

NATIONAL RESILIENCE UNDER PRESSURE: INDONESIA'S STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO INDO-PACIFIC GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION

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Abstract

This article examines how Indo-Pacific geopolitical dynamics translate into concrete pressures on Indonesia's national resilience and what policy responses are most plausible across the political, economic, and defense-security domains. It addresses a gap in the literature: studies on Indo-Pacific competition often remain separated from analyses of Indonesia's national resilience and rarely integrate geopolitical structure, regional security interaction, and adaptive state capacity in a single framework. The study uses a qualitative literature-based design with a structured review of scholarly works, policy documents, and official statistical reports. The analysis applies framework analysis to trace causal pathways linking great-power rivalry, the South China Sea dispute, militarization, and regional economic interdependence to Indonesia's resilience challenges. Because the study relies on secondary sources, it does not include primary interviews or subnational case evidence. The findings show that Indonesia is exposed to intensifying geopolitical competition through diplomatic pressure, supply-chain and investment vulnerability, and growing demands for maritime surveillance and defense modernization. At the same time, Indonesia's strategic location also creates leverage through ASEAN-centred diplomacy, sea-lane connectivity, and issue-based cooperation. The article argues that strengthening national resilience requires not only adaptive diplomacy and maritime defense, but also economic diversification, institutional coordination, and a realistic recognition of policy trade-offs in responding to Indo-Pacific competition.

Keywords: geopolitics, national resilience, Indonesia, Indo-Pacific, regional security

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia occupies a strategic maritime position between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and between the Asian and Australian continents. This location places the country along major sea lines of communication, trade routes, and energy flows while also exposing it to rivalry among major powers and instability in adjacent waters. In the Indo-Pacific context, geography is therefore not a neutral backdrop; it shapes both opportunity and vulnerability for Indonesian statecraft (ASEAN, 2019; Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015; Flint, 2016).

National resilience in the Indonesian context refers to the capacity of the state and society to preserve sovereignty, maintain core functions, and adapt to external and internal pressures. Law Number 3 of 2002 and Indonesia's defense white paper make clear that sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national safety cannot be separated from political, economic, and security readiness. Regional geopolitical change must therefore be treated as a multidimensional challenge rather than a narrowly military problem (Government of Indonesia, 2002; Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

Existing literature has established that the Indo-Pacific is increasingly shaped by major-power rivalry, maritime disputes, and institutional contestation. However, much of this literature discusses either regional competition at the international level or Indonesian foreign and defense policy in isolation. Fewer studies explain systematically how regional geopolitical dynamics are transmitted into concrete resilience pressures across Indonesia's political, economic, and defense-security domains. The literature also tends to use either geopolitical, regional-security, or resilience perspectives separately, leaving limited theoretical integration between structural exposure, regional interaction, and adaptive state capacity (Anggoro, 2020; Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Chandler, 2014; Acharya, 2014).

This article contributes in three ways. First, it integrates classical geopolitics, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), and resilience theory to explain Indonesia's position more comprehensively. Second, it identifies the causal pathways through which regional tensions affect diplomacy, trade, investment, logistics, maritime governance, and defense planning. Third, it evaluates not only vulnerability but also Indonesia's strategic agency, including the possibility of hedging, ASEAN-centred diplomacy, and selective economic diversification.

Accordingly, the article asks three questions: (1) How do Indo-Pacific geopolitical dynamics affect Indonesia's national resilience across political, economic, and defense-security domains? (2) Which regional factors most

strongly shape Indonesia's national stability? and (3) What strategic responses are available to Indonesia, and what trade-offs accompany them? The objective of the study is to provide an analytically integrated explanation of these issues and to generate policy-relevant insights for strengthening national resilience under conditions of sustained regional competition.

