

The Brics Dilemma: A Poliheuristic Analysis of Indonesia's

Free-Active Foreign Policy Shift

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This article examines the decision-making process behind Indonesia's foreign policy shift towards pursuing full membership in the BRICS consortium. The traditional "free and active" position created a policy dilemma when Indonesia was confronted with the influence of BRICS as a global balancing power. Using Poliheuristic Theory, this study argues that the decision under the Prabowo Subianto administration was not merely the result of macroeconomic calculations, but rather a two-stage process involving cognitive shift and rational analysis. The findings show that the main shift occurred in Stage I (Cognitive), where the leadership reconfigured the "free and active" doctrine from a mere limiting filter to a mandate for proactive participation in a multipolar world. The reconceptualisation of this critical dimension allowed the membership option to pass through the "non-compensation" filter and proceed to Stage II (Rational Analysis). The final decision was a satisficing strategy that successfully aligned the vision of national sovereignty with pragmatic economic gains without abandoning traditional strategic partnerships.

Keywords: BRICS, Indonesia, Foreign Policy, Poliheuristic Theory, Free and Active, Global South, Middle Power

Introduction

The end of the post-Cold War unipolar era did not immediately create global stability but triggered a shift in the constellation of power towards a dynamic multipolar order (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2015). The rise of the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is a major manifestation of the challenge to Western collective imperialism,

which has long dominated global financial institutions and political narratives (Amin, 2016). For developing countries in the Global South, BRICS offers an alternative financial infrastructure through the New Development Bank (NDB) and the BRICS Bridge digital platform to reduce systemic dependence on the hegemony of the US dollar (Putra et al., 2025). Indonesia, as a middle power

with a strategic geopolitical position, faces a dilemma in positioning its interests amid competition between established and new powers (Setiawan, 2025).

Indonesia's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by the Free and Active doctrine. The Free and Active doctrine was definitively born from Mohammad Hatta's speech on 2 September 1948 entitled *Mendajung Antara Dua Karang* (Between Two Rocks), delivered before the B.P.K.N.P. session in Yogyakarta (Hatta, 1948). Hatta's narrative explicitly rejected Indonesia's position as a satellite or mere complement to the interests of major powers.

The essence of Hatta's thinking was the transformation of Indonesia's position international political stage. Becoming a subject meant having the autonomy to determine its own destiny and stance based on national interests, not because of dictates from any bloc. Hatta emphasised that Free politics was not passive, isolationist neutrality, but rather independence to act in accordance with the dignity of the nation. Meanwhile, the principle of being Active requires Indonesia to be proactive—like a rower who must continue to manoeuvre between the reefs of world powers so as not to sink (Hatta, 1948).

Although the Free and Active doctrine is often considered a static principle, its implementation in the field depends on the cognitive perspective of the leader in office. Indonesia's attitude towards BRICS has undergone a paradigm shift that reflects each era of leadership's interpretation of national interests amid global dynamics.

During Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) administration, Indonesia adopted the *Million Friends, Zero Enemies* doctrine. SBY positioned Indonesia as an optimistic middle power and sought to embrace all poles of power (Aisyah & Aliyuna Pratisti, 2025). In this context, BRICS was seen as an opportunity to strengthen Indonesia's international profile on the G20 stage. However, despite the optimistic rhetoric, Indonesia in the SBY era tended to maintain its comfort within the existing global governance structure. This attitude was aspirational but without any drastic formal steps, as the main focus was on maintaining harmonious relations with both the West and the new economic bloc simultaneously (Fizrianti & Sitepu, 2025).

