoted from Tse-tsung (1960, p. 232), "What is politics after all? Everybody must eat—that is important." In 1940, Duxiu realized that both capitalist and socialist systems require a parliamentary system, general elections, legal processes, protection of civil rights, and opposition parties (Yu, 2016). Therefore, the spread of democratic ideas was only focused on understanding the idea of popular sovereignty, which was compatible with the local political idea of *min-ben*.

Democracy Idea in the Tiananmen Movement of 1989

Likewise, during the Tiananmen Movement period, local Chinese political ideas influenced the understanding of democracy in China. On one hand, the political idea of *tianming* contradicts the aspect of general elections in democracy. Thus, the minimalist definition was not adopted by Chinese intellectuals. On the other hand, the adoption of democratic ideas was based on the local political idea of *min-ben*, which Chinese intellectuals believed could strengthen the practice of the *min-ben* idea in China by incorporating liberal aspects of democracy. In other words, there was a cultural selection process in China during the Tiananmen Movement period. Therefore, the understanding of democracy in China could not be classified as one of a democratic country.

The minimalist definition of democratic ideas—the electoral aspect—did not become dominant; it was even rejected during the Tiananmen Movement period because it negated the political idea of *tianming*. In Chinese political culture, there was a belief that heaven would grant its mandate to the ruler or the son of heaven (*tianzi*), who could perform well in governance (Schell, 1994, p. 21). Moreover, common people were not seen to have a right to participate in politics (Shi & Lu, 2010, p. 126). During the Tiananmen Movement period, Chinese society was more concerned with whether the

government was moral and could produce order and economic prosperity than with how it was formed (D. Zhao, 2000, p. 1618).

In democracy, political participation is a fundamental right of the people, whether to choose or be chosen in political contestation. Chinese intellectuals, however, did not attempt to adopt the electoral aspect to spread the idea of democracy. According to Christopher Buckley, Fang Lizhi stated that Chinese society was not ready or capable of being responsible for elections (Buckley, 1991). Another intellectual, Chen Yizi, expressed that democracy in China must exclude most people due to their economic and educational backwardness (Kelliher, 1993, p. 383). Additionally, Wu Jiaxiang explicitly stated that elections would only prevent the emergence of the desired leader to build the Chinese economy, namely a new authoritarian leader (Jiaxiang, 1990, p. 40). In these reinterpretations, intellectuals attempted to exclude the electoral aspect in China because it contradicted the political idea of *tianming*, which understood government legitimacy based on performance. Thus, according to them, general elections would only create the possibility of producing an incapable ruler in China.

In this period, intellectuals—who were perceived as the middle class in bringing democracy to a country—were hindered by the romanticism of local political ideas regarding authority, virtue, and status, thereby promoting a "false" democracy in China, which only fought for intellectuals' rights in politics. For intellectuals, other social classes lacked the capacity to participate in politics. Fang Lizhi (1988b, p. 76) argued, with much sentiment, "If we were to rank peasants, workers, and intellectuals, more and more evidence suggests that the intellectuals would certainly be ranked first... Obviously, the intellectuals today are the most advanced segment in our society, and therefore they should be the ones to be recruited (in politics) over the industrial workers." In this sense, intellectuals were perceived as the leading force guiding and pushing traditional society into modern society (Baikui, 1991, p. 78).

Instead of fighting for people's rights in the context of democracy, intellectuals were inclined to exclude other social classes, especially the rights of peasants and the working class in politics. Kelliher explained that there was tension based on the bias of intellectuals toward peasants and the working class during China's Tiananmen Movement of 1989, where intellectuals' attitudes toward peasants were antagonistic and toward the working class were ambivalent. Peasants, for intellectuals, were perceived as incompetent citizens for democracy, likely to use their voting rights indiscriminately. Considering the peasants' position in Chinese society, intellectuals saw them as close allies of the CCP, such as being recruited to suppress the Tiananmen protests (Kelliher,

1993, p. 388). Giving political rights to peasants was seen as potentially disastrous for China.

The working class, meanwhile, was not considered an ally in the struggle for democracy. Although they participated in the demonstrations with different demands and helped students prevent the military from entering Tiananmen Square, there was reluctance among intellectuals to include the working class in their democratic struggle. As reported by *The New York Times* (Wudunn, 1989), "Mr. Wang—leader of the students—says he believes that the movement is not ready for worker participation because the principles of democracy must first be absorbed by students and intellectuals before they can be spread to others." According to Kelliher (1993, p. 387), a worker told a student, "What you have said is fine, but you never said what we workers should do or how we can back you."

The elitism of Chinese intellectuals not only left a legacy of "false" democracy in China but also buried two potential paths for democratic transition in consideration of the domestic context. First, intellectuals had buried the electoral path before they even won the battle. As mentioned above, most intellectuals were reluctant to have elections in China, fearing they would produce an incapable ruler. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan explained that an uprising of civil society, which would overthrow the regime, tends to lead to the establishment of an interim government (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 71). At this crucial time, an election is the determinant factor in the transition, whether it would lead to a transition to a democratic regime or the establishment of a new non-democratic regime (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 58). This electoral path is vital in the transition, especially in the context of an interim government, because it will indicate the certainty of popular representation, the circulation of political elites, and the legitimacy of new democratic institutions (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 71). Unfortunately, intellectuals tend to evade this path.

Second, intellectual elitism buried the potential path of democratic transition through a pact. Excluding other social classes, especially peasants and the working class, affected the bargaining power of intellectuals to negotiate a pact with the elite party, thereby negating the condition identified by O'Donnell, Schmitter, Linz, and Stepan as pivotal for a pact. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, p. 38) explained one condition for having a pact for the transition toward democracy: "It is a situation in which conflicting or competing groups are interdependent, in that they can neither do without each other nor unilaterally impose their preferred solution on each other if they are to satisfy their respective divergent interests." Thus, the opposition and intellectuals need a degree of

power to play their part in the negotiation pacts—for having bargaining power in negotiation or having a situation of interdependence (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 61). Intellectuals alone, thus, lacked the bargaining power needed for a pact for the transition toward democracy.

Defining democracy in terms of intellectual elitism diminished potential paths of democratic transition. However, democratic ideas during the Tiananmen Movement period were understood in the context of the liberal aspect. In distinguishing democratic centralism from Mao Zedong, Fang Lizhi stated, “My interpretation of democracy is different from that of Mao Zedong... Democracy is not simply a process of consultation but the realization of human rights” (Mok, 1998, p. 86). Furthermore, Lizhi said, “What democracy means is the basic rights of the people or human rights... Human rights include such basic issues as the right to live, to think, to receive education, to get married free of interference, and so on. (Lizhi, 1988a, p. 89)” The liberal understanding was also reflected in the demands of students during the movement, such as removing the ban on protests and allowing freedom of the press (Schell, 1994, p. 47). These demands, although not realized in China, are important to understand the reason for adopting liberal aspects considered democratic ideas during the Tiananmen Movement period.

Liberal aspects could be adopted in China to strengthen the practice of the political idea of *min-ben*. Acharya explained that when local ideas in a country are inadequate to overcome a problem, local actors will adopt foreign ideas to strengthen local ideas (Acharya, 2004, p. 247). In Chinese political culture, especially in the idea of *min-ben*, people can only participate in politics as an opposition when heaven gives a "signal" that the ruler has lost his mandate (Shi & Lu, 2010, p. 126). In other words, there is no alternative "channel" for the Chinese people to express their opinions or wills to political authorities (Wang & Titunik, 2000, p. 82). Therefore, Chinese intellectuals and demonstrators adopted liberal aspects, such as freedom of protest, thought, and press, to express their desires and wills to political authorities. This was also related to the spirit of modernization, where Chinese intellectuals needed intellectual freedom free from government control to achieve China's modernization (Lizhi, 1988a, p. 93). Additionally, the demonstrators demanded that the government recognize the movement as patriotic and democratic (Dan, 2019, p. 32).

Unlike mainland intellectuals who disregarded the election aspect, Hong Kong intellectuals have shown genuine concern for elections by adopting the idea of democracy. In 2013, three prominent Hong Kong intellectuals—Benny Tai, Chan Kin-man, and Chu Yiu-ming—formed the Occupy Central with Love and Peace movement to convey the meaning and importance of universal suffrage (Tai, 2019, p. 67). Hong Kong intellectuals and demonstrators narrated universal suffrage or democracy by referring to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as a reference for their notion (Flowerdew, 2017, p. 12). During the movement, the demonstrators created the slogan, "I want genuine universal suffrage (Hui, 2015, p. 111)!"

Based on the theory of constitutive localization, the difference in understanding between Hong Kong and mainland China regarding democracy is caused by local political ideas. In his research, Stephen Ortmann stated that Hong Kong's core values strongly differentiate Hong Kong's political culture from that of mainland China. This is because Hong Kong's core values reflect Western values, such as freedom of speech, the rule of law, and the right to participate in politics (Ortmann, 2018, p. 125). These differences in political culture underpin the acceptance of Hong Kong intellectuals toward democracy.

Hong Kong's core values are an essential aspect of Hong Kong society in terms of viewing political life in Hong Kong. The importance of these values for Hong Kong society has been driven through a long historical process. The handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China did not change or eliminate Hong Kong's core values in society. On the contrary, the "one country, two systems" policy formulated by China is considered necessary for Hong Kong society to protect its core values. This is because, on one hand, Hong Kong society identifies itself as Chinese and believes in anti-colonialism as a struggle to achieve freedom from Britain (Ma, 2018, p. 36).

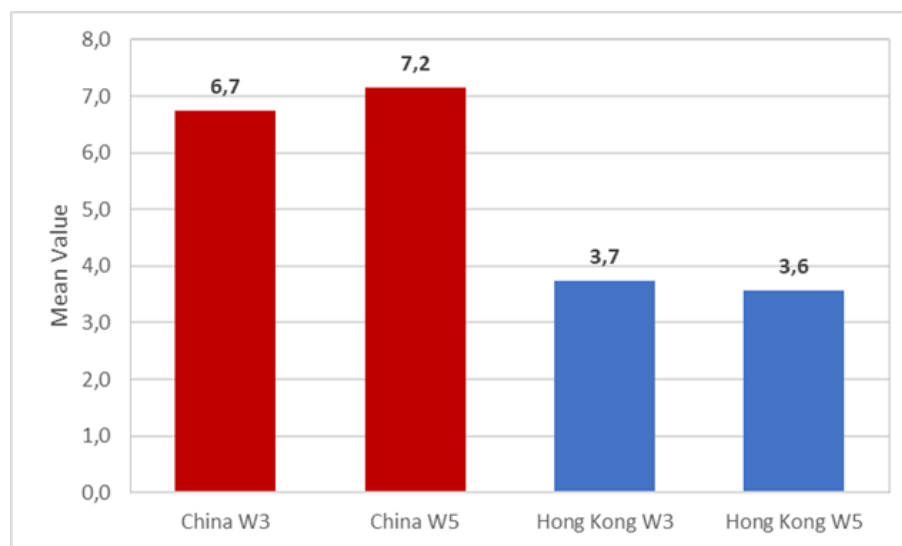
On the other hand, Hong Kong's society has lived under the influence of Western values and thus refuses to live under the CCP regime (Ma, 2018, p. 36). Benny Tai said that more than one million Hong Kong people participated in the Tiananmen Movement demonstrations, strengthening Hong Kong society's recognition of its core values (Tai, 2018, p. 154). Therefore, the struggle to achieve Hong Kong's democratization is essential to maintain its values.

During the Umbrella Movement period, the demonstrators believed that Hong Kong's core values, without a democratic system, would not function well because it would erode Hong Kong's core values in people's lives (Hui, 2015, p. 117). In the theory

of constitutive localization, the stronger the contradiction between local ideas and foreign ideas, the greater the possibility that the foreign idea will be localized rather than entirely accepted (Acharya, 2004, p. 248). Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, the demonstrators considered the idea of democracy to be able to support or protect Hong Kong's core values. This means there is no contradiction between Hong Kong's core values and the idea of democracy as a foreign concept. Therefore, Hong Kong's local political ideas support the acceptance of democratic ideas that align with the minimalist definition.

Relevance and Continuity on China's Understanding of Democracy

Chart—People's Assessment to Chinese Regime



Source: Asian Barometer Survey

Notes:

1. *n* = China W3 (2800); China W5 (4137); Hong Kong W3 (1170); and Hong Kong W5 (1104).
2. The author did not include the fourth wave because of the missing data.

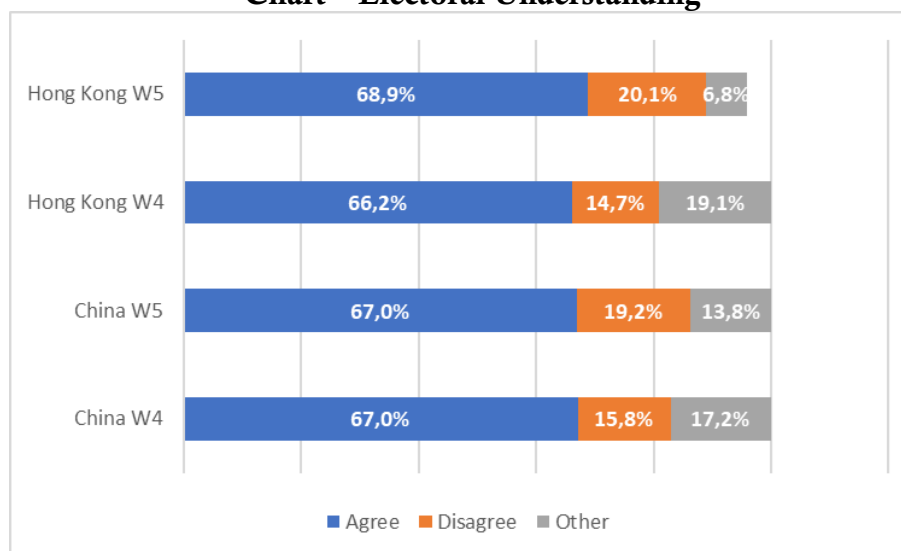
To explain the relevance and continuity of the understanding of democratic ideas in China, this article refers to the results of the ABS survey, which asked the following question: On a scale of 1 (completely undemocratic) to 10 (very democratic), where would you place China today on this scale? This question is vital to show the difference in understanding between the two societies.

The chart above shows a contradictory result, with mean values of 6.7 and 7.2 for China and 3.7 and 3.6 for Hong Kong. Based on Freedom House's reports, the political rights score for China was 7 (the least free) in 2011 and -1 out of 40 in 2019 (House, 2011, 2019). In other words, there is no democratic regime in China. However, in the chart, the mean value for mainland China is relatively high, which means Chinese people, despite living under an authoritarian regime, view their regime as quite

democratic. Meanwhile, Hong Kong has a relatively low mean value when assessing the Chinese regime. Therefore, the chart indicates the difference in understanding of democracy between Chinese and Hong Kong people, as seen in previous movements.

