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A Role Theory Analysis of Indonesia's Accession to BRICS under the Prabowo Subianto Administration

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Abstract

Existing literature on Indonesia's accession to BRICS under the Prabowo Subianto administration has largely examined the issue through a single analytical lens, focusing on either structural or agential perspectives and either material or non-material interests as the underlying factors. This study therefore introduces role theory as a framework to integrate these explanations and asks: "How did national role conceptions, role prescription, and status shape Indonesia's role performance in its decision to join BRICS?" Through document analysis and library research, findings show that national role conceptions, role prescription, and status influence Indonesia's role performance both independently and collectively. Indonesia's status as a middle power and part of the Global South aligns with BRICS' agenda, particularly on global governance reform. Role prescription is reflected in BRICS' formal invitation, which paved the way for Indonesia's membership. The Prabowo administration's role conceptions of active-independent, a voice for developing countries, and bridge-builder position BRICS in line with Indonesia's foreign policy orientation. Collectively, these variables interact in shaping external expectations, status recognition, role conceptions, and Indonesia's decision to join BRICS. Therefore, this study offers the first systematic role theory analysis of Indonesia's BRICS membership, providing an integrated explanation of its structural, agential, material, and non-material dimensions.

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Abstrak

Literatur akademis mengenai aksesi Indonesia ke BRICS pada pemerintahahan Prabowo Subianto umumnya hanya menggunakan satu perspektif analisis, salah satu dari perspektif struktural dan agensi, dan salah satu dari faktor materi atau non-materi. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini akan menggunakan teori peran sebagai kerangka teori yang mengintegrasikan perspektif-perspektif tersebut dan menjawab rumusan masalah "Bagaimana national role conceptions, role prescription, dan status membentuk role performance Indonesia dalam keputusannya untuk bergabung sebagai anggota BRICS?" Melalui studi dokumentasi dan pustaka, hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa national role conceptions, role prescription, dan status memengaruhi role performance Indonesia secara independen dan kolektif. Status Indonesia sebagai middle power dan Global South sesuai dengan agenda BRICS, terutama dalam reformasi tata kelola global. Role prescription berpengaruh melalui undangan formal dari BRICS yang membuka jalan terhadap aksesi Indonesia. National role conceptions pemerintahan Prabowo sebagai active independent, a voice for developing countries, dan bridge-builder membuat BRICS dipahami sebagai forum yang sejalan orientasi kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia. Secara kolektif, ketiga variabel saling memengaruhi dalam membentuk ekspektasi eksternal, pengakuan status, konsepsi peran nasional, dan keputusan Indonesia bergabung. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menyediakan analisis teori peran yang sistematis dan pertama dalam diskursus keanggotaan Indonesia di BRICS, sekaligus mengintegrasikan dimensi struktural, agensi, material, dan non-material dari keputusan tersebut.

Keywords: BRICS, Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto's Administration, Role theory

Introduction

Indonesia, under the Prabowo Subianto administration, formally joined BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as a permanent member in January 2025.[1] The decision, however, has been widely perceived as an unanticipated maneuver, due to the country's longstanding commitment to the *bebas-aktif* doctrine. Although BRICS labels itself as an inclusive multilateral forum amongst emerging economies, its strong commitment for global governance reform is often viewed as a counter-alternative to the western-led international order. Consequently, on one hand, the decision appears to be inconsistent with the *bebas-aktif* doctrine that traditionally emphasizes balanced engagement with major powers and to avoid formal alignment with any political bloc, especially given Indonesia's accession as a full BRICS member rather than a partner country. On the other hand, some suggest that BRICS accession is the actual implementation of the doctrine itself.[2] With this debate in mind, the decision makes the Prabowo administration's interpretation of the *bebas-aktif* doctrine analytically intriguing.