In contrast, Joko Widodo's administration shifted the focus of diplomacy to be more down-to-earth, with the main priorities being maritime sovereignty and domestic economic investment (Faisal Karim & Dwira Yudha, 2021). Jokowi adopted a pragmatic new nationalism approach; foreign policy was considered an instrument to support domestic economic growth. Towards BRICS, Jokowi applied the principle of thorough review and calculation. This caution was evident at the 2023 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, where Indonesia chose to postpone its membership. The postponement of BRICS membership was a strategic decision to avoid perceptions of political bias amid global polarisation that is while maintaining an image of neutrality for the sake of investment stability from traditional Western partners (Aisyah & Aliyuna Pratisti, 2025). For Jokowi, the political risks of BRICS

membership at that time were seen as greater than the economic benefits, which had not yet been proven to be immediate.

A fundamental turning point occurred under the leadership of President Prabowo Subianto. Just a few days after his inauguration, Indonesia officially declared its intention to fully join BRICS, a move that marked a cognitive redefinition of national risk. In the view of the current administration, passivity towards the transformation of the new world order is considered a greater risk to strategic sovereignty than the diplomatic risks that may arise (Setiawan, 2025). Based on a strong vision of sovereignty, Indonesia has positioned itself not merely as a spectator, but as an active subject with control over the direction of its economic policy in a multipolar world (Dharmaputra, 2025).

Studies on Indonesia's interaction with BRICS have generated a wide range of discussions, but the majority still focus on outcomes rather than processes. Research on BRICS in this cluster emphasises economic pragmatism and market diversification. Data shows that Indonesia's non-oil and gas exports to the five original BRICS members reached USD 84.37 billion in 2024, accounting for 33.91% of total national exports (Surya Bakti et al., 2025). In this perspective, BRICS membership is seen as a strategic instrument to secure trade surpluses and gain access to alternative funding through the New Development Bank (NDB) to support infrastructure projects and sustainable development (Setiawan, 2025; Yuniar, 2025). Although it provides a strong data picture, this approach tends to assume

that a country's decisions are automatic mathematical calculations based solely on material gains.

On the other hand, previous literature shifts to the geopolitical dimension and hedging strategy. A number of researchers argue that Indonesia's joining BRICS is a strategic hedging move to minimise the risk of dependence on the Western financial system and a push for de-dollarisation through the Local Currency Settlement (LCS) scheme (Nahak & Kalisang, 2025). Indonesia is considered to be implementing a *Dancing with Giants* strategy. This is an inclusive effort to navigate the rivalry between major powers in the Indo-Pacific while maintaining leadership in ASEAN and pursuing OECD membership (Juned & Saripudin, 2025). However, literature in this category still analyses the state as the unit of analysis and has not been able to explain why radical changes occurred after the leadership transition, indicating a shift at the decision-maker level.

By joining BRICS, Indonesia aims to diversify its global partnerships and access alternative financial mechanisms such as the New Development Bank (NDB). This step is seen as a modern manifestation of a "free and active" foreign policy, in which Indonesia seeks to strengthen the bargaining position of Global South countries while acting as a diplomatic bridge between new economic blocs and Western institutions (Setiawan, 2025).

A major gap in previous BRICS studies is the absence of analysis that dissects the cognitive mechanisms of leaders in

the decision-making process. Most of the previous literature analyses Indonesia as a rational black box without considering how the beliefs of individual decision-makers filter information. This article aims to fill this gap by applying Poliheuristic Theory (PH) as an argumentative infrastructure to bridge the gap between geopolitical reality and psychological processes. Unlike BRICS studies that focus solely on economic benefits, this study argues that Indonesia's decision to join BRICS was top-down and guided by non-compensatory cognitive filters in the first stage of decision-making.

Poliheuristic theory is an approach that bridges the dichotomy between rational actor models and cognitive models, in which leaders use mental shortcuts (heuristics) to simplify complex problems in high-pressure environments (Mintz, 2004; Redd, 2023). Poliheuristic theory is based on a two-stage *decision-making* process. In Stage I (Elimination), decision-makers use non-compensatory criteria to filter policy alternatives; if an option is considered to threaten the political survival of the leader, it is immediately eliminated (Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). In this study, the critical dimension is defined as a combination of domestic politics and the ideological mission of sovereignty. For Indonesian leaders, sovereignty is not merely a legal term, but the heart of domestic public support. If a leader is considered to have failed to uphold the dignity of the nation, their political support will be threatened. Therefore, ideological failure in upholding the nation's dignity on the international stage is considered a non-

compensatory risk.