Historically, the spread of the idea of democracy in mainland China and Hong Kong was quite contradictory, especially in understanding the minimalist definition of democracy. In mainland China, Chinese intellectuals rejected the electoral aspect of democracy because it contradicted the local Chinese political idea of *tianming*. Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, intellectuals and demonstrators adopted the minimalist definition of democracy to maintain Hong Kong's core values. The ABS asked about the understanding of minimalist democracy in both Hong Kong and Chinese people without using the word "democracy."

Chart—Electoral Understanding

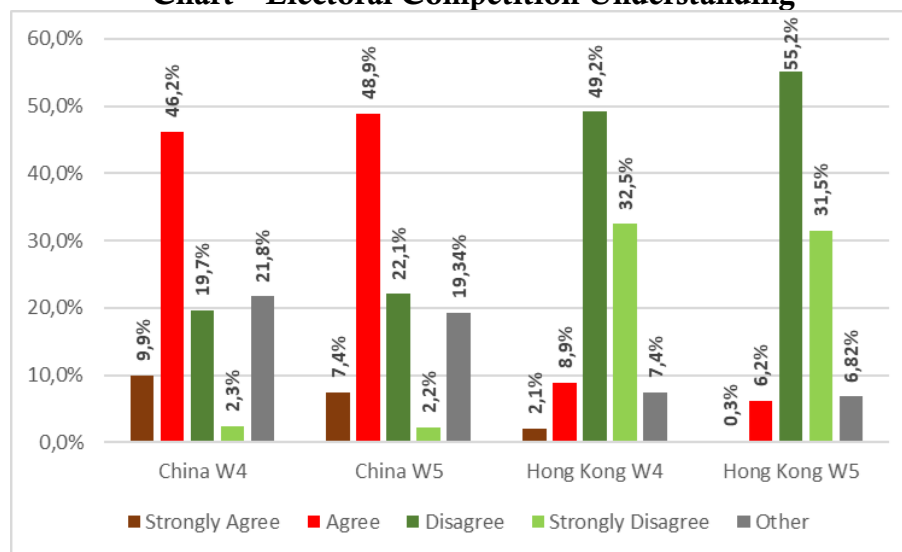


Source: Asian Barometer Survey

Notes: The chart above was derived from the following question: "Do you agree if political leader are chosen by the people through open and competitive elections?"

In the chart above, most Chinese and Hong Kong people show the same understanding—by answering "agree"—that political leaders should be elected through open and competitive elections. In Hong Kong, most people answered "agree" because the political discourse there has focused on the issue of universal suffrage, as was evident in the Umbrella Movement of 2014. In mainland China, however, the understanding of electoral democracy is relatively high, so most people believe political leaders should be elected through open and competitive elections. However, when the ABS posed another question regarding electoral understanding, the results showed the continuity and relevance of previous movements in China.

Chart—Electoral Competition Understanding



Source: Asian Barometer Survey

Notes: The chart above was derived from the following question: "Do you agree that only one political party must be allowed to run for elections and hold positions?"

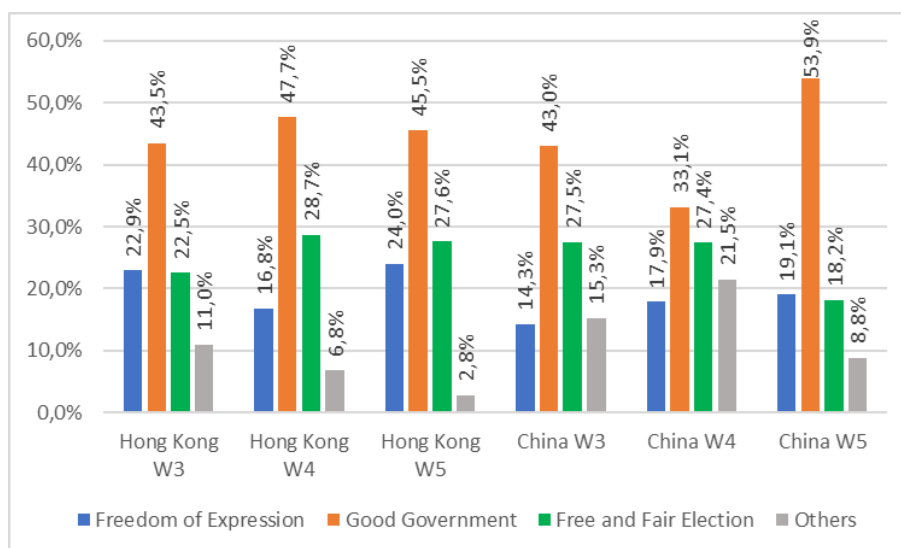
In the chart above, most Chinese people believe that competition in general elections and for political positions should come from a single party—indicated by the total "strongly agree" and "agree" answers, which scored 56.1% in China Wave 4 and 56.3% in China Wave 5. The majority of Hong Kong people, on the other hand, do not agree that general elections and political positions should come only from one party. Therefore, there is a contradiction in understanding general elections between mainland China and Hong Kong.

The understanding of electoral democracy in mainland China can be understood by recognizing the local political idea of *tianming*. This political idea reflects that rulers who perform well will receive a mandate from heaven to rule (Schell, 1994, p. 21). In China, legitimation based on performance is more dominant than legitimacy based on the electoral process. Therefore, electoral understanding has adapted to the local political idea of *tianming*. For example, this understanding is reflected in the term "Democracy with Chinese characteristics" in the NPCSC policy towards Hong Kong, known as the 318 decision. This notion echoes the perspective from Chinese intellectuals during the May Fourth Movement period that elections could potentially produce leaders without the performance to rule (Jiaxiang, 1990, p. 42). With the 318 decision, the Chinese political elite nominated candidates who could run in Hong Kong's election with Beijing's preference, based on performance (Bush, 2014). Thus, while most Chinese people believe that political leaders must be elected through general elections, the understanding of electoral democracy deviates from the minimalist definition.

The majority of Hong Kong people, however, understand that general elections must include more than one party to ensure a competitive election. In Hong Kong, the term "Democracy with Chinese characteristics" was rejected because it could erode Hong Kong's core values (Hui, 2015, p. 112). In other words, Hong Kong's core values, as reflected in the Umbrella Movement of 2014, remain dominant in comprehending democracy. Therefore, the difference in local political ideas between mainland China and Hong Kong influences the understanding of electoral democracy in these two distinct societies.

Moreover, to elucidate the relevance and continuity of the influence of the *min-ben* idea in the understanding of democracy in China, the ABS asked, "If you have to choose only one, which of the following do you think is the most essential element of democracy?"

Chart—Most Essential Element of Democracy



Source: Asian Barometer Survey

Notes: The chart above was derived from the following question: "If you have to choose only one, which of the following you think is the most essential element of a democracy?" The answers include freedom of expression, free and fair elections, good government (government narrows the gaps between poor and rich, government provides basic necessities, government doesn't waste money, and clean and corruption-free politics. And others (can't choose, decline to answer, and do not understand the question)

The answers included four statements: freedom of expression, good government, free and fair elections, and others. Two of these four statements could be classified as reflecting *min-ben* democracy—freedom of expression and good government—due to their alignment with the understanding of democracy during the May Fourth Movement and Tiananmen Movement periods. Free and fair elections could be classified under the minimalist definition of democracy.

In the chart above, respondents in China and Hong Kong show diverse understandings of democracy when forced to choose among the four statements. The understanding of democracy in China aligns with expectations because the two democratic movements—the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and Tiananmen Movement of 1989—demonstrated that the notion of elections was not dominant in China. Similarly, in the results of the ABS survey, the understanding of electoral democracy in mainland China aligns with that in Hong Kong, but with the caveat that general elections can only be conducted by one political party or under "Democracy with Chinese characteristics."

Interestingly, there are similarities in the understanding of *min-ben* democracy in both societies. In mainland China, most people understand democratic ideas based on the *min-ben* idea, with scores reflecting both freedom of expression and good government. These scores show the relevance and continuity in line with the history of spreading democratic ideas in China, as reflected by the May Fourth Movement and Tiananmen Movement periods. Chinese intellectuals in those movements comprehended democratic ideas from a *min-ben* perspective, emphasizing government working for the welfare of the people, those in power should not betray the people, and freedom of expression as strengthening the practice of the *min-ben* idea in China. In Hong Kong, although the Umbrella Movement highlighted universal suffrage as the understanding of democracy, there is still a relatively dominant understanding of *min-ben* democracy. Hong Kong's core values could serve as a basis for accepting democratic ideas, whether in the minimalist definition or in a liberal context.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that democratic ideas as shared knowledge—minimalist democracy—did not spread in China because Chinese local political ideas influenced the spreading process. From the May Fourth Movement period to the three waves of ABS surveys, the understanding of democratic ideas that spread in China has been shaped by Chinese local political ideas—*tianming* and *min-ben*. Moreover, the demand for democratic ideas in China was based on the political idea of *tianming*, so economic growth in China has resulted in popular support for the authoritarian regime. In other words, modernization theory does not apply in China.

In the context of demand, the history of Chinese democratization has shown that the demand for democratic ideas stemmed from the political idea of *tianming* rather than

from modernization theory. Chinese intellectuals would adopt democratic ideas when the government was on the verge of losing its mandate from heaven (*tianming*)—the government had shown its incapability to achieve Chinese modernization and economic growth. Conversely, with the same logic, when the government demonstrates performance in achieving modernization and economic growth, it retains its legitimacy or mandate from heaven. Therefore, the massive economic growth in China has thwarted hopes for political reform toward democracy—reflected by the people's support for the authoritarian regime.

In the context of understanding democratic ideas, Chinese local political ideas—*tianming* and *min-ben*—have influenced the spread of democratic ideas in China. On one hand, democracy was understood and accepted based on the *min-ben* idea, and the May Fourth Movement and Tiananmen Movement periods reflected that democracy was comprehended only through popular sovereignty and liberal aspects, which align with the political idea of *min-ben*. This understanding was also evident in the results of the ABS surveys, showing that most Chinese people understood democratic ideas based on the political idea of *min-ben*. Thus, the understanding of democracy was limited to "the government for the people" without "the government by the people."

On the other hand, the minimalist definition of democracy was not adopted by Chinese intellectuals due to the contradiction between the electoral aspect and the political idea of *tianming*, which emphasizes legitimation based on performance. In the May Fourth Movement and Tiananmen Movement periods, Chinese intellectuals did not adopt, or even refused, minimalist democracy because general elections would only produce leaders without the performance to rule. The ABS survey shows that most Chinese people reject competitive elections—positing that general elections should be held by one party or under "Democracy with Chinese characteristics." Hong Kong, with its different history and political culture, could adopt minimalist democracy because Hong Kong's core values are congruent with this idea, leading most people in Hong Kong to demand universal suffrage. Therefore, there is a contradiction between the understanding of democratic ideas in China and the idea of democracy as shared knowledge.

Thus, the influence of Chinese local political ideas in spreading democratic ideas in China explains China's failure to reform its politics toward democracy or to change its identity to that of a democratic country.

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Prisoner's Dilemma in the Rationalization of Indonesia's Foreign Policy in the South China Sea Dispute

Agnia Adini Al-Haq

PointStar Indonesia

China's nine-dash line claim in the South China Sea has posed a threat and instability in the regional area, including the waters of North Natuna. Indonesia's consistent foreign policy of remaining a neutral country changed under President Prabowo's leadership with the formation of a joint statement. The aim of this paper is to analyze which policy provides the greatest benefit to Indonesia using the Prisoner's Dilemma. The research method used is qualitative, with secondary data sources and descriptive analysis techniques. The conclusion shows that Indonesia's highest score in interactions with China related to the South China Sea dispute is achieved by not cooperating, regardless of China's choices.

Keywords: South China Sea, Prisoner's Dilemma, National Interest

The overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea constitute one of the most significant security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. This issue has been present for a long time, first emerging in 1947 after the Cold War. In the 1970s, it resurfaced following the oil crisis of 1973. In the last decade, the issue has intensified due to the growing potential for open conflict, exacerbated by China's increasingly aggressive activities in the region. The South China Sea is contested by over six countries, most of which are in Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

Indonesia itself is not one of the claimant states in the South China Sea but has been drawn into the dispute. This is due to China's claims overlapping with Indonesia's jurisdictional areas, and China frequently conducting illegal activities in Indonesia's territorial waters in the North Natuna Sea (Anugerah, 2021). Chinese ships have repeatedly entered the North Natuna Sea and engaged in illegal fishing activities. Chinese military vessels have also been frequently seen patrolling the waters of Natuna. In 2021, China even sent a protest note demanding that Indonesia stop drilling for oil in the Natuna waters, which was rejected by Indonesia through a letter reiterating the

prohibition on drilling and exploration in the Natuna Sea. The letter emphasized that Indonesia does not accept China's restrictions, citing the UNCLOS legal basis, which states that waters within its continental shelf are entitled to exploration and exploitation (BBC, 2021).

Various actions have been taken by the Indonesian government to defend its jurisdiction, such as releasing a new map in July 2017. Indonesia changed the nomenclature of the Natuna waters, previously listed as part of the South China Sea, to the North Natuna Sea. President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) also conducted a high-level visit and a limited meeting aboard the KRI Imam Bonjol warship sailing in the Natuna waters. This was intended as a symbol that Natuna is part of Indonesia's territory.

In 2023, China boldly expanded its claim, from the original nine-dash line to ten-dash lines (BNPP RI, 2023). This triggered negative responses from various countries, signaling that China's ambitions are continuing to grow. Although the threat from China in the Natuna waters persists, under Jokowi's administration, Indonesia has been criticized for not providing a significant response or deterrent. This is partly due to the close economic cooperation between Indonesia and China. Indonesia continues to strive for a neutral position and acts as a mediator, even as its sovereignty and that of other ASEAN countries are under threat.

Unlike previous policies, the maritime policy under President Prabowo is seen as a step backward (BBC News, 2024). Through his first overseas visit to China, Prabowo agreed to a joint statement, which included discussions on joint development in areas that are subject to overlapping claims (BBC News, 2024). Prabowo referred to this policy as a partnership and expressed readiness for negotiations. This has drawn criticism, as the creation of the joint statement implies that Indonesia recognizes China's illegal claims in the South China Sea. Previously, Indonesia had firmly rejected China's claims and refused to negotiate with China.