Furthermore, this issue becomes more compelling if we take Indonesia's recent multilateral engagements into account, particularly in global governance. Through BRICS' revisionist approach, Indonesia positions itself as a supporter of

global governance reform agenda to cater the interest of the Global South, as well as to promote alternative multilateral initiatives.[3] Indonesia, however, remains committed to the United Nations (UN) while supporting its internal reform agenda, such as UN80 Initiative.[4] At the same time, Indonesia is still working on its accession process to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a global economic development forum whose membership is predominantly consists of Global North countries. Therefore, Indonesia's simultaneous engagements across different multilateral forums raising broader question on how it conceptualizes its role within the current global governance.

The timing of Indonesia's accession to BRICS also adds another layer to the question. Since the establishment of BRICS during Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) administration, Indonesia has frequently expressed its interest to join the forum. Despite these expectations, Indonesia did not join the forum during the Yudhoyono administration. Conversely, Joko Widodo administration intensified Indonesia's engagement with BRICS and joined the forum as a partner country, although it chose not to pursue full membership.[5] The accession to BRICS then occurred under Prabowo Subianto, just months after his cabinet's inauguration. Consequently, many viewed joining BRICS as one of Prabowo Subianto's key foreign policy priority. This swift accession to BRICS therefore warrants further analysis of its underlying factors.

Building on these analytical gaps, there are a number of studies which examined Indonesia's accession to BRICS. However, existing studies have generally focused on the material dimensions of the issues. Most studies posit that joining BRICS allows Indonesia to strengthen economic cooperation with fellow emerging economies,[6] diversify export markets, as well as access potential investment and development funding.[7] Other studies add that the decision reflects Indonesia's pragmatic hedging strategy toward major powers and its growing influence in the international system.[8] [9] Although these material aspects indeed play a significant role, the non-material dimensions remain relatively underexplored.

Nevertheless, there have been a few attempts to bridge the non-material perspective into the discourse. Lee et al.[10], for instance, briefly introduced the notion of 'status-seeking' in explaining Prabowo Subianto administration's pursuit of domestic legitimacy through BRICS membership. Furthermore, Larasati and Pratiwi[11] provide a preliminary structural-agency analysis on the issue, arguing that BRICS membership reflects Indonesia's role adaption in the changing global order. However, the paper focuses more on the impact to Indonesia's downstreaming agenda, which leave the analysis of Indonesia's decision-making process not fully addressed.

Although existing studies offer very diverse analyses, there is a lack of integrated explanation of the factors underlying Indonesia's decision. To fill the gap, this study employs role theory as the theoretical framework, which accommodates both structural-agential and material-non-material perspectives. Therefore, this study uses a theory-based approach, focuses on the operationalization of role theory to examine Indonesia's decision to join BRICS.

Role theory was first adopted into International Relations studies by K.J. Holsti[12] in 1970. The main proposition of role theory is that foreign policy reflects a country's role performance, results from the interaction between domestic understanding of its role, external expectations, and its status in the international system. Through this proposition, role theory outlines three main variables that shape a country's role performance: status, role prescription, and national role conceptions.

First, status in role theory refers to a country's position in the international system, based on factors such as its participation in international affairs, military capabilities, economic capacity, and other factors. Second, role prescriptions are defined as the expectations and demands placed on a country by international actors and the broader international system. Third, national role conceptions are understood as a country's domestic perception of its orientations and responsibilities within the international and/or regional system, shaped by policymakers' views of the roles their state should assume.[13]

Using the theoretical framework, this study doesn't view the decision to join BRICS merely as an individual foreign policy, but rather as Indonesia's role performance in the international system. Therefore, we ask*: How did status, role prescriptions, and national role conceptions shape Indonesia's role performance in its decision to join BRICS?* With this question in mind, this study seeks to bridge the gap by offering a multidimensional analysis of how these variables, reflecting both structural and agential factors, shape Indonesia's role performance.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative-interpretive approach to operationalize role theory in examining Indonesia's accession to BRICS. Given that qualitative research may employ multiple data-collection methods, this study combines document analysis and library research, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. The data are then analyzed to examine how national role conception, role prescription, and status shape Indonesia's role performance.