Through the lens of poliheuristic theory, President Prabowo ruled out the option of remaining passive (*status quo*) towards BRICS. Such passivity was considered an ideological failure that could undermine his vision of a strong and honourable nation. Once this risky option was eliminated, he moved on to Stage II (Rational), in which leaders begin to calculate the real benefits as the most optimal outcome for national interests.

This study seeks to prove that Indonesia's joining BRICS is the result of a mixture of ambition to raise the country's prestige in the eyes of the world (status) and careful calculations to survive in a world where power is no longer centred in one country (multipolar). The structure of the article will explain how to trace this decision-making process through the process tracing method, followed by an in-depth analysis of each stage of the decision-making process.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative design with a process tracing strategy to identify the causal mechanisms linking leaders' psychological profiles to foreign policy outcomes (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). This method was chosen for its ability to dissect the sequence of events and conjunctures in a single case to demonstrate how a belief system transforms into actual political decisions (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). This methodology does not merely trace the machinery of causality to ensure the validity of findings from potential ecofinality—that

is, the possibility of different alternative explanations for the same outcome (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). The level of analysis is centred on the individual level with the President as the highest authority in Indonesia's decision-making structure (Mintz, 2004).

The operationalisation of data in this study is divided into two main clusters to follow the two-stage logic of Poliheuristic Theory (Mintz, 2004). The first cluster focuses on identifying cognitive evidence (Stage I), which is summarised through content analysis of primary thought documents and key speeches by leaders (Hermann et al., 2001; Mintz, 2004). The data in this cluster is used to map the mental architecture related to the non-compensatory "critical dimensions" of sovereignty, where failure to maintain the nation's dignity is seen as an intolerable domestic political loss (Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). By tracing the consistency of leaders' narratives, researchers can prove the existence of an option screening process that precedes the technical calculations of ministries ((Mintz, 2004).

The second cluster is directed at gathering evidence of technocratic rationality (Stage II) to explain why the remaining options are considered the most satisfactory (satisficing) (Mintz, 2004). Data was collected from macroeconomic reports, trade data from statistical agencies, and official statements from international institutions regarding the potential material benefits of joining the BRICS bloc (Surya Bakti et al., 2025). Through data source triangulation techniques, this study verifies

that after policy options pass the cognitive filter in Stage I, rationalisation based on economic parameters and access to funding is then carried out to achieve a strategically optimal final decision (Mintz, 2004).

President Prabowo's Cognitive Architecture and Belief System

Analysis of Indonesia's decision to join BRICS requires a deep understanding of the psychological orientation of its leaders. This sub-chapter examines the decision-making process through the lens of Poliheuristic theory. Within the framework of Poliheuristic Theory, foreign policy decisions are a manifestation of the interaction between the strategic environment and the belief system of leaders as the ultimate decision unit. Before dissecting the mechanism of policy option elimination in the first stage, this study reconstructs President Prabowo Subianto's thinking architecture through the operational code approach to provide a cognitive filter before the decision to join BRICS was made (Mintz, 2004). A textual analysis of President Prabowo Subianto's primary works, namely *Strategi Transformasi Bangsa* (2023) and *Kepemimpinan Militer* (2023), reveals that the President's cognitive profile is dominated by the history of colonialism in the past, which has transformed into an absolute or *non-compensatory* political threshold.