Literature Review

Classical Geopolitics and Its Contemporary Revision

Classical geopolitics begins from the proposition that location, access, and control over strategic space shape the distribution of power among states. Mackinder and Spykman remain important because they explain why maritime routes, chokepoints, and border regions become focal points of competition. For a country such as Indonesia, whose strategic environment is defined by archipelagic geography and sea-lane connectivity, classical geopolitics offers a useful starting point for identifying structural exposure to external rivalry (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1942; Cohen, 2003).

At the same time, contemporary scholarship has criticized classical geopolitics for geographic determinism. Critical geopolitics argues that geography does not mechanically determine state behaviour; strategic meaning is also produced through discourse, institutions, technology, and policy agency. In other words, geography matters, but it does not operate independently from the choices of political actors or from wider ideational and institutional settings (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Dodds, 2007; Flint, 2016).

This critique is important for the present study. Indonesia's location does not automatically make the country weak or trapped; it can also create bargaining leverage, hedging opportunities, and diplomatic centrality. Accordingly, this article uses classical geopolitics in a revised form: geography is treated as a conditioning factor rather than a deterministic cause. Contemporary maritime scholarship also extends Spykman's insight by showing that sea power today depends not only on physical access, but also on maritime domain awareness, logistics, interoperability, and control over strategic infrastructure and trade networks (Till, 2018).

Regional Security Complex Theory

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) explains that security interactions are usually most intense at the regional level because proximate states are more likely to affect one another's threat perceptions and policy responses. For Indonesia, this theory is useful because it situates the country within a broader Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific environment in which the security choices of China, the United States, ASEAN states, and external partners interact in cumulative ways (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

RSCT helps explain why developments in the South China Sea, defense alignments, and maritime incidents matter even when Indonesia is not the principal claimant in every dispute. Security interdependence means that pressures generated elsewhere in the region can alter Indonesia's diplomatic room for manoeuvre, defense planning, and economic confidence. The theory is therefore relevant for identifying how regional dynamics travel across borders and become domestic resilience challenges.

However, RSCT also has limitations. Its original formulation is strongly state-centric and is less well equipped to capture non-traditional threats, private-sector dependence, technological interdependence, and transnational vulnerabilities. In Southeast Asia, scholars such as Acharya have shown that regional order is shaped not only by state rivalry but also by institutional norms, regional identity, and cooperative practices. For that reason, RSCT is used here as a framework for mapping regional interaction, but not as a complete explanation of all security pressures affecting Indonesia (Acharya, 2014).

Resilience Theory, Critiques, and Alternative Concepts

Resilience theory shifts attention from the elimination of threats to the capacity to absorb shocks, adapt, and recover while preserving core functions. In national-security analysis, this perspective is valuable because states rarely operate in threat-free environments. What matters is whether institutions can continue to function under pressure and adjust without systemic breakdown (Chandler, 2014; Keković & Ninković, 2020).

For Indonesia, resilience theory is especially relevant because geopolitical pressure is multidimensional. Great-power rivalry may affect diplomacy, maritime enforcement, investment flows, logistics, energy security, and public confidence at the same time. A resilience lens allows these pressures to be analysed together rather than through a narrowly military frame.

Nevertheless, resilience is not an uncontested concept. Critics argue that resilience language can normalize permanent adaptation to unequal or unjust conditions, shifting attention away from structural reform. Alternative concepts such as robustness and antifragility also offer useful insights. Robustness emphasizes resistance and continuity, while antifragility highlights the capacity to improve through disorder (Taleb, 2012). This article nonetheless prioritizes resilience because the Indonesian case is best understood as a problem of adaptive governance under recurring pressure rather than one of total resistance or of gaining advantages from crisis.

Alternative Frameworks and Rationale for Theory Selection

Other theoretical lenses could also have been used. Constructivism would highlight identity, norms, and strategic narratives; institutionalism would emphasize ASEAN-led rules and organizational effects; and hedging theory would focus on how middle powers avoid binary alignment under great-power rivalry. These approaches are relevant and informative, especially for Indonesia's free-and-active foreign policy and ASEAN diplomacy.