Primary data are collected through document analysis of official Indonesian government statements and documents on BRICS and its foreign policy

direction. Specifically, this study prioritizes official statements by Indonesian Presidents and Foreign Ministers, following Holsti's approach of examining statements by the highest-level foreign policymakers. We put particular emphasis on the Prabowo administration by tracing its public statements from 2024 to 2025 across different audiences such as members of the House of Representatives, foreign counterparts, and the general public, to identify recurring patterns. Additionally, secondary data are drawn from academic literature, books, journal articles, news reports, and relevant publications to supplement the analysis where official statements are unavailable or insufficient.

Data are analyzed using Miles et al.'s [14] framework of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Following this framework, we continuously cross-check each finding, particularly those derived from official statements, against other official statements, supporting documents, relevant academic literature, and news reports. Interpretive analysis is specifically employed to identify Indonesia's national role conceptions as articulated in official statements, and to examine the relationships among the variables within the role theory framework.

Results and Discussion

Status: Indonesia as a Middle Power and a Part of the Global South

There is no clear consensus within International Relations scholarship on how to determine the status of individual countries. In his seminal paper, Holsti, too, notes that commonly used terms such as 'Great Power' and 'Middle Power' provide only a rough indication of countries' status and do not fully reflect their influence[15]. Some categorizations, however, are generally based on countries' participation in international affairs, military capabilities, economic capacity, technology, prestige, and other factors. This indicates that a country's status can be examine through different indicators and perspectives.

To help construct an appropriate categorization, we adopt the approach used by Rosyidin and Kusumawardhana[16] in determining a country's status. Their paper proposed that status consist of four complementary aspects. These aspects are: 1) the material aspect, which reflects a country's military and economic capabilities; 2) the behavioral aspect, with emphasis on foreign policy patterns; 3) the social aspect, which is related to international legitimacy and recognition; and 4) the cognitive aspect, which refers to domestic perceptions of the country's status.

We posit that Indonesia's accession to BRICS is associated with its status as an emerging middle power and as part of the Global South. While the former reflects Indonesia's individual status within the international system, the latter

reflects its collective status as part of the broader group of developing countries. This categorization can be examined using the four aspects outlined above.

Materially, it is widely accepted that Indonesia can be categorized as an emerging middle power and is positioned within the Global South. Middle powers are generally characterized by moderate economic and military power, as well as a degree of political influence internationally. These characteristics align with Indonesia's attributes, which is one of major economic power in Asia and one of the world's emerging markets, while possessing moderate military capabilities.[17] At the same time, Indonesia's status as middle power is, still, inextricably linked to its status as part of the Global South. Global South countries are often associated with developing, or even underdeveloped, economies with tangible disparities to the Global North. This is relevant to Indonesia's condition, as despite showing substantial growth in recent years, it remains classified as a not fully developed country due to the high levels of inequality in comparison with countries in the Global North.[18] Materially, therefore, Indonesia can be categorized both as middle power and part of the Global South.

From the behavioral perspective, Indonesia's foreign policies have also reflected the behavior of both a middle power and a Global South country. As a middle power, Indonesia has been increasingly active in international affairs, particularly in multilateral forums, although its degree of influence is not comparable to that of great powers. Specifically, Karim[19] uses the term 'emerging middle power' to describe Indonesia's behavior which tend to be more revisionist toward the global governance system, contrast to the 'traditional middle powers' which are generally Western countries that support the status quo of liberal international order. This revisionist approach also simultaneously associates Indonesia with the Global South movement, which advocated for global governance reform. This premise is consistent with Indonesia's long-standing involvements in South-South Cooperation, including through the historic Bandung/Asian-African conference.[20]

In the social context, international status is also contingent to recognitions from other actors. Rosyidin and Kusumawardhana explain that such recognitions are reflected through Indonesia's membership, position, and participation in various invitation-based and/or election-based multilateral forums. For example, Indonesia has served as an elected member of both the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Moreover, Indonesia has been invited to attend several summits where it is not a formal member, including the G7 Summit and BRICS Summit in 2023.[21] Although we disagree with Rosyidin and Kusumawardhana's categorization of Indonesia as a great power based on these recognitions, given the limited evidence of its actual influence, we acknowledge that Indonesia's

involvement in these forums reflects international recognition of its international status.