The main dimension in this cognitive structure is the collective memory of the inferiority of the Indonesian people in the past, which was consistently identified through the use of the terminology *Honden en Inlander*. Prabowo wrote that the '45 Generation

was formed and rose up because they did not want to be treated worse than dogs by the colonizers. In the past, they often heard the phrase *verboden voor Honden en Inlanders* (dogs and natives are not allowed) and saw it written on walls (Subianto, 2023). This reflection shows that national dignity is not merely a rhetorical variable, but an indicator of the cognitive limitations of leaders. This belief created a mechanism whereby any foreign policy option that risked placing Indonesia in a subordinate position would be eliminated at the first stage, without considering its economic utility. This explains why the option of maintaining the status quo, which is considered cognitively passive, is perceived as a return to the status of inlanders that damages the nation's pride.

The transformation of identity from an object nation to a subject nation is the second axis in his belief system. Prabowo explicitly emphasizes his rejection of the mentality of dependence through his vision of fundamental industrial transformation. He states, "*We must not remain silent and accept being labelled as a defeated nation. We must become a winning nation. We must not be satisfied with being known as a nation of buyers. We must become a nation of makers*" (Subianto, 2023). The metaphor of transitioning from a nation of buyers to a nation of makers represents a cognitive shift to change Indonesia's position in the global value chain. This narrative validates the preference for *Global South* economic alliances such as BRICS, which offer space for developing countries to pursue independent industrialization. In this view, international integration is no longer merely an

effort to find markets but a strategic instrument to ensure Indonesia's independence as a respected and honorable country through economic self-reliance.

The President's thinking is driven by loss aversion or fear of losing autonomy, which is manifested in the concept of the Indonesian paradox and the leakage of national wealth. President Prabowo Subianto emphasized that national wealth cannot bring prosperity if it flows abroad through the export of raw materials, warning that "*if we are not brave and unable to stop our wealth from flowing abroad, our country cannot become a prosperous nation*" (Subianto, 2023). This fear of leakage became the rational basis for the down-streaming policy, which then became a key prerequisite in the second stage calculations.

The consistency of President Prabowo Subianto's cognitive architecture was then confirmed through the narrative presented by the President in his inauguration speech at the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly and his speech at the 80th United Nations General Assembly. In these international forums, President Prabowo explicitly revived collective memories of oppression through the quote "*Honden en Inlander Verboden*" to emphasise Indonesia's position as a subject that rejects the doctrine of "*the strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must*" (Subianto, 2024). The replication of this narrative in foreign policy statements proves the existence of belief system stability. This ensures that the cognitive filter that prioritizes national sovereignty and dignity is not a retrospective coherence created after a

decision has been made, but rather an operational instruction- that precedes and directs the elimination process in the first stage of Poliheuristic decision-making.

Stage I (Elimination) – Non-Compensatory Dimensions and Sovereignty Threshold

Within the framework of Poliheuristic Theory, the foreign policy deliberation process begins with simplifying the choice set through an elimination mechanism that discards alternatives that violate critical or non- compensatory dimensions. Analysis at this stage maps the choice set in binary terms between Option A (Status Quo/Passive) and Option B (Joining BRICS). Decision-making at the initial stage is not based on a comparison of the relative merits of each option, but rather on the fulfilment of a minimum threshold in the critical dimensions adopted by the leader, namely the dimensions of Sovereignty and National Dignity (Mintz, 2004).

The operational threshold is determined using the dichotomy of national identity that the President consistently emphasizes. In his primary work, *Strategi Transformasi Bangsa* (Strategy for National Transformation), Prabowo sets strict parameters for the transformation of national identity. He asserts: *We must not be content with being known only as a nation of buyers. We must become a nation of producers* (Subianto, 2023). The status of a consumer nation serves as a veto variable; any policy option that maintains Indonesia's position solely as a consumer market or merely follows global dynamics without an active role as a producer is automatically

categorized as unacceptable.

The elimination mechanism is illustrated through the decision matrix in Table 1 below, which shows the failure of Option A to meet the sovereignty dimension standards:

Table 1 Selection of Non-Compensatory Criteria

Policy Option	Non-Compensation	Perception of Nation Role
Status Quo	Failure	Nation as Buyer (Passive)
Joining BRICS	Successful	Active Nation

Based on Table 1, Option A was eliminated because it was cognitively perceived as a manifestation of a dependency mentality. Although Option A offered short-term diplomatic stability, the deficit in the dimension of sovereignty was absolute, thereby eliminating the advantages of Option A in other dimensions.