This shift in policy direction raises the question of which policy would provide the best outcome for Indonesia in addressing the overlapping claims in the South China Sea. Therefore, this research will explore which policy is ideal for Indonesia in responding to the overlapping claims in the South China Sea using game theory, specifically the Prisoner's Dilemma. This research will focus on Indonesia's national interests in the South China Sea, which can be observed from the interaction patterns in resolving the issue. The national interest will determine the scores and choices, from the most ideal to the least ideal, for Indonesia. The study is titled *"Prisoner's Dilemma in the*

Rationalization of Indonesia's Foreign Policy in the South China Sea Dispute, with the research question: *"Which policy is considered the most ideal for Indonesia in resolving the conflict in the South China Sea?"*

Literature Review

A research article by Muchlis Gasim in 2024, titled *"Indonesia's Role in Resolving the South China Sea Dispute: A Constructivist Analysis of the Code of Conduct (CoC) and National Interest"*, discusses Indonesia's national interests in the South China Sea in the context of its efforts to help resolve the issue. These interests are divided into three key aspects: defense, economy, and politics. This research uses a constructivist approach, which is deemed capable of understanding how norms and efforts for joint negotiations with ASEAN shape Indonesia's maritime interests and identity. The study contributes valuable information regarding Indonesia's various commitments aimed at protecting its national interests.

Next, research by Wines Aprilla in 2021, titled *"Indonesia's Efforts in Resolving the South China Sea Conflict"*, examines Indonesia's role as the largest country in ASEAN with the responsibility to maintain stability in the region. These efforts are made by building steps that can enhance mutual trust and cooperation, which are believed to help mitigate sources of conflict and maintain stability. This research contributes information regarding Indonesia's commitment to creating a peaceful situation.

Another relevant study was conducted by Gaffar Mu'aqaffi and Kevin Ali Sesarianto, titled *"Amid China's Assertiveness and Indonesia's Domestic Bureaucratic Politics: The Trajectory of Indonesia's Response to the South China Sea Dispute under Yudhoyono and Jokowi"*. This research explains that the South China Sea dispute has not been a primary focus or national interest during President Jokowi's administration. The presence of conflicting interests within the government is one of the factors why Indonesia is perceived to have responded inadequately to the issue. This has impacted the formulation of policies, which have been seen as ineffective and unbalanced in addressing the threats in the South China Sea. The study contributes information on how changes in leadership result in differing national interests, which affect policy decisions regarding the resolution of China's illegal claims in the South China Sea.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method, which provides answers by presenting descriptive data. Qualitative research focuses on the search for meaning, understanding, and insight into a phenomenon as a whole (Yusuf, 2014). The type of research used is descriptive analysis, which aims to describe or interpret current conditions. The data is presented in the form of words and images. Using a descriptive qualitative research method is considered helpful for this study in gathering primary and secondary data to analyze Indonesia's interests in the South China Sea dispute, which will then rationalize Indonesia's choices in responding to the policies being implemented.

Theoretical Framework

This research uses game theory as an approach to demonstrate Indonesia's rational choices in foreign policy decision-making concerning issues in the South China Sea (SCS). However, to provide choices, national interests are an inseparable factor. The policy adopted should align with the national interest, as this is considered to yield the most beneficial outcome for a country. Additionally, national interests lead to policies that are implemented through various forms of interactions. Therefore, the concepts of national interest and interaction cannot be separated when analyzing Indonesia's rational choices.

Game Theory - Prisoner's Dilemma

Game theory is a framework that illustrates situations of conflict and cooperation between rational decision-makers (Tadelis, 2013). It explains that actors always choose rational behaviors or decisions that maximize their gains. In game theory, there are three key features in decision-making: 1) Actions, which are all the alternatives available to the players; 2) Outcomes, which are the results that arise from an action; and 3) Preferences, which explain the rational reasons for players to rank the possible outcomes, starting from the most desirable to the least desirable (Tadelis, 2013: 4).

To analyze which actions an actor will take, one can look at the benefits of each action. Benefits are used to evaluate actions and outcomes (Tadelis, 2013: 7). The calculation of these benefits is known as the payoff function. The payoff function explains the rational preferences of how a country should act and how it often behaves (Tadelis, 2013: 7).

To predict the outcomes of an action, players must understand the issues they face. By doing so, players can approach the problem in a structured and systematic way. Rational choices only emerge when players understand the consequences of their best actions. In other words, players can predict the consequences of their policies by understanding their rational preferences for outcomes (Tadelis, 2013: 10). One model of the game that can be used to predict Indonesia's best action against China's illegal claims in the South China Sea is the prisoner's dilemma.

The prisoner's dilemma is a part of game theory that helps predict or explain the actions a country will take when faced with a particular issue. This theory provides several variables, including the players, available action choices, the sequence of player actions, conditions, player information preferences, and the final outcome of the interaction (Guner, 2012). This theory can also help explain why countries often choose not to cooperate, even when cooperation seems to provide benefits (Cooper & Kumar, 2018).

The result of each party's chosen strategy or best interaction is called the Nash equilibrium. The Nash equilibrium is based on the balance between both players in responding with their best strategy according to each country (Frieden et al, 2019: 83). The assumption of the prisoner's dilemma is that the players will behave non-cooperatively, meaning each country will control its actions based on what is in its best interest. Such actions will only be taken if they are considered the best option. The Nash equilibrium or the final balance achieved requires the players to be satisfied with their own choices (Tadelis, 2013: 55).

In the prisoner's dilemma, there are four assumptions that form the background of the equilibrium analysis: 1) Players are rational, meaning they choose their actions to maximize the results according to their beliefs about what will happen in the game; 2) Players are assumed to be intelligent, meaning they know the game's conditions, such as actions, outcomes, and preferences of each player; 3) Common knowledge, meaning that players play rationally and intelligently; 4) Self-enforcement, meaning the solution taken is a step to protect themselves (Tadelis, 2013: 54).

In this study, the choice made by Indonesia must align with its national interest, leading to a satisfying final outcome. Therefore, the concept of national interest is important to discuss.

Concept of National Interest

The interests of a country, which are crucial in its interactions, influence the actions that country will take. National interests help determine the direction and objectives of a country's foreign policy. National interests are the determining factor in deciding which policy is most suitable for a country. In other words, actions reflect the interests or preferences of a country. National interest, being a fundamental foundation, underpins all political analyses. Specifically, interests are the preferences of actors regarding the outcomes of their political choices (Frieden et al, 2019: 45).

For example, if a country's interest lies in security, then when faced with a sovereignty threat, the country will strengthen its defense and weaken its adversary. This can help explain Indonesia's preferences regarding disputes in the Natuna waters and the South China Sea. The government will have choices and an analysis of the options that will bring the greatest benefit, down to the worst possible outcomes, depending on the country's primary interest.

National interests can be analyzed through statements or actions taken by the actors themselves. Indonesia's actions or policies in responding to issues in the South China Sea can form the basis of analysis and assumptions regarding Indonesia's interests. Interests can be categorized into three groups: power, security, and welfare (Frieden et al, 2019: 45).

Concept of Interaction

Interaction is the way two or more actors produce political outcomes (Frieden et al, 2019: 51). Interaction can lead to certain outcomes for a country, depending on the choices the actors make regarding the type of interaction they wish to engage in, which is relevant to their national interests. There are two assumptions in interaction. First, actors will always engage in behaviors that will lead them to a particular outcome. In other words, actors are assumed to choose from available options, considering the consequences, with the goal of achieving the desired result. Second, in interactions, actors will always base their strategies on what they believe to be their interest, and predict the actions of others. That is, actors will always develop strategies they believe are the best response to others (Frieden et al, 2019: 52). In conclusion, both assumptions link national interests to available choices through interaction.

In international interactions, strategy is essential. However, the formulation of a strategy, which is a response to the actions of another actor, does not always lead to the

most favorable outcome. Sometimes, it results in an unwanted outcome. Nevertheless, strategies are always developed as best as possible to align with the desired results and interests, even though they do not guarantee the best or most preferred outcome.

Discussion

After the introduction section, which contains the background, theoretical framework, and issues, the author will explain the application of the prisoner's dilemma in explaining Indonesia's policy in the South China Sea. The first thing to remember about the prisoner's dilemma is that each of the two players has preferences regarding the best action, regardless of what the opponent chooses. However, generally, the action taken must align with the basic concept of rationality (Tadelis, 2013: 59). Rationality is defined as the choice that leads to the best possible outcome for each player.

Below is an example of a rational strategy in the prisoner's dilemma:

Table 1. Prisoner's Dilemma Rational Strategy

		Player 2	
		M	F
Player 1	M	-2, -2	-5, -1
	F	-1, -5	-4, -4

The table explains that two players are faced with a serious situation, say a robbery case. Both players are suspected of being thieves. To get a confession for the theft, the police separate them and offer deals that affect the increase or decrease of their sentences. Anyone who reports their partner's crime ("finks" or F) will receive a reduced sentence. On the other hand, anyone who remains silent ("mum" or M) to avoid increasing their sentence will face an increased punishment. It is assumed that serving time in prison is undesirable, so -1 represents one year in prison.

From the table above, it can be understood that if both parties choose to remain silent (M), they will both be sentenced to 2 years in prison because the only evidence is the accusation of theft. However, if Player 1 chooses to remain silent (M), while Player 2 reports (F), Player 1 will receive a 5-year sentence, while Player 2 will only receive a 1-year sentence. This outcome results from Player 2's cooperative behavior. The same punishment occurs if Player 1 chooses (F) and Player 2 chooses (M). However, if both

choose (F), they will each receive a 4-year sentence because both players will accuse each other of being the mastermind behind the robbery.

Implementation of Indonesia's Policy on the South China Sea through Prisoner's Dilemma

Based on the brief explanation above, the author will treat Indonesia as Player 1 and China as Player 2. The issue raised is the overlapping claims in the South China Sea. The available choices are to cooperate (C) or not cooperate (NC). The value given is 1 for each consequence that results in a benefit, and -1 for each consequence that results in a loss. Positive values mean the country gains its interests, and the higher the positive value, the more the country gains. On the other hand, negative values mean the country does not achieve its interests based on the choice made. Both are based on rational choices and the national interests of each country. This will be represented in the following table:

Table 2. Prisoner's Dilemma Regarding the South China Sea Claims

		China	
		C	NC
Indonesia	C	-2, -2	-5, -1
	NC	-1, -5	-4, -4

Based on the matrix above, it can be understood that the order of best choices for Indonesia is $NCC > CC > NCNC > CNC$ (Frieden et al., 2019: 83). For Indonesia, the dominant strategy is not to cooperate (NC), regardless of China's actions or strategies. If China chooses to cooperate, it is better for Indonesia not to cooperate ($NCC > CC$). Then, if China chooses not to cooperate, it is also better for Indonesia not to cooperate ($NCNC > CNC$). The equilibrium reached by both players using their best responses is to not cooperate. Although mutual cooperation yields a better outcome than mutual non-cooperation ($CC > NCNC$), each country has an incentive not to cooperate to protect itself from unfavorable moves by its opponent.

The following discussion will explain how the rationality of the prisoner's dilemma is applied to Indonesia's policy in responding to China's illegal claims in the

South China Sea, based on Indonesia's national interests, which reflect the potential of the South China Sea for Indonesia and its foreign policy values and principles.

The Potential of the South China Sea

The South China Sea is part of the Pacific Ocean and is a semi-enclosed sea bordered by multiple countries. To the west, it borders Vietnam; to the east, it borders the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei; to the south, it borders Indonesia and Malaysia; and to the north, it borders China and Taiwan (Nugraha, 2021). This region has become contested primarily due to China's claim to 80% of the area, outlined by the "nine-dash line," a U-shaped boundary extending 1,500 km south of Hainan Island and overlapping with the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia (BNPP RI, 2023).

The vast potential of the South China Sea is one of the reasons it is highly contested. Its reserves of oil and gas, busy trade routes, and rich marine resources make the region strategically important economically and in terms of security. It is estimated that the region holds 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves (CFR, 2024). Additionally, the South China Sea is believed to contain 160 trillion cubic feet of undiscovered natural gas (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative). Major hydrocarbon production locations include the northern Kalimantan region, the eastern Malay Peninsula, and the northwestern part of Palawan (LaFond, 2024).

Beyond oil and gas, the region's abundant fish resources provide opportunities to support local consumption and boost maritime exports. Furthermore, the South China Sea serves as a critical global trade route—the Sea Line of Trade (SLOT)—connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This trade route is vital for international commerce, with an estimated 64% of total goods movement passing through it in 2022 (Beaver & Vazquez, 2024). Trade flows such as oil and minerals moving northward and food and manufactured goods moving southward highlight the region's bustling economic activity. The total trade passing through the region is estimated at \$3.37 trillion (CFR, 2024).

The instability in the South China Sea poses risks to the global economy, impacting not only the disputing nations but also the international community. China's increasingly bold actions heighten the potential for conflict, directly leading to higher shipping costs and disruptions to global supply chains (Beaver & Vazquez, 2024). For instance, trade through the South China Sea accounts for 5.72% of the total trade of the

United States (Beaver & Vazquez, 2024), affecting U.S. economic stability and its global economic leadership.

For Indonesia, the South China Sea—referred to as the North Natuna Sea—offers significant potential, both in terms of sovereignty-related security and economic opportunities, including marine and fishery resources and natural resources like oil and gas that can improve Indonesia's prosperity.

Indonesia's National Interests in the South China Sea

The South China Sea plays a critical role in Indonesia's national interests. National interests are goals pursued, achieved, realized, and maintained based on a shared national assumption (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013). The first interest to be discussed is economic.

As previously mentioned, the North Natuna Sea, which directly intersects with China's claims in the South China Sea, holds significant economic potential. Indonesia's interests include exploring and exploiting resources in the area, such as the abundant fish stocks in Natuna. In 2023, fish catches reached 135,171.42 tons, with a total production value of IDR 2,344,100,331 (Natuna Fisheries Department, 2024: 5). These catches are marketed to Batam, Tanjungpinang, Singkawang, Pontianak, and Jakarta (Natuna Fisheries Department, 2024: 7). This production can meet national fish consumption needs, and compared to import costs, it is far more cost-effective.

Utilizing marine resources can improve the welfare of coastal communities, as fishing is the primary livelihood for approximately 6,130 households in Natuna (Niko, 2022). However, the South China Sea disputes have encouraged Chinese fishermen to enter Indonesian waters illegally, often guarded by China's coast guard vessels. These vessels intimidate local fishermen, reducing their catches.

Beyond fisheries, the economic potential in Natuna extends to oil and gas. Located along international shipping lanes, Natuna is estimated to have 14,386,470 barrels of crude oil reserves with a volume of 222 trillion cubic feet, along with a natural gas reserve of 112,356,680 barrels (Natuna Tourism Department). Additionally, Natuna has 46 trillion cubic feet of hydrocarbon natural gas reserves, among the largest in Asia.

Maximizing oil and gas resources can boost Indonesia's domestic reserves (Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources). However, disputes in the South China Sea

disrupt stability, as seen in 2021 when Chinese vessels frequently entered the Tuna Block during drilling by Harbour Energy (Arbar, 2021).