From the cognitive aspects, these statuses have been internalized domestically by Indonesian presidents over time. During Indonesia's early years, the Soekarno administration glorified the anti-imperialist narrative and perceive the country as the leader among newly independent countries, leading to the holding of Asian-African Conference and the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement.[22] Although the term 'Global South' did not yet exist during that time, Soekarno's vision for a more just global order laid the foundation for the later Global South movement, and continued to shaped domestic perceptions of Indonesia's international status across subsequent governments. In the case of middlepowermanship, Karim notes that the use of the term 'middle power' became more widely accepted in Indonesia's domestic self-perception during the SBY and Joko Widodo administrations.[23] This self-perception continued under the Prabowo administration and can be seen from several statements. During a meeting with the House of Representatives (DPR RI) on 2 December 2024, Indonesia's then Foreign Minister, Sugiono, stated that *"... Indonesia wants to become a strong country, an influential middle power that is respected by other countries."*[24] Similarly, during a bilateral meeting with South Korea, Prabowo stated that Indonesia and South Korea, as fellow middle powers, share common interests.[25] Thus, current Indonesian foreign policymakers have affirmed Indonesia's status as part of the Global South and as a middle power.

In relation to its accession to BRICS, we posit that Indonesia's status an emerging middle power and as part of the Global South are shaping variables to its decision to join BRICS as a full member. This is based on the alignment between Indonesia's status and the status and goals of BRICS itself. BRICS is a multilateral forum of developing countries that advocates reform of global governance. This is in line with Indonesia's status as an emerging middle power seeking to strengthen its role in establishing a more inclusive global order. Furthermore, BRICS's goal of advancing South-South interests is aligned with Indonesia's status as part of the Global South.

The alignment between Indonesia's status and that of BRICS can be traced in Sugiono's statement at the BRICS+ Summit in Kazan. He stated that *"BRICS can serve as an appropriate instrument for discussing and advancing the common interests of the Global South."*[26] This was strengthened by Minister of Foreign Affairs Regulation (*Permenlu*) No. 10 of 2025, which similarly states that BRICS is an appropriate platform for discussing and advancing the interests of developing countries, as well as for establishing a more representative multilateral system and global order.[27] These statements demonstrate that the Prabowo administration affirms BRICS' compatibility with Indonesia's status, particularly in advancing the interests of the Global South and the agenda of global governance reform.

Furthermore, while positioned as an appropriate platform for collective purposes of middle powers and the Global South, BRICS also provides a platform to strengthen the legitimacy of Indonesia's international status. This is due to BRICS' membership criteria, later discussed in the next chapter, which involve specific requirements. Indonesia's admission to BRICS indicates that it meets these criteria, especially in term of its status as a middle power and part of the Global South. This is consistent with Wardhana and Dharmaputra's[28] argument that the membership in BRICS is the Prabowo administration's quest for international status. Therefore, status constitutes a variable that shapes Indonesia's role performance to join BRICS as a full member.

Role Prescription: External Expectations toward Indonesia

Role theorists define role prescriptions as expectations held by external actors toward a country regarding role(s) it is expected to assume. We find that there are two types of expectations toward Indonesia in relation to its accession to BRICS. These are general expectations from the international community and formal expectations from BRICS itself.

General expectations regarding Indonesia's potential membership in BRICS had emerged among economists and international media. O'Neill,[29] in his article that coined the BRIC terminology, mentioned Indonesia as an emerging country with economic potential, although its prospects were not yet comparable to those of India and China. These expectations became more specific when Morgan Stanley analyst, Chetan Ahya, argued that Indonesia should be included to the existing BRIC forum, as reported by The Economic Times.[30] Similarly, China Daily[31] popularized the terms BRIIC or BRICI to include Indonesia in the grouping, even before South Africa joined. Together, these statements demonstrate that international actors had developed expectations regarding Indonesia's potential accession to BRICS.