However, no single one of these approaches sufficiently captures the full problem addressed in this article. The analytical task here is to connect structural exposure, regional interaction, and domestic adaptive capacity. Classical geopolitics clarifies why Indonesia's location matters; RSCT explains how regional tensions are transmitted; and resilience theory evaluates how the state responds across sectors. The combination therefore offers broader explanatory reach than any one framework used alone.

Integrated Conceptual Framework

This study adopts an integrated conceptual framework in which classical geopolitics identifies Indonesia's spatial exposure, RSCOT maps the regional pathways through which pressures are transmitted, and resilience theory evaluates the state's capacity to absorb, adapt, and respond. The three frameworks are therefore complementary rather than competing: the first explains where vulnerability and leverage come from, the second explains how regional interaction intensifies them, and the third explains what kinds of national responses are institutionally viable.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design with a structured literature review. The research is interpretive in orientation and policy-analytical in purpose: it does not seek to test a formal causal model statistically, but to explain how regional geopolitical dynamics are translated into concrete resilience challenges for Indonesia across multiple domains.

The source base consists of three categories of materials. First, the study draws on foundational works in geopolitics, regional security, and resilience in order to define the theoretical framework. Second, it reviews contemporary scholarly literature on the Indo-Pacific, Southeast Asian security, maritime strategy, and middle-power behaviour. Third, it incorporates official policy and statistical sources from ASEAN, the Government of Indonesia, SIPRI, Bank Indonesia, BPS, and BKPM to ground the discussion in current strategic and economic developments. The literature search prioritizes publications from roughly the last decade for contemporary analysis, while retaining key classical texts where conceptually necessary.

Sources were selected using relevance-based inclusion criteria. Included materials had to meet at least one of the following conditions: (1) directly discuss Indo-Pacific geopolitical competition, Southeast Asian security, or maritime contestation; (2) address Indonesia's national resilience, defense, foreign policy, or economic vulnerability; or (3) provide authoritative institutional data relevant to the identified resilience domains. Duplicate items, purely journalistic commentary, and materials without clear

authorship or evidentiary basis were excluded. Search terms included combinations of “Indonesia,” “Indo-Pacific,” “geopolitics,” “national resilience,” “regional security,” “South China Sea,” “maritime security,” and “hedging.”

The analytical procedure combined thematic coding with framework analysis. In the first stage, the materials were coded into recurrent themes such as major-power rivalry, maritime disputes, ASEAN centrality, defense modernization, trade vulnerability, and institutional adaptation. In the second stage, the coded evidence was organized through the three theoretical lenses used in this article: classical geopolitics to identify structural exposure, RSCT to map regional transmission mechanisms, and resilience theory to evaluate adaptive state capacity. In the third stage, the findings were synthesized across four outcome domains—political, economic, defense, and security—in order to identify both vulnerability pathways and strategic response options.

To strengthen analytical rigor, the study relies on source triangulation by comparing academic interpretations with official policy documents and statistical releases. It also applies reflexive caution by acknowledging that secondary-source analysis may overrepresent formal state perspectives and published scholarship. The main limitations of the design are that it does not include primary interviews with policymakers, does not systematically capture subnational perspectives, and cannot fully observe classified or unpublished strategic deliberations. These limits are explicitly recognized in interpreting the findings.

DISCUSSION

Regional Geopolitical Dynamics Affect Indonesia’s National Resilience

Regional geopolitical dynamics affect Indonesia’s national resilience through a set of linked causal pathways rather than through abstract pressure alone. Classical geopolitics helps explain why Indonesia is exposed in the first place: its location across major sea lanes and between two oceans makes regional instability strategically consequential. Yet geography does not

determine outcomes by itself. The same location that generates exposure also creates room for agency through maritime connectivity, diplomatic centrality, and issue-based coalition building (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1942; Flint, 2016).