The same year, China issued a protest note regarding oil and gas drilling in Natuna, claiming it occurred in its jurisdiction. However, under international maritime law (UNCLOS 1982), territorial seas extend 200 miles from a country's baseline. Natuna waters, located approximately 2,215 miles from China, are clearly outside China's jurisdiction under international law. It is Indonesia's responsibility to safeguard its sovereignty, not only to protect its jurisdictional rights but also to ensure navigation freedom and peace in the region (Darmawan, 2024).

For Indonesia, China's aggressiveness in the South China Sea is both a security threat and a challenge to its international role, especially in ASEAN. As a leader in ASEAN, Indonesia seeks to resolve disputes, particularly since four ASEAN members are claimants in the South China Sea. While Indonesia has its interests in the dispute, its approach emphasizes achieving regional peace. Acting as a mediator in negotiations aligns with Indonesia's interests. Compared to the U.S., which shares similar goals, Indonesia has the advantage of being part of the region, enabling it to convince involved countries to prioritize negotiations and international law as guidelines (Darmawan, 2024).

Nevertheless, Indonesia must consider its longstanding economic cooperation with China, which has significantly impacted its economy (Abimanyu, 2017). Thus, avoiding military conflicts is the best option for addressing the issue (Zou, 2023). Indonesia's national interests are then reflected in foreign policies that involve interaction as a relevant strategy.

Indonesia's Policy on the South China Sea Dispute

China's claim over the South China Sea has been pursued aggressively through its foreign policy. China openly deploys its military in the region, building military bases on three islands: Subi Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, and Mischief Reef (Blanchard, 2024). The consistent presence of Chinese military forces in the area heightens threats to neighboring countries. As China bolsters its defense capabilities, other nations are prompted to strengthen theirs, triggering tensions that could escalate into open conflict.

These tensions have already materialized in the South China Sea. Utilizing its military strength, China frequently intrudes into the jurisdictional boundaries of other nations. In 2023, Chinese forces used water cannons against Filipino vessels multiple

times and directed military-grade lasers at Philippine supply ships (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). This provoked a defense agreement between the Philippines and the United States to enhance maritime security (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). Such interactions reflect the Philippines' strategic response to China, aligning with national interests of strengthening military defenses and protecting sovereignty. This strategy adheres to the interaction concept, which emphasizes crafting policies to fulfill national objectives.

Facing a situation not much different from the Philippines, China's threat has also extended into the waters of the Natuna region. However, unlike the Philippines, Indonesia, adhering to its free and active foreign policy principles, strives not to align with any major powers. Instead, Indonesia seeks to actively collaborate with various parties through negotiations and diplomacy (Anwar, 2024). However, the negotiations here do not involve compromising the sovereignty of Natuna. Rather, they are aimed at achieving a peaceful and stable environment in the region.

Indonesia's foreign policy on the South China Sea disputes began with the establishment of the Declaration of Conduct (DoC) in 2002 by ASEAN and China as an effort to create a peaceful environment concerning the disputes. Throughout the process, Indonesia has actively participated in encouraging all involved parties to commit to refraining from activities that could destabilize the region. The DoC advocates for dialogue and consultation as means of resolving issues in the South China Sea (Ayudiana, 2023). The formation of the DoC opened the door for ASEAN to advance discussions on the Code of Conduct (CoC), a guideline for state behavior and dispute resolution in the South China Sea (CNN, 2023).

Indonesia is committed to being a neutral party in this effort. This commitment is demonstrated through initiatives like the *Workshop on Managing Potential Conflict in the South China Sea*, involving ASEAN members and China. This workshop focuses on constructive dialogue and technical cooperation, aiming to build mutual trust and strengthen synergy in maintaining regional peace (Integrated Coastal Zone Management, 2024). Additionally, Indonesia spearheaded the initial draft of CoC discussions. In early 2023, Indonesia hosted the negotiations and discussions on the CoC between ASEAN and China, and it plans to host subsequent negotiation rounds. Hosting these events is an effort to foster trust and reflects Indonesia's longstanding free and active foreign policy stance (Ayudiana, 2023).

Indonesia's strategy to remain neutral and active is implemented to achieve political outcomes aligned with its national interests. This aligns with interaction theory, which posits that the outcome of interactions depends on the relevance of policies to national interests (Frieden et al., 2019). Indonesia views ASEAN's involvement as a choice that can lead to greater regional stability due to collective commitments, rather than resolving disputes bilaterally. This corresponds to the first assumption of interaction theory, which emphasizes selecting available options based on consequences that align with national interests.

Interaction theory also highlights formulating strategies as responses to actions by other actors. In this case, despite the DoC being agreed upon in 2002, it has not deterred China's ambitions, including activities that create instability. China's aggressive actions in the Natuna waters have compelled Indonesia to adopt a firmer stance. Enhancing defense capabilities has become one of Indonesia's options, reflecting its commitment to being defensive in protecting its jurisdictional territories.

While international engagement through diplomacy and cooperation is considered essential to exert international pressure on China, the increasing tensions make it challenging to solely rely on diplomatic channels to safeguard Indonesia's sovereignty in the Natuna waters. This is evidenced by China's waning commitment to the DoC, as shown by activities perceived as threatening regional stability. Consequently, the use of military instruments is deemed necessary for defense purposes and to create a deterrent effect (Sulistiyani, Pertiwi, & Sari, 2021).

Indonesia has gradually strengthened its security posture in the region (Chang, 2024). This began with expanding military bases in the Natuna Islands and deploying additional military vessels. In response to China's threats in 2016, Indonesia mobilized Su-30 and F-16 fighter jets for extensive exercises in the Natuna Islands (Chang, 2024). In 2018, Indonesia dispatched two companies of Raider infantry troops—a combat unit stationed in Sepempang. These efforts are part of a strategic plan to protect national interests and prevent border threats (Chang, 2024).

Runway expansion at the Raden Sadjad Air Base on Greater Natuna Island has also been carried out to facilitate simultaneous fighter jet takeoffs and landings. Special forces detachments and four AH-64 helicopters have been deployed for air defense. At sea, Indonesia consistently stations at least three frigates and corvettes and has begun constructing a submarine support base in Selat Lampa (Chang, 2024). These military enhancements are expected to increase the capacity for longer and more frequent patrols

in the South China Sea. Strengthening military capacity is projected as a long-term strategy to secure outermost territories from escalating threats. In addition to enhancing diplomacy and negotiations, preparing for defense is also necessary to address similar challenges (Chang, 2024).

Despite numerous efforts by the Indonesian government to address the South China Sea issue, some parties argue that these policies are not strong enough to resolve instability in the region. The government is considered overly reliant on China, often prioritizing China's interests in its policies (Jatmika, 2020). As a result, violations by China continue to occur.

A new approach emerged under President Prabowo's leadership. During his first foreign visit to China, Prabowo returned with a joint statement or agreement signed on November 9, 2024. The agreement includes 14 points, one of which focuses on maritime cooperation, discussed in the ninth point. This point highlights strategic and comprehensive maritime cooperation to actively explore and develop joint projects.

Both sides emphasized maritime cooperation as an important component of the comprehensive strategic cooperation between China and Indonesia and will actively explore and carry out more maritime cooperation projects, cultivate more bright spots, jointly safeguard peace and tranquility of the ocean, improve the maritime governance system, keep the ocean clean and beautiful, and achieve maritime prosperity...

The agreement aims to provide clarity in maintaining peace in the maritime region and achieving maritime prosperity. It is considered a step toward affirming the full implementation of the DoC and the beginning of the CoC conclusion.

This agreement marks a significant shift in Indonesia's policies regarding China's unilateral claims in the South China Sea. Previously, Indonesia had firmly rejected China's claims as they conflict with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982. Additionally, the 2016 ruling of the International Tribunal on China's claims clarified that the "nine-dash line" lacks a legal basis. Indonesia has consistently refused to negotiate with China over these illegal claims. However, the joint statement implicitly acknowledges China's claims in the South China Sea. This development suggests that Indonesia has fallen into China's trap, making it the first ASEAN country to recognize the "nine-dash line" claim (Darmawan, 2024).

Although Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the joint statement does not constitute recognition of China's nine-dash line, China's interpretation may differ (Darmawan, 2024). Through this statement, Indonesia is perceived as not only recognizing something that violates international law but also agreeing to share its

sovereign rights over resource exploration and exploitation in the region. This agreement could significantly disadvantage Indonesia in managing its natural resources and harm its position as a neutral country and the largest nation in ASEAN.

In pursuing peace in the South China Sea through CoC negotiations, Indonesia has insisted that all claims must adhere to UNCLOS. Thus, the joint statement is seen as inconsistent with Indonesia's long-standing position. Instead, the statement strengthens China's position, bringing it closer to its national interests—not just in terms of claim recognition but also by opening opportunities to exploit coveted natural resources.

Interaction theory explains that a nation's behavior aligns with its national interests. However, Indonesia's position as a neutral country and ASEAN leader contradicts this approach. The theory emphasizes choosing strategies that yield the most favorable outcomes. Allowing China to co-exploit resources in the North Natuna Sea does not maximize the benefits for Indonesia.

According to calculations presented in Table 2 using the *prisoner's dilemma* model, cooperating with China does not yield ideal outcomes for Indonesia ($NCC > CC > NCNC > CNC$). The cooperation columns in the table (CC & CNC) show non-ideal situations for Indonesia, represented by negative scores (-2 and -5). Cooperating or reaching agreements on China's illegal claims in the South China Sea undermines Indonesia's ability to defend its sovereignty. Indonesia's neutral stance appears to shift, showing a tendency toward China, impacting both domestic and international interests.

Despite Indonesia's strong economic ties with China, the decision to issue the joint statement with China does not seem to be a strategy that brings positive value. Even when both countries agree to cooperate, there is always the possibility of betrayal by China. This was demonstrated on November 11, 2024, when a Chinese coast guard vessel re-entered North Natuna (Damarjati, 2024). To protect itself from such possibilities, the ideal option would be for Indonesia to avoid cooperation (NC) in overlapping areas in Natuna.

In the NC table, Indonesia achieves better scores regardless of China's actions. For instance, under the NCC option, Indonesia scores 1 for maintaining non-cooperation, which aligns with its national interest in protecting its jurisdiction and upholding international law. Although the score is modest, indicating ongoing tensions in North Natuna waters, Indonesia's independent stance in defending its sovereignty and resources demonstrates a firm position.

The NCNC option results in a score of -4 for both countries, reflecting persistent border tensions as each nation pursues its interests. Diplomatic efforts to reach peaceful agreements would be challenging, with repeated violations. However, this situation is deemed better than Indonesia agreeing or cooperating with China. Betrayal by China will always remain a possibility.

Conclusion

Through calculations using the *prisoner's dilemma* framework, it becomes clear that the choice not to cooperate (NC) is always preferable to the choice to cooperate (C). Indonesia can continue to act as a neutral party, avoiding alliances or alignment with any major powers. This approach aligns with Indonesia's longstanding free and active foreign policy principles. Moreover, Indonesia can independently explore and exploit natural resources in the region to their fullest potential without interference from any party.

In conclusion, the choice not to cooperate aligns with Indonesia's national interests. On the other hand, the option to cooperate contradicts Indonesia's consistent stance of neutrality. Cooperation increases the likelihood of negotiations involving jurisdictional division and the resources contained within, potentially eroding Indonesia's rights to manage its maritime territories. Additionally, the potential for tension among ASEAN countries, resulting from Indonesia's shift in policy, could alter the political dynamics in the region. Such a decision would greatly benefit China while causing significant disadvantages for Indonesia.

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Football as Political Communication Tool for German Supporters: How the Story of St. Pauli and Union Berlin Goes International

Kiki Esa Perdana & Bima Prawira Utama

Communication studies, School of leadership and management, Tanri Abeng University
International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Padjajaran University

Football is the most popular sport in the world, involving many people, from players, club officials, federation administrators in each country, the media, and also supporters consisting of various backgrounds. In some countries, even football also involves politicians and political parties. Because it involves many people and also many media, it is not uncommon that many people intend to convey their political messages through football so that they can be seen by the public. Germany is one of the countries that experiences this, with a background and political history that is quite strong in society and German football, which is quite famous in the world. Many football supporters in Germany try to convey various political messages to the public; they assume that football is a powerful medium to convey various political messages that they have. Starting from left-wing politics, right-wing nationalism, to various socio-political ideologies. By using political communication methods, this article tries to analyse the correlation between politics and football supporters in Germany and how the political message can go across the globe. This article was written using descriptive analysis and concluded that although German society has a dark history of politics, this does not prevent German football supporters from conveying their political messages through football, while on the other hand, the media helps to spread those messages across the globe.

Keywords: German Football, Political Message, Political Tool, Globalization

Football began to gain popularity in Germany in the late 19th century. The first football clubs were founded in major cities such as BFCgermania, which originated from the city

of Arsinghausen in Lower Saxony; after that, big city football, such as in Berlin and Hamburg, also began to form many football clubs. Football At that time, it was played in the winter of 1881/82; there was no sports field of its own, so BFC Germania initially used Tempelhofer Feld (which would later be built into the famous Tempelhof Airport). (Germania, 2024).

In 1900, the German Football Association (Deutscher Fußball-Bund, DFB) was formed, and from then on, football flourished throughout the country. The Bundesliga was founded in 1963 as Germany's professional football league. This decision changed the landscape of German football, allowing clubs to compete at the highest level and producing talented players who went on to make their mark on the international stage.

Germany is a country renowned for its contributions to science, technology, and its complex political history. It is also widely recognized for its advanced football culture, which has produced several prominent clubs, players, managers, and even innovative football management systems. One example is Bayern Munich (Globaldata, 2024) , a club that has won six European titles and developed legendary players who became World Cup winners, such as Franz Beckenbauer, Thomas Müller, Bastian Schweinsteiger, and Philipp Lahm. Another example is Borussia Dortmund, known for producing World Cup winners like Mario Götze and Mats Hummels, as well as nurturing world-class managers such as Jürgen Klopp, who introduced innovations like the 'footbonaut,' a machine used to enhance players' passing skills (Mag, 2016).

Football is the most popular sport in Germany. The DFB is the national governing body for football in Germany, overseeing 6.6 million members across more than 26,000 football clubs. The German national football team has won the World Cup four times: in 1954, 1974, 1990, and 2014. According to *SportsBusiness*, a sports media outlet, between 2010 and 2012, the German football league, or Bundesliga, was ranked the top football league in the world in terms of average attendance across all sports in Germany, recording an average of 45,134 supporters per match (SportBusiness, 2010).

In general, the characteristics of German football fans are similar to those of football fans in other countries. Their behavior ranges from extreme fanaticism to political activism, involvement in social movements, or simply viewing football as a form of entertainment or family activity.