These general expectations, however, were more a matter of recognition and opinion and thus did not directly influence Indonesia's membership in BRICS. Conversely, we find that formal institutional expectation was a primary factor in Indonesia's decision to join the grouping. In this case, the formal expectation was articulated by BRICS, which subsequently influenced the Prabowo administration's decision.

Our premise is grounded in BRICS's decisive role in the membership accession process. According to BRICS official website, prospective members must formally express their interest, after which their accession is considered by existing members and decided by consensus.[32] Furthermore, BRICS's recent expansion also followed an invitation-based mechanism, as demonstrated by BRICS invitation to six countries to become full members in 2023.[33] This process

shows that BRICS plays a decisive role in the accession of new members, with its formal invitations reflecting formal institutional expectations for prospective members to join the forum.

The significance of this formal expectation on BRICS membership can be observed through Indonesia's accession process. The SBY administration, for instance, had expressed an interest in joining BRICS, but it did not lead to concrete membership during his tenure. We argue that this was because the expectations on Indonesia's accession to BRICS were not formal institutional expectations, but rather general expectations expressed by economist and media. This is consistent with Kamalakaran's[34] report, which cited an Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs official stating that Indonesia would welcome an invitation to join BRICS, while noting that consensus among existing members was necessary and that no formal accession process had begun at the time. This suggests that Indonesia's accession remained contingent on a formal invitation and consensus among BRICS members.

In contrast to the SBY administration, Indonesia received an invitation to join BRICS during the administrations of Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. This was confirmed by then Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi during a meeting with the House of Representatives on 5 September 2024, when she stated that BRICS had approached and invited Indonesia to join the forum in 2023. However, the final decision to join BRICS was left entirely to the incoming Prabowo Subianto administration.[35] This proves that BRICS had established formal institutional expectations toward Indonesia regarding its membership accession.

Within the context of role prescription, BRICS's invitation to Indonesia also indicates broader expectations regarding the role Indonesia is expected to perform. These expectations are reflected in BRICS' criteria for prospective full members and partner countries, as well as the objectives of BRICS expansion. The four principal criteria for full membership include: (1) geographical balance; (2) good relations with all BRICS member countries; (3) support for global governance reform, including reform of the United Nations and its Security Council; and (4) non-imposition of unilateral sanctions.[36] These criteria are consistent with *BRICS Membership Expansion: Guiding Principles, Standards, Criteria and Procedures*,[37] which emphasizes multilateralism, international law, good relations among BRICS members, and support for global governance reform. As affirmed in the Johannesburg II Declaration,[38] these criteria reflect mutually agreed expectations among BRICS member states.

The invitation to join BRICS indicates that Indonesia was considered to have met the established criteria and aligned with BRICS' objectives for prospective members. It also demonstrates that BRICS held expectations for Indonesia to contribute to advancing the forum's agenda. More specifically,

BRICS expects Indonesia to contribute to promoting global governance reform in order to advance the collective interests of the Global South and developing countries.

Lastly, the invitation was important to the Prabowo administration's decision, given that it constituted a key prerequisite for Indonesia's accession to the forum. Therefore, it can be concluded that role prescription can be understood as a variable shaping Indonesia's role performance through its decision to join BRICS. This demonstrates role theory's premise that external expectations shape a country's role performance, as reflected in its foreign policy.

National Role Conceptions under the Prabowo Subianto Administration

Holsti defines role conceptions as "*policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the function, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional system."*[39] In other words, it refers to a state's internal perceptions of the role it occupies in international and regional affairs. Holsti further explains that role conceptions are shaped by domestic factors, such as geographical location, resources, national and traditional values, ideology, public opinion, and political interest. Therefore, it is necessary to first examine the sources of national role conceptions before identifying these conceptions.

In the context of Prabowo administration, we find that Indonesia's national role conceptions are shaped by a combination of traditional values, geographical condition, and strategic interests. These three contexts are intertwined in shaping the administration's perceptions of Indonesia's position and role in international affairs. Together, they also provide the basis to understand the Prabowo administration's role conceptions.