From the RSCT perspective, the significance of Indo-Pacific rivalry lies in the way threats are transmitted across the regional security environment. Indonesia does not need to be the principal claimant in every maritime dispute to experience its effects. When regional alignments harden, naval presence intensifies, or crisis signalling escalates, Indonesia faces a narrower diplomatic space, greater maritime enforcement burdens, and higher uncertainty in defense planning. This is why regional stability matters directly to national resilience rather than merely to foreign-policy prestige (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Acharya, 2014).

The political mechanism operates through pressure on strategic autonomy. Major-power competition can compel states to clarify preferences, accept external security initiatives, or adjust diplomatic language in ways that may reduce room for manoeuvre. Political resilience in this context therefore depends on institutional consistency, the credibility of Indonesia's free-and-active foreign policy, and the state's ability to coordinate foreign, defense, and economic messaging without appearing strategically incoherent (Chandler, 2014; ASEAN, 2019).

The economic mechanism is more concrete than the earlier draft suggested. Geopolitical volatility can weaken investor confidence, raise insurance and logistics costs on regional shipping routes, interrupt supply chains, and increase risk premiums for firms dependent on external financing. Indonesia's trade exposure to China and ASEAN means that turbulence in the regional order can affect export demand, import costs, exchange-rate expectations, and business planning in relatively short order. Economic resilience therefore depends not only on macroeconomic stability, but also on diversification of markets, logistics reliability, and policy credibility (BPS, 2025; BPS, 2026; Bank Indonesia, 2026).

In the defense and security domain, intensified rivalry raises the likelihood of gray-zone coercion, maritime incidents, surveillance burdens, and deterrence dilemmas. SIPRI's data on rising military expenditure do not automatically mean war is imminent, but they do indicate a more competitive strategic environment. For Indonesia, resilience in this domain involves maritime domain awareness, readiness, interoperability, early-warning capacity, and the ability to prevent limited incidents from escalating into wider political crises (SIPRI, 2025; Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015; Till, 2018).

Counter-arguments, however, should be acknowledged. Indonesia's geography is not only a source of vulnerability; it can also provide leverage, especially when competing powers need access, diplomatic legitimacy, or regional stability. Likewise, some scholars argue that higher military spending can under certain conditions contribute to mutual deterrence rather than instability. These alternative interpretations are valid, but their stabilizing effect depends on strong institutions, communication channels, and the absence of persistent miscalculation. In a fragmented regional environment, those conditions cannot be assumed.

Regional Geopolitical Factors Affecting Indonesia's National Stability

Five factors most strongly shape Indonesia's national stability. The first is major-power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, which affects diplomatic agendas, technology and infrastructure choices, defense partnerships, and the regional balance of influence. For Indonesia, the key challenge is not only to avoid entrapment, but also to prevent its strategic autonomy from being gradually narrowed by cumulative external expectations (ASEAN, 2019; ASEAN, 2024).

The second factor is the South China Sea dispute. Even without being the principal claimant in every contested space, Indonesia is affected through the Natuna area, maritime law-enforcement demands, and the broader implications for freedom of navigation and regional order. The dispute matters because it tests whether regional rules and crisis-management mechanisms remain credible under pressure (ASEAN, 2024).

The third factor is regional militarization. Rising defense budgets, expanding naval presence, and more frequent security signalling increase the risk of misperception. For Indonesia, this does not simply justify more spending; it requires smarter prioritization between deterrence, surveillance, procurement, and regional confidence-building. This is also where policy trade-offs emerge most clearly, because resources allocated to defense modernization inevitably compete with development and welfare priorities.

The fourth factor is economic interdependence. Indonesia's export and import structure links domestic stability to the performance of regional markets and to the security of trade corridors. Vulnerability is therefore shaped not only by external shocks themselves, but also by the concentration of commercial dependence and by the resilience of domestic buffers such as reserves, logistics capacity, and investment quality (BPS, 2026; Bank Indonesia, 2026; BKPM, 2026).