Germany has played a central role in world history. During World War II, alongside Italy and Japan, Germany was considered one of the 'Axis Powers' or 'bad guys' in history. At the time, Germany adhered to an extreme right-wing political

ideology, Nazism, which culminated in the atrocities of the Holocaust under Adolf Hitler's dictatorship. Today, Germany is a democratic country with a diverse range of political views, spanning Green politics, Social Democracy, and the resurgence of right-wing politics represented by the Alternative für Deutschland party/movement.

With such a range of political perspectives in society and the widespread popularity of football, it is unsurprising that Germany has a variety of politically active football supporters. These supporters use football as a platform to communicate and convey their political messages to a broader audience.

Overview of Germany

Germany has a complex and often dark history. The rise of the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler in the early 1930s had a devastating impact on Germany's political life and several neighboring countries. Hitler's policies ultimately led to World War II, one of the deadliest conflicts in human history. This era left a profound scar on German history and the global community. In addition to these historical events, Germany underwent significant demographic changes following its re-establishment after World War II. Around the 1970s, Germany invited *gastarbeiter* (foreign workers), primarily from Turkey, to meet labor demands. Many of these workers eventually settled in Germany, establishing families and contributing to the country's population diversity. However, this shift has also led to debates over immigration, with some perceiving it as a security concern. These historical and demographic factors continue to shape German society and its political landscape.

The majority of German citizens tend to approach sensitive historical topics with caution, viewing them as sources of collective suffering. However, this sensitivity often takes on a different tone when expressed through football. For many German football fans, the sport serves as "free media," a platform for expressing political views—even on sensitive matters.

Politics, in simple terms, is a way for humans to interact, share power, and organize collective life. It involves decision-making, policy creation, and the pursuit of shared interests. It is virtually impossible for any citizen, including those in Germany, to remain completely detached from politics. Football, both in Germany and beyond, often serves as a medium for conveying various messages, ranging from social to political issues, to a broader audience.

The opening article of the German Constitution guarantees the dignity of every individual, freedom of personal development, equality before the law, and freedom of belief and conviction. It ensures equal rights for men and women and prohibits discrimination based on gender, descent, race, language, origin, faith, religion, or political beliefs. It also grants everyone the right to freely express their opinions through speech, writing, or images. These constitutional principles have inspired actions by the German national football team, such as their silent protest against Qatar's LGBTQ+ ban during the 2022 World Cup. Germany, widely regarded as one of the most LGBTQ+-friendly countries globally, legalized same-sex marriage on October 1, 2017, following the Bundestag's approval of full marital and adoption rights for same-sex couples in June of that year (DW, 2017). In early 2024, the German Football Federation (DFB) officially launched a movement to combat racism and discrimination among fans and amateur players.

Economically, Germany's backbone lies in its export-oriented industrial sector. The country is the world's leading producer of high-tech industrial equipment, including iron, steel, coal, cement, chemicals, automotive machinery, and renewable energy technology such as wind turbines and solar panels. The industrial sector accounts for 29.1% of Germany's GDP. Of the world's 500 largest companies, 37 are headquartered in Germany. In a nation with advanced industry and technology, football serves as a vital outlet for leisure and emotional expression. It is the most popular spectator sport in Germany, with tens of thousands of fans attending matches weekly. Bundesliga tickets, while in high demand, are significantly cheaper than tickets for the English Premier League. Football is also widely played and enjoyed by children in schools and through thousands of amateur leagues. Prominent teams like Bayern München and Borussia Dortmund are central to Germany's football culture (Expatrio, 2024). Watching football provides an escape from daily routines and a space for personal expression (Perdana, 2021).

German society is diverse and shaped by various political ideologies. As a federal democracy, Germany has strong political parties, an independent judiciary, and robust regional and local governments. The constitutional framework carefully outlines the allocation of power and the election process, ensuring that any changes to this framework are made with careful consideration of their broader implications.

Political participation is a hallmark of German democracy, enabling citizens to engage in elections and policymaking. Higher levels of political participation typically

indicate a healthy democracy, while low participation may suggest apathy or distrust toward the government system.

With Germany's relatively open political system, people use various mediums, including football, to express their political views. Football stadiums and matches have become platforms for voicing political issues. Two German football teams stand out as examples of this phenomenon. St. Pauli, with its idealism and commitment to social issues, represents "punk football," while Union Berlin embodies solidarity and community-driven club management. Even during times of financial crisis, such as when Union Berlin faced near bankruptcy, fans displayed extraordinary dedication by raising 1.5 million euros (approximately Rp 24.2 billion) to save the club (Butler, 2023).

How Football Clubs Gains Their Identities?

One of the most important aspects of studying football as a medium to convey political messages is that a club and its fans need to have a clear identity, which is then communicated through various meanings associated with the club. The first and foremost aspect of a football club's identity is its local and regional affiliation. This connection provides a unique selling point, attracts supporters, and allows fans to identify closely with the club (Gómez-Bantel, 2016).

Most football clubs around the world are rooted in their regional identity. For example, some of the biggest football clubs globally include their city names, such as Real Madrid, AC Milan, Liverpool FC, FC Barcelona, and Ajax Amsterdam—each among the top five clubs with the most UEFA Champions League trophies, the most prestigious European club competition. Similarly, FC St. Pauli, named after the St. Pauli district in Hamburg, and Union Berlin, named after Germany's capital city, Berlin, exemplify this practice. Identifying a football club with its place of origin is a common tradition across sports worldwide.

The second key element of a football club's identity is its ideology. Though abstract, ideology serves as a valuable conceptual framework that reflects how different social groups think, feel, and act. It embodies a set of political beliefs, ideas, and values about how society should function and improve (Spaaij & Viñas, 2013). For some, ideology becomes a guiding principle and even a way of life.

In football, ideology does not directly impact the game itself—a Marxist ideology will not make a left winger run faster, nor will Capitalism make a right winger dribble more skillfully. Instead, ideology reflects a football club's societal role. For instance, FC

Barcelona is renowned for its connection to Catalan nationalism, symbolizing the Catalan people and their identity. This link was solidified during Francisco Franco's dictatorship when FC Barcelona matches became a refuge for Catalans to express their dissent against the regime, cementing the club's identity as a bastion of Catalan culture (Minder, 2017). This identity remains integral to FC Barcelona to this day.

Ideology plays a vital role in modern football. The sport's immense popularity, with an audience of five billion people globally (FIFA, 2024), has made it more than just a game. Football reflects societal dynamics and often mirrors political tensions. For instance, Simon Kuper (2006, pp. 4–18) titled one chapter of his book *Soccer Against the Enemy* as "Soccer is War," discussing the rivalry between Holland and Germany in the 1988 European Cup semifinals. Holland's 2-1 victory over Germany was celebrated as symbolic revenge for World War II. Similarly, rivalries such as Celtic vs. Rangers in Scotland—steeped in political and religious undertones (Silawati, 2022)—and Boca Juniors vs. River Plate in Argentina, which reflects class divisions, illustrate football's deep societal connections (LFYC, 2024).

Pascal Boniface (2002) argued that football reflects contemporary global dynamics, representing a country's geopolitical position through its achievements on the field. Indonesian philosopher Sindhunata (2002, pp. 38–40) also highlighted how rivalries like those between Holland and England evoke emotional weight, sometimes exceeding the impact of historical conflicts. From a Baudrillardian perspective, football has become a simulacrum, a hyperreal phenomenon transcending its original purpose (Sugito, 2016).

German football exemplifies this phenomenon. Known for its passionate fans and high-quality play, the Bundesliga is widely regarded as one of the world's best leagues. The German football culture emphasizes discipline, teamwork, and hard work, fostering a strong collective mentality both on and off the field. This emphasis on unity and collaboration has contributed significantly to Germany's success in major tournaments like the World Cup and European Championship (Academy, 2024).

From a fan's perspective, football serves as a powerful medium for forming and expressing individual and collective identities. It represents cultural affiliations or countercultural stances, shaping how fans relate to themselves and others (García-López, 2024). For clubs like St. Pauli and Union Berlin, fan identity is deeply intertwined with their origins and societal context. Understanding the history and ideologies of these clubs

is crucial to comprehending how football can transcend its role as a sport and become a vehicle for social and political expression.

St. Pauli, the Punk Rockstar of the *Fußball*

St. Pauli is a football club based in Hamburg, Northern Germany. Its journey began in 1907 when football was played as part of the gymnastics club Hamburg St. Pauli Turnverein 1862. At that time, football in St. Pauli was not part of an organized competition. In 1910, the football players joined the North German Football Association. They played their first league game in 1911 and, in 1924, broke away from the gymnastics club to form FC St. Pauli (FC St. Pauli, 2024).

In the 1930s, Germany underwent a significant political shift as the National Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP), better known as the Nazis, rose to power. By June 1933, under the leadership of the Deutsch Fußball-Bund (DFB), Jewish individuals were forced to leave all sports clubs. Although St. Pauli was compelled to expel Jewish players, they initially refused to align with Nazi ideology. St. Pauli became one of the few clubs that rejected the Nazi government's policies during the early 1930s, opposing right-wing ideology, racism, and anything that threatened peace among people. However, under political pressure, St. Pauli ultimately joined the Nazi system in 1937 for the sake of the club's survival. This decision, though reluctant, was led by club president Wilhelm Koch (Dev, 2017). Over time, St. Pauli evolved to embody progressive values, such as anarchism, libertarianism, and socialism, representing the lower classes in Hamburg, Germany, and beyond.

After World War II, the club experienced ups and downs in German football. Although they were promoted to the Bundesliga, Germany's top division, in 1977, they were relegated the following year. St. Pauli's journey in the Bundesliga never reached the heights of clubs like Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, or even their regional rival Hamburg SV. However, in the 1980s, the club began to stand out by cultivating a distinctive subculture among its supporters, which later gained global recognition. By 2024-2025, St. Pauli made their long-awaited return to the Bundesliga (Bundesliga, 2024).

What made St. Pauli a global cult club was its unwavering stance against racism and fascism. While some European football clubs have notorious associations with fascist ideologies, such as Lazio's Ultras group "Irriducibili," known for racist banners and chants, St. Pauli stands in stark contrast. St. Pauli has embraced a punk ideology

rooted in mutual aid, anti-consumerism, and human rights (Avery-Natale, 2016). This progressive ethos has endeared the club to fans worldwide.

St. Pauli's fans have also driven key initiatives, such as renaming their stadium Millerntor Stadion to distance it from its former name, Wilhelm Koch Stadion, after the Nazi-affiliated president. The stadium became the first professional football ground in Europe to adopt a strict code of conduct prohibiting racist, fascist, sexist, or homophobic comments. This code later became a model for other clubs in Germany (Haasen, 2018).

Economically, St. Pauli cannot compete with giants like Bayern Munich or RB Leipzig, but the club prides itself on its idealism and community involvement. St. Pauli rejects private ownership and involves fans in every decision. This commitment to collective action aligns with the punk philosophy of "Do It Yourself" (DIY). In 2004, when the club faced financial crisis and near-bankruptcy, fans—ranging from bar owners to local sex workers—raised prices on goods and services, contributing the surplus to save the club (Ilham, 2022).

The humanist side of punk ideology is also reflected in St. Pauli's supporters, who are predominantly left-wing, anti-fascist, anti-racist, and anti-sexist. The St. Pauli Ultras frequently organize political campaigns, fundraise for the less fortunate, and even host events like the FIFA World Cup for nations unrecognized by FIFA. The club's fans have become emblematic of the global "Against Modern Football" (AMF) movement, advocating for the preservation of football's community roots against its commercialization (Zaimakis, 2023).

The club's unofficial skull and crossbones logo symbolizes solidarity with the working class, despite its origins in pirate imagery. St. Pauli supporters, largely from Hamburg's working-class neighborhoods, see the logo as a defiant symbol of their identity. Despite the club's modest achievements, fans prioritize independence and sustainability over quick success funded by capitalist ventures.

St. Pauli's embrace of progressive values, such as anarchism and socialism, has made it a global symbol of political football. Its unique ethos and dedicated fanbase solidify its reputation as one of the most politically connected football clubs in the world.

Worker's United: The Union berlin

Originally founded in 1906 as FC Olympia Oberschöneweide, the club has changed its name up to ten times. After a series of dissolutions and reforms following World War II,

the name 1. FC Union Berlin was officially adopted in January 1966 when trade union federation leader Herbert Warnke proposed the formation of a club for Berlin's workers.

FC Union Berlin may not be a club with a long history of competing in the German Bundesliga or achieving impressive accolades. In fact, they had not appeared in Germany's top league since Berlin's unification in 1990 (FC Union Berlin, 2024).

Last September, in a historic match—Union's first Bundesliga game—the supporters remained silent for the first 15 minutes. This protest was staged against the ownership model of their opponent, RB Leipzig, which is owned by the Austrian energy drink company Red Bull. The action was led by Union's oldest ultras group, Wuhlesyndikat. The fans take pride in the fact that their club has survived without reliance on a single corporate sponsor like RB Leipzig. In 2009, Union even severed ties with its main sponsor, ISP (International Sport Promotion), because its manager had a decade-long history as a Stasi operative. Remarkably, everyone working at the club, from president Dirk Zingler to the ticketing staff, is a dedicated Union Berlin supporter. This commitment reflects the working-class communitarian values of family, solidarity, and mutual cooperation that are consistently upheld by all elements of the club. In contrast, their neighbors at Hertha Berlin are majority-owned by a private firm, 777 Partners, which holds a 64.7% stake (Bresaola, 2023).

Such dedication has made Union Berlin a cult club in Europe, similar to St. Pauli. As Roos Menkhorst (2024) observed, Union Berlin is a quintessential working-class club, representing the town of Köpenick in Berlin, a working-class neighborhood. When Union wins, local bars often celebrate by serving free beer to customers. The club even celebrates Christmas with its fans, as 22,000 supporters gather in the stadium to sing Christmas carols.

This special relationship between Union Berlin and its supporters is a rare phenomenon in world football. As football clubs increasingly become privatized, many lose the passion-based connection that once defined fandom. Union Berlin's management system, however, serves as a form of political communication—if not a statement—embodying their labor union-inspired values.

Union Berlin demonstrates that political communication in football does not have to take the form of performative actions; it can simply be reflected in how a club is managed. This unique management model is not exclusive to Union Berlin. Athletic Bilbao in Spain also operates under a socio system, where the club's ownership and management are in the hands of its fans.

Football, Globalization, Ideology, and Media

As football continues to grow in popularity worldwide—thanks to advancements in information technology—international football fans now consume the sport in much broader ways. Before the advent of the internet, fans could only watch football on terrestrial television, and matches were usually broadcast live or occasionally delayed if the broadcaster decided to air them later. Some fans could record games to watch later, but such technology was not widely available, especially in Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia. Today, football can be watched repeatedly on free video-sharing platforms such as YouTube and Dailymotion. These platforms allow people to rewatch matches while also enjoying commentary from both local and international analysts, amateur and professional alike (Marcelo Pires & Vítor Santos, 2018).