Traditionally, Indonesia's foreign policy has been grounded in the *bebas-aktif* doctrine. This doctrine requires Indonesia to maintain an independent foreign policy without aligning with any particular bloc while simultaneously participating actively in international affairs. This doctrine is also consistent with Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, Indonesia's ideological and constitutional foundations, which emphasize a commitment to humanitarian values and world peace. Therefore, this doctrine has continued to shape Indonesia's national role conceptions across different presidential administrations.[40]

These traditional values have also influenced Indonesia's role conceptions under the Prabowo administration. This can be observed in various statements made by Prabowo Subianto and Sugiono. For instance, while still a

presidential candidate, Prabowo Subianto outlined his foreign policy direction at a forum organized by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia, where he stated:

> "… the tradition of Indonesia's foreign policy has been very clear. From the early days of our independence and our sovereignty, we have opted for an independent foreign policy, guided by the principles of non-membership of any geopolitical bloc. Our tradition in foreign policy has always been non-aligned; we do not wish to be part of any geopolitical bloc. This tradition, I think I'm committed to continue and to pursue."[41]

A similar statement was subsequently made by Sugiono during a working meeting with Commission I of the House of Representative, in which he stated that:

> "From the outset, President Prabowo has established a foreign policy vision in which Indonesia remains committed to a non-aligned, non-bloc position, meaning that we do not position ourselves within any military bloc. We have no intention of joining any military pact because doing so would be inconsistent with our national interests, both constitutionally and traditionally." (Translation by the authors)[42]

These statements reflect the connection between Indonesia's traditional values and its foreign policy under the current administration. Furthermore, Indonesia's geographical conditions and the strategic interests of the Prabowo administration also contribute to the country's foreign policy. At the 2023 CSIS forum, Prabowo explained that Indonesia's geographical position, which lies at the crossroads of major civilizations and international trade routes, strengthens the need to maintain an independent and active foreign policy. Prabowo also added that the *bebas-aktif* doctrine should be maintained because it reflects the will of the majority of the Indonesian public.[43] Prabowo reiterated this statement at the 2025 Antalya Diplomacy Forum, stating, "… *And by tradition, every Indonesian government has to maintain this tradition. Otherwise, we will lose popular support.*"[44] Therefore, this indicates that Prabowo administration's national role conceptions are shaped not only by traditional values, but also by geographical factor and the strategic interests in maintaining public support.

Having examined the sources of the national role conceptions, this study identifies three dominant Indonesian role conceptions under the Prabowo administration, which are: 1) active-independent, 2) a voice for developing countries, and 3) bridge-builder. The first conception, active-independent, is defined as maintaining an independent foreign policy while actively expanding diplomatic and commercial relations with diverse countries.[45] The conception of a voice for developing countries reflects Indonesia's identity as a postcolonial state, its interests as part of the developing world, and its priority of domestic economic development.[46] Finally, bridge-builder extends Holsti's concept of the

'bridge', encompassing not only cross-cultural communication but also consensus-building and advancing common interests.[47]

These national role conceptions have been expressed, explicitly and implicitly, by the Prabowo administration on several occasions and in different contexts. The active-independent role conception is reflected in the Prabowo administration's emphasis on the *bebas-aktif* doctrine, which guides Indonesia's active engagement in international affairs while maintaining independence from any bloc. This is evident in Prabowo's statement at the 2023 CSIS forum, where he said:

> "I will continue dialogue, I will continue collaboration. I don't want protectionism, but I want equal playing field … Indonesia must maintain the best relations between all the great powers. By having these relations, we can be some sort of honest broker, some sort of bridge, by the fact that we have no hidden agenda … We need to have the best relations with all partners and all countries."[48]

The second role conception, a voice for developing countries, reflects Indonesia's view of the international system as unequal and insufficiently representative of developing countries. As part of the Global South, Indonesia seeks to advance their collective interests and promote a global governance system that better represents them. This can be traced to Prabowo's statement at the 2025 Antalya Diplomacy Forum, in which he noted