The fifth factor is the strength of ASEAN-centred regional architecture. ASEAN centrality remains important because it offers Indonesia a platform to socialize rules, manage tensions, and avoid pure bilateralization of strategic pressure. Comparative experience is instructive here: Vietnam and the Philippines have relied more visibly on maritime assertion and external balancing, while smaller states such as Cambodia and Laos have had less strategic room for manoeuvre. Indonesia's position is distinct, but the wider regional pattern shows that resilience is always shaped by the interaction between domestic capacity and regional institutional space.

Indonesia's Strategy for Maintaining National Resilience Amid Regional Geopolitical Dynamics

Indonesia's first strategic task is to preserve diplomatic flexibility without allowing flexibility to become ambiguity. Adaptive diplomacy remains necessary, but it must be backed by coherent signalling and by clear priorities regarding sovereignty, ASEAN centrality, and maritime order. Otherwise, efforts to hedge between major powers can be interpreted domestically or externally as indecision rather than strategy.

Second, Indonesia should strengthen ASEAN-centred mechanisms while also preparing for periods when ASEAN consensus is weak. This means supporting dialogue and rules-based regional processes, but also building minilateral and issue-specific cooperation on maritime safety, logistics continuity, and crisis communication where broader consensus is difficult. ASEAN centrality is valuable, but it should be treated as a strategic asset that requires active maintenance rather than as a self-sustaining condition.

Third, maritime resilience should be improved through better surveillance, presence, inter-agency coordination, and selective modernization. The policy objective is not maximal militarization, but credible control over strategic waters and rapid response to limited incidents. This is especially important because gray-zone challenges often fall between traditional military and civilian enforcement responsibilities.

Fourth, economic resilience should focus on diversification and shock absorption. Indonesia cannot eliminate regional dependence, but it can reduce concentration risk by broadening export destinations, strengthening domestic logistics, protecting critical supply chains, and maintaining macroeconomic buffers. Here again trade-offs matter: not every diversification strategy is costless, and short-term efficiency can conflict with long-term resilience.

Fifth, integrated national resilience requires an operational coordination mechanism. A standing inter-agency resilience forum linking foreign affairs, defense, maritime agencies, trade, investment, central banking, and national planning would improve scenario planning, shared indicators, and crisis response. Such a mechanism would also help manage inter-agency conflicts by clarifying priorities, timelines, and escalation channels rather than assuming that whole-of-government coordination will emerge automatically.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Indo-Pacific geopolitical dynamics affect Indonesia's national resilience through interconnected political, economic,

defense, and security pathways. The core contribution of the study is to show that geography, regional interaction, and adaptive state capacity must be analyzed together. Classical geopolitics explains Indonesia's structural exposure and leverage; RSCT explains how regional pressures are transmitted; and resilience theory explains the institutional requirements for maintaining stability under sustained pressure.

The analysis also shows that policy recommendations are not cost free. Stronger maritime capability may improve deterrence but competes with other development priorities. Adaptive diplomacy may preserve flexibility but can be difficult to sustain under domestic and external pressure. Economic diversification improves resilience over time, but it requires adjustment costs and institutional discipline. For that reason, national resilience should be treated as a problem of strategic prioritization and cross-sector coordination rather than as a list of uniformly beneficial measures.

Operationally, the most plausible strategy is a layered one: maintain ASEAN-centred diplomacy, strengthen maritime domain awareness, diversify economic exposure, and institutionalize whole-of-government coordination. These steps are more credible when accompanied by clear implementation mechanisms, shared indicators, and regular scenario-based planning across agencies.

This study has several limitations. Because it relies on secondary literature and official documents, it cannot fully capture confidential strategic deliberations, subnational perspectives, or the informal politics of implementation. Its national-level focus also means that local community experiences in border and maritime areas are underrepresented. Future research could extend this work through interviews with policymakers, comparative analysis with other Southeast Asian states, and scenario-based studies of how simultaneous geopolitical and economic shocks would stress Indonesia's resilience.

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