Another interesting development brought by the internet is the accessibility of lower-league matches, which can now be enjoyed globally. In the 1990s, before the internet, lower-league teams were only featured on television—internationally—when they played against major teams in local cup competitions like the DFB Pokal or the FA Cup. Today, these matches are readily available online and can be watched anytime.

The internet has also enabled fans to explore other aspects of football beyond the matches themselves. For example, streaming platforms like Netflix offer a wide array of football documentaries that cover the sport from multiple angles, including the matches, players, incidents, and even the experiences of captains and fans. These documentaries highlight how elements beyond the game itself have become significant for football fans worldwide.

Choudry (2018) explored how social media, a significant part of the internet, has transformed football. Social media allows football journalists to share their content widely, engage audiences, and receive global feedback. It has also empowered football fans to voice their opinions on a global scale, spreading their ideologies far and wide. In the cases of FC St. Pauli and Union Berlin, their fans already held strong ideological beliefs, but the internet and social media helped amplify their messages—consciously or unconsciously—to a much wider audience.

FC St. Pauli has achieved the status of a "cult club," celebrated by international and local media alike. Outlets such as England's *BBC* (Poole, 2020), the United States' *Vice* (Magee, 2017), Indonesia's *Panditfootball* (Aprialdi, 2015), and *Detik.com* (Aprialdi, 2023) have all highlighted the club's unique appeal. These media platforms consistently

praise St. Pauli for its passionate fans and steadfast values, reinvented in the 1980s, which include anti-fascism, anti-homophobia, and anti-sexism. The club is also commended for its anti-modern football stance, often described as being "more about football than business."

The uniqueness of FC St. Pauli is further underscored by its foreign players, including Australians Jackson Irvine and Connor Metcalfe. In a short documentary by *10Football*, Irvine—the captain of the Australian national team—shared that he joined St. Pauli partly because his girlfriend advised him to "join that cult club." When St. Pauli contacted him in 2021, Irvine immediately accepted the offer. Both Irvine and Metcalfe have noted that St. Pauli's fans hold strong idealistic beliefs and stand firmly by them (10Football, 2024). This demonstrates how football fans' ideologies can influence even foreign players to become part of their club.

Meanwhile, FC Union Berlin possesses qualities that set it apart from most football clubs worldwide. The club is entirely fan-owned, a rare phenomenon in modern football. The Israeli-based sports media *Playingfor90* described Union Berlin as a mythical club and a "disruptor of modern football" (Stewart, 2023). Operating with a minimal budget and 100% fan ownership, Union Berlin successfully qualified for the 2023/2024 UEFA Champions League, Europe's most prestigious club competition.

Basro (2023), writing for *CNN Indonesia*, also highlighted Union Berlin's uniqueness, describing it as a club that prioritizes its fans above all else, unlike many modern football clubs that treat supporters as mere customers. Basro drew comparisons between Union Berlin and other fan-centric clubs in Europe and Indonesia, such as FC United of Manchester, AFC Wimbledon, AFC Liverpool, Bohemian FC in Great Britain, and Indonesian clubs like Tribun Kultur FC, Urbanside FC, Kalibrug FC, Rainfall FC, and Port City Wanderers.

These cross-national media perspectives illustrate that the ideologies of both FC St. Pauli and FC Union Berlin are not only unique but also transcendental, reaching audiences worldwide. The advancement of information technology has played a crucial role in elevating football into more than just a game. It has transformed the sport into an international platform where clubs and fans alike can promote their ideologies and influence others across borders.

Conclusion

As the most popular sport in the country, football has been a significant part of German society. Football clubs in Germany are a representation of their people and, therefore, also reflect the political views of the population. On a global level, football itself has become a symbol of the various parties behind the teams playing on the field.

In this paper, we use Germany's FC St. Pauli and Union Berlin as examples of how political ideologies can emerge from these clubs. In the case of FC St. Pauli, their anti-fascist and anti-racist ideology has inspired fans and media worldwide, helping them achieve cult status in global football. Meanwhile, Union Berlin has reached mythical status by surviving in a fan-supported economic environment.

On the other hand, football has become more than just a game. The growing influence of aspects outside the game, such as the ideologies of fans and clubs, is worth discussing. In this context, several international and local media outlets outside Germany frequently write positively about FC St. Pauli and Union Berlin, highlighting how the political messages conveyed by these clubs can serve as a positive inspiration for other football clubs around the world.

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Complexity of the Government and Governance in ASEAN

Members: Issues and Challenges

Yusep Ginanjar & Putri Auliya

Faculty of Political and Social Science, Universitas Jenderal Achmad Yani

This article explores the complexities of government and governance among ASEAN member states, focusing on the intersection of diverse political systems, institutional frameworks, and governance practices. ASEAN, a region characterized by its rich cultural and historical diversity, encompasses a spectrum of governance models, from democratic republics to absolute monarchies and socialist states. This heterogeneity poses unique challenges for regional integration, policy harmonization, and collective decision-making. The article systematically analyzes governance issues, including corruption, rule of law, economic management, and civil liberties, drawing on comparative metrics and case studies. It also addresses the challenges of aligning national governance practices with ASEAN's regional objectives, such as fostering ASEAN community integration and addressing transboundary issues like climate change and security. By highlighting disparities in governance performance and institutional capacities, the article underscores the need for innovative approaches to regional collaboration that respect sovereignty while promoting cohesion. This work contributes to the broader discourse on governance in multilateral organizations, offering insights into potential pathways for enhancing institutional effectiveness within ASEAN. The findings aim to support policymakers, scholars, and practitioners in navigating the complexities of governance in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Governance; Government; Southeast Asia; ASEAN

The ASEAN region, composed of diverse nations, remains a fascinating subject of study from multiple perspectives such as economic, legal, political, social, or others. The evolution of democratic practices within this region is particularly compelling, given the numerous ethnic and heterogeneous communities that coexist and interact. One key area of interest is the examination of government and governance practices among its member states. The concepts of government and governance are often interpreted in varying ways, both theoretically and practically. In Southeast Asia, the process of democratization faces

numerous obstacles, as democracy is often adopted not as a deeply held belief but as a strategy for remaining politically relevant. Common challenges across the region include insufficient participation, underrepresentation of certain groups, widespread corruption, and other issues undermining the effectiveness of democratic practices.

This article draws on three different articles to explore the themes of government and governance within Southeast Asia. The first article, authored by Mark Richard Thompson, is titled "The Dialectic of 'Good Governance' and Democracy in Southeast Asia: Globalized Discourses and Local Responses." The second article, written by Arnakim, L.Y., Karim, M. F., and Mursitama, T. N., is titled "Revisiting ASEAN Legislation and Its Impact on Regional Governance." The third article by Thomas Pepinsky is entitled "Decoupling Governance and Democracy: The Challenge of Authoritarian Development in Southeast Asia."

The first article critiques the weaknesses of reformism and the rise of populism in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, discussing how conflicts of interest continue to hinder good governance. It highlights the tendency of politicians to be elected based on charisma rather than their vision for long-term prosperity. The second article examines ASEAN legislation and its impact on regional governance, noting that despite some ratified agreements, the implementation of these agreements often falters due to a lack of enforcement mechanisms. This is contrasted with the European Union's approach, which possesses stronger authority to ensure compliance among its members. The third article addresses the growing challenge of authoritarianism in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, particularly in light of the economic rise of China and Vietnam, which has influenced democratic practices in the region, with China's soft power diplomacy further complicating the situation.

In contrast to the narrow focus of these previous studies, this article aims to provide a broader perspective on democracy within the context of government and governance in Southeast Asia. While the existing literature often zeroes in on specific issues—such as the economy, social challenges, or law enforcement, this article seeks to examine the entire phenomenon of governance and democracy as interconnected and multifaceted.

This research is significant not only for enhancing our understanding of governance across multiple countries but also for highlighting Southeast Asia's potential as a dynamic region. Comprising diverse nation-states with distinct backgrounds, the region is interconnected through ASEAN. This makes it crucial to assess the effectiveness

of governance within these states, enabling an evaluation of the significance of their governmental roles. A key contribution of this work is its emphasis on the emerging challenges to democracy and good governance in Southeast Asia, particularly influenced by China's increasing influence on the global stage. As Southeast Asia continues to develop rapidly, it also faces declines in various areas. Given the interdependent nature of domestic and international issues, ensuring regional and national stability is crucial for the continued progress of this developing region.

The article titled "Complexity of the Government and Governance in ASEAN Members: Issues and Challenges" is intriguing for several reasons, such as its comprehensive scope. The research suggests a broad yet detailed exploration of both government (structures, institutions, and systems of administration) and governance (practices, decision-making processes, and effectiveness). This dual focus appeals to readers interested in understanding not just the frameworks but also the practical challenges ASEAN countries face. In terms of regional relevance, given ASEAN's geopolitical and economic importance, mapping governance in its member states is a timely and essential task. The focus on this diverse region, with its mixture of political systems, economic statuses, and cultural identities, highlights the complexity and uniqueness of Southeast Asia. Additionally, the focus on issues and challenges implies a critical and problem-oriented approach rather than a purely descriptive one, making it valuable for academics, policymakers, and development practitioners seeking actionable insights.

The implications for regional integration are also significant, as ASEAN's collective goals, such as economic integration, sustainable development, and regional stability, are heavily influenced by governance disparities. The title hints at exploring how these variations impact the region's ambitions, resonating with those interested in the future of regional cooperation. The combination of governance and government appeals to a wide audience, including political scientists, economists, sociologists, and international relations scholars, signaling an interdisciplinary approach to understanding governance in ASEAN. By addressing governance issues and challenges, the title implicitly speaks to the potential for reforms, better policy alignment, and stronger institutional frameworks, which are critical for ASEAN's success on the global stage. This title captures attention by promising a structured yet nuanced examination of governance in a dynamic and diverse region, making it both intellectually and practically significant.

Analysis

To effectively analyze the practice of democracy in governance within Southeast Asia, it is crucial to first distinguish between the concepts of government, governing, and governance. These terms have distinct meanings, both theoretically and practically. "Government" refers to the institutional framework or structure responsible for exercising authority, while "governing" pertains to the control and management exerted by one party over others. "Governance," on the other hand, involves the decision-making processes that reflect societal expectations, particularly through the administration of state functions. The ideal of "good governance" aligns with democratic principles, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.

Good governance is a multi-dimensional concept rooted in political science, public administration, and development studies. According to the UNDP, key theories and frameworks related to good governance include transparency, accountability, participation, rule of law, effectiveness, and efficiency. Transparency ensures that decision-making processes are open and accessible to the public. Accountability involves holding public officials responsible for their actions and decisions. Participation involves engaging stakeholders, including marginalized groups, in decision-making. The rule of law upholds fairness and impartiality through robust legal systems. Effectiveness and efficiency relate to delivering public services and managing resources to meet societal needs without waste. Based on these principles, countries in Southeast Asia should be aware of these basic tenets to create order within their governing processes.

Southeast Asia is a unique and rapidly developing region, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) serving as its primary regional organization. Comprising ten member states—Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam—ASEAN fosters cooperation in economic, political, and security matters. The region, home to approximately 650 million people with a combined GDP of \$2.8 trillion, plays a pivotal role in Asian economic integration. ASEAN has been instrumental in creating one of the world's largest free trade blocs, having signed six free trade agreements with other Asian nations (Maizland & Albert, 2020). The main objectives behind the formation of ASEAN were to promote economic growth, ensure regional peace and stability, encourage active participation, and provide mutual support on issues that impact all member states. Additionally, ASEAN aims to sustain robust and mutually beneficial relationships with other regional and international organizations that align with its goals and priorities (Heng, 2020).

Over time, ASEAN has made notable progress in fostering regional economic integration and promoting free trade. In 1992, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) was established with the aim of forming a unified market, boosting intra-ASEAN trade and investment, and attracting foreign capital. As a result, intra-ASEAN trade grew from approximately 19% of the bloc's total trade in 1993 to 23% in 2017, with over 90% of products within the region now traded duty-free. The organization has also identified eleven key sectors for integration, including electronics, automotive, rubber products, textiles and apparel, agro-products, and tourism (Heng, 2020).

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Beyond the region, ASEAN's influence and strategic importance are under scrutiny, particularly in relation to territorial disputes in the South China Sea. This remains one of the most complex challenges, with Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam all asserting claims over areas contested by China. China's actions, including land reclamation and the construction of artificial islands, are viewed by many as violations of the sovereignty of other claimant states. Consequently, several nations have invested in modernizing their military forces. Furthermore, ASEAN faces increasing pressure as the United States and China vie for dominance in the Asia-Pacific. Southeast Asian countries are increasingly compelled to align themselves with one of the two powers. As the US-China rivalry intensifies, ASEAN finds itself at a strategic crossroads, where failure to navigate the geopolitical tensions effectively could destabilize the entire region. Therefore, it is essential to examine the economic and governance landscape and systems across Southeast Asia.

a. Southeast Asia's Economic and Governance Landscape

Southeast Asia is a diverse region, consisting of countries with varying sizes, levels of development, and political systems. The region's five more advanced nations—Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines—are generally better equipped with management systems and are further along in the process of liberalization.

In contrast, the transitional economies of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar continue to face challenges in public administration and lag in moving toward more open and competitive societies. As a collective, these countries are becoming increasingly influential in the global economy, with their combined impact on global economic activity growing. Southeast Asia is the second-fastest growing region after East Asia, with an average annual growth rate of over 6% in overall GNP and around 4% in GNP per capita. Between 1990 and 1998, the region's performance was nearly three times higher than that of the OECD. Some countries in the region, such as Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia, have embraced trade liberalization as a path to development, setting global standards in areas like poverty reduction, healthcare, and education.

Southeast Asian nations are also making strategic investments in sectors like information technology, biotechnology, and workforce development to build knowledge-based, interconnected economies. However, concerns regarding financial stability, environmental sustainability, and capital flow remain prevalent, with parts of the region under close scrutiny. Thailand, in particular, was at the center of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which had global repercussions. As Southeast Asia continues to rely heavily on exports, it remains especially vulnerable to global economic downturns. Most Southeast Asian nations are part of a broader group of middle-income countries that have emerged as key global producers of public goods. These nations play a critical role in addressing market failures related to growth, stability, and governance—issues that have substantial benefits for the global community. To sustain broad-based and inclusive growth and prevent future financial crises, governance reforms in Southeast Asia are essential.

b. Southeast Asia's Governance System

In the context of an organized government, the state has a monopoly on regulation within the nation or country. In public administration and governance, the state is understood as a collection of institutions endowed with the authority to exercise legitimate coercion within a defined territory, known as a nation or country, whose inhabitants are referred to as society. When exercised appropriately, the state's exclusive authority to use coercion enables governments to fulfill their core responsibilities, such as maintaining macroeconomic stability and ensuring equitable resource distribution.