> "I tend to be now a bit pessimistic about the success of diplomacy … this is very, very distressing, very sad, for the rules-based system that has been created after the Second World War by the western powers themselves … there are demands, there are security councils, the permanent members should be increased to represent the reality of this present world. We have big countries like India, big countries like Brasil, you know, many countries that represent a big segment of the world population that feel underrepresented in the highest organs of the United Nations."[49]

Notwithstanding this revisionist approach to the global governance, Indonesia continues to maintain relations with developed countries and seeks to bridge the interests of the Global North and the Global South. This reflects the bridge-builder role conception, as expressed in Prabowo's statement at the 2025 World Government Summit:

> "We strive to listen as much as we speak, forging partnerships based on trust and mutual respect … advocating for dialogue among equals rather than adversaries … Indonesia aims to strengthen its role as a force for regional stability and development, while maintaining its position as a bridge between the Global North and the Global South, to promote peace, cooperation, and stability."[50]

With regard to BRICS membership, we argue that these role conceptions help shape Indonesia's accession to the forum. This can also be

observed through statements made by the Prabowo administration. For example, during a meeting between Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and House of Representatives on 2 December 2024, Sugiono stated:

> "Indonesia's decision to join BRICS is an effort to engage with BRICS member countries and become a bridge-builder, while balancing the interests of developed and developing countries. In addition, we consider BRICS a multilateral grouping that we can use to improve our economic relations with its member countries ... this is also an implementation of our independent and active foreign policy." (Translation by the authors)[51]

This statement was further emphasized by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Havas Oegroseno when explaining Indonesia's BRICS membership to the House of Representatives, stating that:

> "This step reflects Indonesia's commitment to strengthening South–South cooperation and promoting more inclusive global governance reform. This membership also demonstrates Indonesia's strategy of balancing relations with global powers without exclusively aligning with any one side." (Translation by the authors)[52]

These two statements indicate that the decision to join BRICS is consistent with Indonesia's national role conceptions under the Prabowo administration. First, the justification of BRICS membership as an implementation of an independent and active foreign policy, particularly through balancing relations with great powers and fostering closer relations with other members, reflects the active-independent role conception. Second, the view that accession to the forum may advance the collective interest of developing countries also align with the role conception of a voice for developing countries. Third, the aspiration to balance the interest of both developed and developing countries is similarly reflects the bridge-builder role conception. Therefore, the arguments presented here suggest that national role conceptions serve as a variable that helps shape Indonesia's role performance, as reflected in its accession to BRICS as a full member.

Role Performance: Indonesia's Accession to BRICS

We have explained Indonesia's status, role prescription, and national role conceptions, including their respective influences on Indonesia's accession to BRICS. These variables, however do not operate independently in shaping country's role performance. Rather, they interact with one another, collectively shaping role performance.

Indonesia's status as middle power and part of the Global South provide a basis for understanding this interaction. Domestically, it shapes the national role conceptions, as Prabowo Subianto administration views the country as a

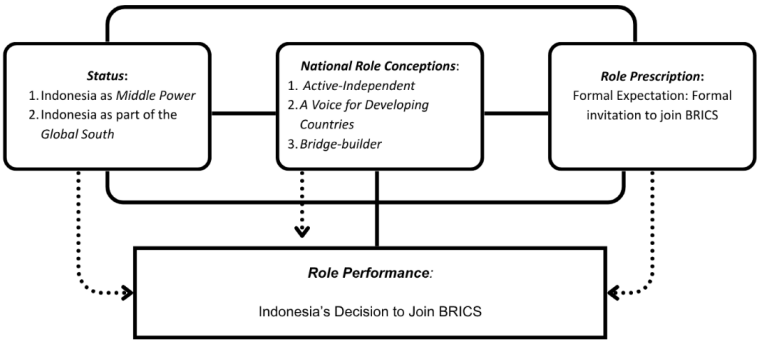
major developing country responsible for advocating the collective interests of the Global South. Externally, Indonesia's status aligns with BRICS' agenda, making it a suitable prospective member and contributing to the forum's formal invitation as a concrete expression of role prescription. This premise is consistent with Holsti's argument that "*those responsible for making decisions and taking actions for the state are aware of international status distinctions and that their policies reflect this awareness*."[53]

Role prescriptions may also contribute to shape country's status and its national role conceptions. As previously discussed, using Rosyidin and Kusumawardhana's[54] framework, social recognition also strengthens international status. In this sense, we view BRICS' formal invitation as an additional form of recognition of Indonesia's status, although this alone is insufficient to determine its overall status. At the same time, the invitation reinforces the Prabowo administration's conception of Indonesia as capable of advancing South-South interests, in line with Holsti's argument that national role conceptions are related to, or buttressed by, role prescriptions.[55] This was explicitly acknowledged by Sugiono at the 2024 Conference on Indonesian Foreign Policy (CIFP), where he stated that the Indonesian government was aware of other countries' expectations regarding Indonesia's role at the international level.[56]

Additionally, Indonesia's national role conceptions also help shape its status and the role prescriptions it receives. Through its foreign policy, the active-independent, bridge-builder, and a voice for developing countries conceptions reinforce Indonesia's status as a middle power seeking to advance Global South interests. These conceptions also shape external expectations of Indonesia by reflecting the roles the country seeks to perform in international affairs.

To better illustrate how these variables interact in shaping Indonesia's role performance, the following figure presents the relationships among status, national role conceptions, and role prescription:

Figure 1. Interaction of Role Theory Variables in Indonesia's Accession to BRICS



Source: Developed by the author

As shown above, the dotted arrows represent the direct influence of each variable on Indonesia's role performance, while the solid lines illustrate the relationships among the three variables and their collective influence. We have explained that these variables are intertwined, collectively shaping Indonesia's decision to join BRICS

Based on this discussion, Indonesia's status, role prescription, and national role conceptions are interrelated variables that interact to shape its role performance in joining BRICS. In response to the invitation extended during the Joko Widodo administration, the Prabowo administration formally expressed Indonesia's interest to join BRICS, which was conveyed by Sugiono at the 2024 BRICS+ Summit in Kazan.[57] As a result, at the 2025 BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as BRICS chair, announced Indonesia's membership following consensus approval. Indonesia' accession to BRICS thus marked the manifestation of its role performance.

Concluding Remarks

This study operationalizes role theory by examining three variables that shape Indonesia's role performance in its decision to join BRICS: status, role prescription, and national role conceptions. First, Indonesia's status as a middle power and part of the Global South aligns with BRICS's characteristics as a forum that advances the interests of the Global South and middle powers. Second, role prescription is reflected in BRICS's formal invitation for Indonesia to join the forum. Third, Indonesia's role conceptions as active-independent, a voice for developing countries, and a bridge-builder make BRICS a relevant platform for advancing its foreign policy interests. While each variable may independently influence Indonesia's role performance, this study argues that their interaction also shapes Indonesia's decision to join BRICS.

Therefore, this study offers two contributions. First, we bridge existing strands of literature which examined Indonesia's BRICS accession through separate analytical perspective. Through our analysis on the external and domestic aspects of each role theory variables, this study caters both the structural and agential perspectives. It also moves beyond traditional material-based analysis by highlighting Indonesia's aspirations to play greater role in global governance which represent a non-material interest. Second, we extend the application of role theory to analyze country's accession to international organizations, and broader multilateral engagements, thereby offering an alternative theoretical approach to foreign policy analysis.

For further research, we believe this study can be developed theoretically, methodologically, and empirically. Theoretically, future research

could utilize other concepts in role theory, such as role conflict and role legitimation, to better understand how Indonesia navigates its different international roles. Methodologically, future studies could use a more systematic discourse analysis of government speeches, official documents, and public statements to identify Indonesia's national role conceptions more comprehensively. Empirically, future research could examine Indonesia's actual role performance after joining BRICS to assess how its role conceptions are reflected in its actions within the forum.

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