However, this power can also lead to arbitrary governmental actions or offer public officials opportunities for misuse of authority. Such unrestrained interventions can erode the institutions designed to safeguard state power. Therefore, the exercise of constraint is just as critical as the exercise of authority for the effective functioning of the state. Mechanisms of limitation, often referred to as checks and balances, are embedded

within the political structures of all nations. Among the most prominent and fundamental of these mechanisms is the separation of powers. A modern state cannot operate without distinct branches: the legislative, responsible for lawmaking; the executive, which enforces laws; and the judiciary, which interprets them. This division of powers fosters governmental continuity and stability. Veto points play a vital role in regulating the exercise of authority within public administration by ensuring that no policies are adopted or enacted unilaterally. These points require that any proposed policy undergoes scrutiny by a third party before being implemented. The greater the separation of powers, the more veto points must be navigated to amend or overturn any policy decisions.

While veto points serve to prevent hasty decision-making, they can also hinder effective policy implementation, particularly when they impede the revision of outdated or detrimental regulations. Governance among ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member countries varies significantly due to differences in political systems, levels of economic development, cultural contexts, and historical experiences. Comparative analyses of governance across ASEAN's 10 member states reveal differences in their democratic practices. Countries like Indonesia and the Philippines operate as democratic republics with regular elections and active civil societies, whereas Vietnam and Laos are one-party socialist states, and Brunei is an absolute monarchy. Thailand and Myanmar have experienced military influence in governance, alternating between democratic and authoritarian tendencies. Singapore and Malaysia follow parliamentary systems but differ in democratic practices. As we can see, among all ASEAN member countries, they are not similar; each has a different background and government system.

In terms of governance quality or rule of law, Singapore ranks high globally for its rule of law and regulatory efficiency, while Myanmar struggles with rule of law, exacerbated by military coups and conflict. In corruption rankings, countries like Singapore and Brunei perform well in transparency, whereas Cambodia and the Philippines struggle with high levels of corruption. If we look at developmental challenges, Cambodia and Myanmar face issues in poverty alleviation, weak institutions, and governance capacities. Through institutional and regional cooperation, ASEAN promotes regional governance mechanisms like the ASEAN Charter, emphasizing non-interference and consensus decision-making. While these principles have fostered peace and cooperation, they also hinder decisive action on governance issues (e.g., human rights abuses in Myanmar). Key challenges for ASEAN governance relate to bridging governance disparities among members, addressing corruption, enhancing

accountability, and balancing sovereignty with regional cooperation for transnational issues. By understanding these variations, ASEAN can work towards fostering more cohesive governance practices while respecting its members' diversity.

Issues and Challenges

a. Administrative Governance

Southeast Asian governments are relatively modest in scale when compared to OECD nations and other developing countries. The commonly used metric of government size—measured as government expenditure relative to total economic output—provides a narrow perspective, often omitting significant off-budget expenditures. Despite these limitations, Asian economies have shown notable success in managing the size of government, which is a critical aspect of effective governance.

Government consumption, distinct from investment, follows this trend, although the gap between Asia and industrialized nations has been gradually closing. In East and Southeast Asia, government consumption historically accounted for around 10% of GDP, compared to 17% in OECD countries. While narrower in scope—largely comprising the public wage bill—government consumption offers a more precise reflection of the tangible benefits citizens receive from public spending (Heng, 2020).

Cross-regional comparisons reveal how Asian governments have successfully narrowed the consumer welfare gap with highly developed nations while maintaining relatively smaller governmental structures. Southeast Asia, to some extent, exemplifies this achievement, demonstrating effective downsizing without the burdensome challenges faced by industrialized states. Unlike Western economies, which have struggled with decades of unchecked welfare state expansion, Southeast Asia has avoided such complications. Similarly, unlike many developing nations still engaged in post-colonial nation-building, Southeast Asia has largely moved beyond this phase, easing significant governance pressures.

Singapore stands out as a benchmark for efficient governance, achieving unparalleled improvements in per capita GDP and human development with a lean government model. Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines have directed substantial public investment towards human development but require further efforts to close the gap with the region's wealth leaders. Meanwhile, countries like Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are striving to balance government size, economic growth, and

human welfare. For these nations, expanding government capacity is likely necessary to effectively deliver critical public goods.

The World Bank notes that oversized governments in Southeast Asia often reflect inefficient and costly initiatives that contribute minimally to growth. As economic expansion slows, societal demands for increased public spending intensify, leading to excessive consumer expenditures that function as a de facto tax with limited societal benefits—unless specifically targeted at building social safety nets during economic downturns. However, indiscriminate reductions in consumption risk undermining essential services like teacher salaries or access to healthcare. The challenge of "right-sizing" government becomes even more complex when a vicious cycle of inefficiency and growing demands takes hold.

b. Economic Governance

The creators of the composite measure, Huther and Shah (1999), suggest that "the quality of a government's economic management (may) be measured by performance indicators of fiscal policy (debt-GDP ratio), monetary policy (central bank independence), and trade policy." According to their methodology, a score between 51 and 75 indicates strong economic management, a score between 41 and 50 indicates acceptable management, and a score between 0 and 40 indicates poor management. Consequently, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines are considered well-managed, while Thailand and Indonesia are only marginally managed. There is a strong association between governance quality, where economic management is integrated, and per capita income, but they also argue that the causality works both ways because greater earnings increase the demand for higher-quality management.

Grigorian and Martinez (1999) used a two-stage least squares test to correlate good governance with industrial success in Asian and Latin American nations in a related study. Using institutional quality indices (government contract repudiation, risk of expropriation, corruption, rule of law, and bureaucratic quality) from a dataset assembled by the University of Maryland's IRIS Center, they found that institutional quality has a very strong positive impact on the rate of industrial growth. Their findings also indicate that the more developed the legal and regulatory framework, the stronger the enforcement, and the fewer the administrative obstacles, the larger the amount of investment available in the economy, and the more effective the resource allocation (Grigorian & Martinez, 1999, p. 28).

Southeast Asia's high-performing economies—Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, alongside their East Asian counterparts—garnered global acclaim by defying the Kuznetsian inverted-U hypothesis, which posited an inherent trade-off between growth and equity. The Asian experience demonstrated that robust economic management could achieve development that is both market-driven and equitable. This success required bold and innovative policymaking across economic and social domains. Macroeconomic management during the era of globalization introduced new challenges and opportunities, including exposure to volatile capital flows. While this gamble resulted in severe consequences during the Asian financial crisis, it also fueled remarkable pre-crisis growth rates, sometimes exceeding 10% annually.

Crucially, these governments prioritized foundational social investments, particularly in health and education, which underpinned both economic and social resilience. Government strategies that integrated public spending with private-sector involvement in infrastructure development proved transformative. By employing cost-effective approaches, these policies not only attracted substantial investments but also expanded access to essential services for underprivileged populations. Infrastructure improvements in sectors such as power, water, telecommunications, and transportation have had a profound impact on living standards across Southeast Asia. Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines achieved significant advancements in water and sanitation, with over 80% of their populations—including the poorest—gaining access to improved services. However, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Indonesia lagged behind in this regard over the same period.

Similarly, access to electricity has become a key focus for regional governments. Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore have excelled in this domain, while Myanmar surprisingly outperformed the Philippines in some aspects. The region's success stories underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach. These "pacesetter" nations have effectively combined private-sector participation, inclusive service coverage, and efficient regulatory frameworks to lower costs and enhance affordability. This model not only ensures broader access to infrastructure but also sets a blueprint for sustainable development in Southeast Asia.

c. Political Governance

Prior to the Asian financial crisis, the region had a positive reputation for the rule of law. East and Southeast Asian nations saw tremendous wealth, faith in their legal systems improved, and the perceived rule of law strengthened. Even as the region's high-

performing Southeast Asian countries produced record-breaking development rates, signs of regional fragility emerged: judicial independence was seriously weakened, and corruption reached unprecedented levels. Corruption and a weak legal system are likely accomplices in crime, feeding off one another to demolish a country's institutional defenses (Mauro, 2006).

When a country's institutional defenses are weak—such as when courts fail to uphold their role as pillars of the rule of law or when regulatory agencies become hotbeds of corruption—the repercussions for economic governance are profound. Unreliable institutions compel entrepreneurs to adopt one of two strategies: a "hit-and-run" approach, involving speculative, high-return investments that allow for rapid exit at the first sign of trouble; or a "play-it-safe" approach, characterized by conservative, low-return investments requiring minimal capital commitment. Prior to the financial crisis, most Southeast Asian countries experienced both dynamics. Short-term capital inflows often fueled speculative activities, such as real estate investments that created unsustainable asset bubbles, while long-term inflows were disproportionately directed towards commerce and services.

Corruption further exacerbated these issues, diverting resources away from critical sectors like health and education, thereby limiting opportunities for the poor to invest in their own human capital. Thailand was widely lauded for its judicial independence and relatively low levels of corruption, making it an outlier in the region. However, it became emblematic of the perils of overinvestment in non-essential sectors, and its economy was the first in Asia to suffer a dramatic reversal during the crisis. Elsewhere in the region, governance issues presented significant challenges. Vietnam, for instance, continues to grapple with deficiencies in its legal framework, particularly in property rights and due process. The lack of an independent judiciary, inconsistencies in property law that hinder the development of financial markets, and a systemic bias favoring the state sector and communal ownership have all stifled competition.

While policy shifts to move away from a command economy could initiate reforms, they are insufficient to sustain long-term growth without an adequate legal foundation. In countries with strong state traditions, governments could theoretically enforce the rule of law and promote better governance. However, Malaysia exemplifies how state dominance can undermine judicial independence, as seen when the judiciary was subordinated to developmental agendas through presidential decrees. Cambodia, devastated by the Khmer Rouge era, saw its judicial system nearly eradicated. The

resulting legal and regulatory frameworks remain weak, inconsistent, and poorly enforced, exacerbating uncertainty.

Similarly, in Indonesia, efforts to address past corruption—particularly targeting elites who amassed illicit wealth under Suharto's regime—have largely been ineffective, contributing to the nation's persistently low rankings in global indices for rule of law, corruption, and business climate. High levels of public corruption erode the legitimacy of the state and its ability to establish growth-promoting institutions. Corruption reflects a distorted policy environment in which officials manipulate regulations for personal gain. When such misconduct is uncovered, it undermines judicial authority to the extent that courts can no longer pose a credible threat of punishment. This institutional fragility perpetuates a cycle of poor governance and economic instability, further hindering sustainable development.

d. Decentralized Governance

Decentralization refers to the transfer of a significant portion of a central government's political, fiscal, and administrative authority to subnational government entities. Subnational governments are expected to be able to make binding decisions in at least some policy areas if they become independent. In practice, decentralization expands the resources and responsibilities of already existent subnational government organizations. Decentralization is largely believed to increase governance quality. A government closer to its people performs best because it is more aware of local residents' issues. As a result, residents and community organizations can better participate in government matters under a decentralized structure. Proximity improves preference matching for public services. Moving decision-making closer to those affected reduces both information and transaction costs. On the other hand, a centralized approach to economic administration can stifle local growth.

Thus, a decentralized form of administration is as viable in less developed public sector locations like Southeast Asia as it is in sophisticated, highly industrialized settings. Southeast Asian countries implement decentralization in various ways. The path of least resistance is deconcentration, where central governments delegate authority to their own branch or district offices while maintaining the hierarchical link between field and central offices. For example, the Philippines' Department of Health is currently undertaking a hard transition to a more regionalized system. In Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, to varying degrees, privatization is occurring as part of "shedding" duties from overburdened central governments. State-owned enterprises are often the focus of

privatization. Localization, on the other hand, transfers power, duty, and accountability entirely to subnational or local governments elected by citizens.

Localization, from another perspective, transfers power, duty, and accountability entirely to subnational or local governments elected by citizens. Devolution has occurred in the Philippines in the form of transferring public service delivery in health and, to a lesser extent, social welfare and agricultural extension to local governments. Another form, delegation, is not truly decentralized because subnational governments are simply requested to act on behalf of higher ones. Decentralization indicates that local governments should operate as principals rather than as agents of the central government.

Southeast Asian nations, with the exception of Singapore, have chosen multitiered systems with one or two elected subnational administrations. Despite their unitary origins, several have attempted to restructure their frameworks to foster decentralized decision-making because of the higher value placed on uniformity and equal access to public services. A form of federalism is emerging that allows for more freedom of choice, political involvement, innovation, and accountability (Huther & Shah, 1999).

This multitiering is not an exception; each level of subnational government is meant to offer only those services that benefit the jurisdiction's citizens. Subnational governments are given a significant role in resource allocation under such "fiscal federalism." When the benefits of certain services have no significant spillover effects on residents of surrounding jurisdictions, the right quantities and mix of services can cater to local preferences (Aminuddin & Purnomo, 2019). If local residents are dissatisfied with service delivery, they can vote incumbents out of office or relocate to other jurisdictions. Local politics can approximate market efficiency in the distribution of local public services in this regard. However, there's a caveat: in many Southeast Asian nations with authoritarian regimes or constrained land and labor markets, citizens may not be able to engage effectively in the political process or "vote with their feet." Such representation may be further hampered by a lack of competence to run multi-level administrations (Manan, 2014). Recentralization has a negative distributional impact. The decision to consolidate services, administration, and infrastructure, ostensibly to ease management, contends with the hard realities of rugged topography, ethnic diversity, and the necessity for community engagement, all of which support smaller local administrative entities. As a result, there is a lack of government presence in a vast number of settlements.

Each public service should be provided by the level of government that has authority over the region that benefits and pays for it. The individuals who decide how much of a public good should be delivered should be included in the decision-making process. In a similar spirit, the principle of subsidiarity contends that service delivery responsibilities should be delegated to the lowest level of government unless there is a compelling case for doing so at a higher level. Local expenditures must be more closely aligned with local aims and desires to correctly assign responsibility for the delivery of local public goods. It also requires ensuring that accountability is backed up by the authority to generate the funds needed to meet the local government's obligations. This entails giving subnational governments control over expenditure and tax collection (Manan, 2014).

The benefits of decentralization can be undermined by corruption, but it also holds the potential to mitigate both the causes and effects of corruption. In decentralized systems, citizens can reduce opportunities for corruption by gaining insights into government processes and voicing grievances. Additionally, they can opt out of corrupt systems by "voting with their feet" in response to bribery or misconduct. Empirical evidence suggests that corruption is lower in countries with higher levels of decentralized spending. For instance, a one-standard-deviation increase in decentralization correlates with a 40% improvement in a country's corruption rating. Huther and Shah (1999) have demonstrated a negative relationship between fiscal decentralization and corruption. Their analysis, based on a composite score that evaluates judicial efficiency, bureaucratic efficiency, and the absence of corruption, shows a positive and statistically significant correlation between decentralization and better governance metrics, implying that decentralized governments are more responsive to citizen demands and preferences, particularly in the delivery of public services, than their centralized counterparts.

These are the outlines of key issues and challenges related to democracy, government, and governance in ASEAN. First is an overview of democracy, government, and governance in ASEAN. ASEAN members, representing Southeast Asian countries, have diverse political systems, ranging from fully democratic in Indonesia and the Philippines, to semi-authoritarian in Thailand, and authoritarian regimes in Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar. These different political systems lead to different priorities in decision-making. Governance quality varies significantly, influenced by historical legacies, cultural factors, and levels of economic development. Under ASEAN's institutional framework, this diversity presents challenges for regional consolidation, especially considering ASEAN's principle of non-interference, which

limits direct promotion of democracy among member states, favoring sovereignty and stability. This often hinders collective action on regional problems rooted in domestic governance issues (e.g., Myanmar's political crisis or the haze pollution from Indonesian forest fires). Weak enforcement mechanisms also occur as ASEAN struggles to enforce agreements or hold states accountable, undermining its problem-solving capacity.

Moreover, political and institutional challenges within ASEAN include weak democratic institutions. Some ASEAN states have fragile judicial systems and underdeveloped electoral mechanisms, leading to persistent corruption across the region, which undermines trust in governance. This is often exacerbated by limited public access to information and a lack of government transparency in several ASEAN states, questioning governance, accountability, and the rule of law. This situation shows the unequal application of the law and the potential for political interference in judicial processes. On the other hand, citizen participation in some states is limited due to repressive laws, lack of civil liberties, or controlled media landscapes. Institutional theory argues that governance quality depends on the strength and adaptability of institutions, emphasizing both formal structures like laws and regulations and informal norms such as cultural values and traditions (North D. C. Institutions , 1990).

To evaluate how a government ensures good quality governance for its people, we should consider how they use their authority or legitimacy in various circumstances. For instance, governments acting as legal institutions should make policies based on public needs or be public-oriented. They should be adaptive in assessing how policies work. Governments must strengthen democratic institutions by creating an independent judiciary to ensure courts are free from political interference and uphold the rule of law, conducting free and fair elections, and empowering parliaments to effectively check the executive branch. To increase public trust, governments should promote transparency through open data policies, making government data accessible to the public to enable informed decision-making and reduce corruption. They should also understand the public's diverse viewpoints by reaching out through digital communication for clear, timely, and accurate information about policies, laws, and public spending. Whistleblower protections are crucial to encourage reporting of malpractice by safeguarding those who come forward. By providing public access to information on policy-making or progress, governments should ensure accountability by evaluating public service effectiveness or conducting regular audits of government spending and publishing the results.

Analyzing governance comparisons among ASEAN member countries is crucial for several reasons, particularly given the region's economic, political, and cultural diversity. For example, in terms of regional stability and cooperation, ASEAN operates on a consensus-driven model of decision-making, which requires alignment despite differing governance structures. Understanding these differences helps identify challenges and opportunities for shared goals like regional security, economic integration, and sustainable development. In economic development and trade, governance quality directly impacts economic performance and trade facilitation. Countries with robust governance frameworks—like Singapore and Malaysia—tend to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI) and foster innovation. Analyzing governance can highlight gaps and suggest reforms for less-developed members like Cambodia and Myanmar to enhance regional economic integration.

In terms of human rights and inclusivity, governance differences significantly affect human rights, civil liberties, and inclusivity across the region. Comparing governance helps spotlight issues like political repression, media restrictions, or violations of minority rights (e.g., Myanmar's Rohingya crisis), providing a basis for ASEAN and international stakeholders to engage constructively. This analysis is also significant for policy harmonization; disparities in governance can hinder standardization of policies on critical issues like climate change, cybersecurity, or public health. A comparative analysis can reveal areas needing greater alignment to address transboundary challenges effectively. For policymakers, businesses, and international organizations, understanding governance variations ensures better planning and decision-making. For instance, investors can tailor their strategies based on regulatory environments, and development agencies can prioritize countries needing institutional support. Despite each country's differing backgrounds, this can also strengthen ASEAN's global role. As ASEAN grows in geopolitical importance, its ability to present a cohesive stance depends on mitigating governance-related disparities. Comparative analyses provide insights into fostering collective strength while respecting the region's diversity. By studying governance differences, ASEAN can better balance its principle of non-interference with proactive collaboration, fostering unity amid diversity.

The complexity of government and governance in ASEAN members lies in the interplay of institutional heterogeneity, historical legacies, divergent policy outcomes, and the regional emphasis on sovereignty. Using comparative politics frameworks, one can argue that these factors not only define the governance challenges within ASEAN but also highlight the need for innovative, context-sensitive approaches to strengthen

regional collaboration while respecting diversity. The complexity of government and governance in ASEAN member states can be analyzed through a combination of International Relations theories and relevant governance concepts. This analysis reflects the interplay of domestic political systems, regional dynamics, and global forces. Liberal institutionalism highlights the role of institutions in fostering cooperation and achieving common goals. This perspective argues that institutions like ASEAN can mitigate anarchy in the international system by promoting mutual trust, regularizing interactions, and reducing uncertainty among states.

Key arguments in liberal institutionalism relevant to ASEAN include: **Interdependence and Regional Stability:** ASEAN members benefit from economic and political interdependence, which can decrease conflict likelihood. This is achieved by creating a structure that encourages cooperation on shared goals like economic growth and security while discouraging unilateralism or isolationism. ASEAN's role in establishing norms for peaceful dispute resolution aligns with liberal institutionalism's emphasis on the value of norms and rules. For example, the ASEAN Way promotes non-interference and consensus-building, fostering regional harmony despite the diversity of political systems (Ramli & Idris, 2022). **Adaptability in Governance:** Liberal institutionalists argue that institutions like ASEAN can evolve to address emerging global challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity, and transnational crime. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining relevance and effectiveness (Devitt, 2011). Critics, however, note that ASEAN's informal approach sometimes leads to weak enforcement mechanisms. From a liberal institutionalist perspective, strengthening ASEAN's institutional capacity could enhance governance outcomes by addressing gaps in implementation and accountability.

In conclusion, liberal institutionalism provides a useful lens to analyze ASEAN's governance, highlighting its strengths in fostering cooperation and identifying areas for reform to handle complex regional challenges. For deeper insights into how this theory applies to ASEAN, works by Robert Keohane and analyses in regionalism-focused studies offer rich theoretical grounding. ASEAN institutions like the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) aim to standardize governance in areas such as trade, investment, and regulatory frameworks. However, the diversity of domestic governance systems presents significant challenges. Countries with robust institutions (e.g., Singapore) are better equipped to meet AEC requirements, while others with weaker governance (e.g., Myanmar, Cambodia) struggle to comply. Liberal institutionalism underscores the need for capacity-building measures within ASEAN to address disparities and foster deeper

integration. Comparative politics frameworks can also be used to analyze this case, focusing on exploring how formal institutions (laws, constitutions, governmental structures) and informal norms shape governance. By analyzing ASEAN members' institutional variations, such as parliamentary systems vs. one-party states, we can determine key policy points.

Based on Douglass North's work on institutions and governance, North highlights their role as the "rules of the game" in shaping political and economic behavior. He distinguishes between formal institutions like constitutions, laws, and regulations, and informal institutions like cultural norms and societal expectations. The key argument is that institutional quality and economic performance are linked, with North arguing that effective governance depends on the alignment of formal and informal institutions. In the ASEAN case, Singapore exemplifies strong institutional alignment, fostering economic growth and efficient governance. In contrast, Cambodia and Myanmar face governance challenges due to weak institutional frameworks, leading to corruption and inefficiency. These institutional variations create a governance landscape that is inherently complex, complicating efforts to develop unified policies and frameworks under ASEAN's consensus-driven model.

Therefore, ASEAN must maintain control and consolidation despite its diverse and complex backgrounds by leveraging unique institutional principles, fostering a culture of consensus, and prioritizing practical cooperation over ideological alignment. Several ways ASEAN achieves this include through "The ASEAN Way," which emphasizes Consensus and Non-Interference. ASEAN's guiding principle, known as the ASEAN Way, emphasizes Consensus-Based Decision-Making. This means that all member states, regardless of size or influence, have an equal say in decisions, ensuring that no member feels marginalized. Additionally, there is the principle of non-interference; ASEAN respects the sovereignty of its members, avoiding intervention in domestic affairs, even in cases of governance challenges. This approach fosters trust and minimizes conflict between nations with varying political systems (e.g., democracies, monarchies, and socialist states). These principles prioritize harmony over enforcement, creating a flexible framework that accommodates diversity. ASEAN adopts pragmatic regionalism, focusing on areas of mutual benefit such as economic integration through the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which promotes trade liberalization, market integration, and regulatory convergence despite disparities in economic development among member states. ASEAN also focuses on practical issues like disaster management

(e.g., the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance), transnational crime, and climate change, where collaboration is critical.

This pragmatic approach allows ASEAN to sidestep contentious issues while building trust and functional interdependence. ASEAN has created mechanisms to manage internal diversity and external pressures. Gradually, ASEAN holds meetings and dialogue partnerships where it engages with global powers (e.g., China, the U.S., and Japan) through frameworks like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), ensuring it remains central in regional geopolitics. Therefore, ASEAN has skillfully balanced relationships with global powers, ensuring its members' interests are protected without aligning fully with any bloc. In conclusion, ASEAN's ability to manage its complexity stems from its emphasis on consensus, non-interference, and practical cooperation. While its approach may sometimes result in slow progress or weak enforcement, it is hoped that it will increase the possibility of creating effective solutions for maintaining regional peace and promoting integration in a highly diverse region. However, we cannot hope for too much due to the dynamic political situations within ASEAN and the countries around it.

Conclusion

Southeast Asia's diverse political systems, cultural landscapes, and economic disparities present unique challenges to implementing good governance. However, these challenges also create opportunities for tailored solutions that balance regional diversity with universal governance principles. By focusing on strategic reforms and leveraging regional cooperation, Southeast Asian countries can make significant strides toward achieving good governance. Key measures include strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring the rule of law, and fostering transparency and accountability. Governments must actively engage civil society, empower marginalized communities, and create participatory platforms that enhance citizen involvement. Leveraging technology, particularly through e-governance, can streamline processes, reduce corruption, and increase efficiency.

Regional collaboration, facilitated by ASEAN, should emphasize capacity building, knowledge sharing, and collective responses to cross-border challenges such as corruption, environmental sustainability, and human rights. ASEAN's non-interference principle must evolve to allow constructive dialogue and support for governance reforms without compromising sovereignty. By committing to inclusive, transparent, and

accountable governance, Southeast Asian nations can not only address internal issues but also build a resilient region that fosters equitable development, social cohesion, and trust in public institutions. Through a unified vision and localized strategies, the region can set a global example of adaptive and effective governance.

Southeast Asia's development has been hindered by weak governance and dysfunctional institutions. The region's economic downturn revealed systemic corruption, poor fiscal management, and political instability. While transitional economies in the region managed to avoid the worst of the crisis, structural "distortions" in their economic systems have impeded sustained growth. To promote equitable and resilient development, Southeast Asia must implement fundamental reforms in governance and the public sector. These reforms should focus on enhancing transparency and accountability, making rules and incentives more adaptive, improving the efficiency of institutional frameworks, and fostering coalitions for change to sustain reform momentum.

Southeast Asian countries must prioritize the establishment of robust systems for transparency and accountability, regardless of their stage of development. Central governments need to clearly define their roles, primarily focusing on delivering public goods and managing macroeconomic policy. This entails limiting their involvement to strategic guidance ("steering") while delegating operational responsibilities ("rowing") to other societal actors, such as the private sector and civil society. In practical terms, this approach requires "right-sizing" governments, which can partially be achieved through privatization. Examples of such efforts include accelerated privatization in Indonesia and reforms in Vietnam's state-owned enterprises, both supported by international donors.

By scaling back direct provisioning functions and fostering market-driven solutions, Southeast Asian governments can enhance public-sector efficiency, alleviate fiscal pressures, and increase accountability. However, downsizing must be approached with caution. Countries like Thailand and the Philippines may need to expand their public sectors in the short term to address pressing developmental gaps before stabilizing at a more optimal size. Achieving the right balance between government size, economic growth, and societal welfare is critical for sustainable development in the region. But despite ASEAN's efforts to create consolidation through many discussions and international meetings with various countries' affiliates, it still needs further evaluation in responding to critics who argue that the ASEAN Community's effectiveness is limited due to its structural and political complexities, making it unreliable as a mechanism for resolving significant regional issues.

Several key arguments highlight why ASEAN's structural complexities hinder its dependability. First, ASEAN comprises a range of political systems, Second, ASEAN institutions lack enforcement mechanisms, as agreements are non-binding. And third, the ASEAN Way has double standards regarding the principles of consensus and non-interference, which often hinders solving both internal and regional problems. Therefore, ASEAN may struggle to achieve rapid consolidation through its ASEAN Community initiative. While the ASEAN Community initiative has ambitious goals, scientific analyses of political, economic, cultural, and institutional factors suggest that rapid consolidation is unlikely. The organization may achieve gradual progress, but its structural limitations and internal diversity make fast integration a formidable challenge.

Suggestions

ASEAN, as an organization of countries in Southeast Asia, must have a forum that plays an active role in relation to existing conditions, especially with changes occurring in many sectors of ASEAN member countries. Here are several suggestions:

- a) **Comparative Analysis of Governance Models:** Examine the diversity of governance systems across ASEAN members, including democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian states. Highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each model in addressing governance challenges.
- b) **Focus on Regional Challenges:** Analyze cross-cutting issues such as corruption, inequality, weak institutions, and human rights concerns. Provide case studies from specific ASEAN countries to illustrate common governance challenges and unique national contexts.
- c) **Evaluate the Role of ASEAN:** Assess how ASEAN's principles of non-interference and consensus-based decision-making influence governance within member states. Explore opportunities for ASEAN to play a more active role in promoting good governance while respecting state sovereignty.
- d) **Highlight the Impact of Globalization and Technology:** Discuss how global economic trends and technological advancements (e.g., e-governance, digital platforms) shape governance reforms in ASEAN countries. Address risks like digital authoritarianism and cyber threats while promoting digital inclusion.

- e) Propose Pathways for Reform: Suggest practical steps for improving governance, such as institutional reforms, anti-corruption measures, and capacity building. Emphasize the importance of participatory governance, citizen engagement, and decentralization.

By incorporating these suggestions, the paper can offer a comprehensive understanding of the issues and challenges in governance across ASEAN while providing actionable recommendations for improvement.

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