This elimination mechanism is reinforced by the policy *veto* explicitly stated in international discourse. At the 80th UN General Assembly, President Prabowo openly rejected the doctrine of fatalistic realism by asserting: *“Might cannot be right, right must be right”* and calling for the rejection of fate as *“the weak who suffer what they must”* (Subianto, 2024). By rejecting the role of a weak entity that simply accepts circumstances, the President formally disqualified Option A. This shows that satisfaction with the dimension of sovereignty is a necessary condition for options that fail to position Indonesia as an active subject, which are rejected before any material cost-benefit

calculations are made.

The transition from the ideological screening phase (Stage I) to the rational calculation phase (Stage II) is evident through the shift in focus of the narrative in the President's Inauguration Speech. The speech, which began with an affirmation of identity to become a winning nation and then transformed into technocratic details regarding industrial down streaming, signifies a shift in cognitive mechanisms. After Option B (BRICS) passed the selection process because it met the requirements of national sovereignty, the decision was then tested through rational utility calculations in the next stage.

Stage II: Rational Calculation and Satisficing Strategy (Economic Utility)

After Option A (Status Quo) was eliminated in the first stage for violating the sovereignty threshold, the decision-making process moved on to the analytical processing phase. In stage II, actors act based on cost-benefit calculations to maximize the utility of the remaining options (Mintz, 2004). Given the complexity of the domestic economic challenges faced by the new administration, the decision to join BRICS (Option B) has four aspects to maximize utility.

The first rational basis for the President's calculations is his reading of the shift in global economic gravity. Statistical data for 2024 confirms a fundamental structural change in which the BRICS bloc (including expansion members) accounts for 41.41% of the world's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) based on Purchasing

Power Parity (PPP). This aggregate value has surpassed the economic power of the G7 bloc, which only contributes around 29.08% (Salsabilla & Wahyu Nugroho, 2025). Integrating the national economy into the growing bloc (BRICS) provides much higher expected utility than remaining in the traditional Western market, which is experiencing stagnant growth.

Empirically, from the performance of national trade. Throughout 2024, Indonesia's total non-oil and gas exports to the five core BRICS countries exceeded \$84.37 billion, contributing around 33.91% of total national non-oil and gas exports (Surya Bakti et al., 2025). Indonesia managed to record a significant trade surplus of £31.04 billion, with the surplus from nickel and its derivatives to China alone contributing £6.26 billion (Yuniar, 2025). The economic utility value shows that BRICS is not merely a political alliance, but a real giant market for absorbing value-added products for Indonesia as the most efficient way to secure state revenue.

The second variable is risk calculation to safeguard the strategic agenda of industrial down-streaming. Amid global regulatory pressures, particularly the European Union's lawsuit at the WTO through dispute DS592, Indonesia needs partners capable of providing capital support to realize its vision of becoming a manufacturing nation. BRICS countries serve as a vital source of capital substitution. Investment data shows that in the first half of 2024, total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the five major BRICS member countries reached \$4.14 billion, equivalent to 14.72% of total FDI inflows

to Indonesia (Salsabilla & Wahyu Nugroho, 2025).

These capital flows are focused on sectors that are the target of Western protectionist policies. China, for example, recorded an investment value of \$1.8 billion in the first quarter of 2025, which was allocated specifically for the construction of smelter and mining infrastructure (Salsabilla & Wahyu Nugroho, 2025). This massive investment provides an economic shield for Indonesia; even though raw ore exports are banned and contested, the construction of domestic processing plants continues thanks to funding from BRICS partners. This ensures that the transformation of the economic structure from extractive to industrialization remains on track, minimizing the risk of policy failure due to external pressures.

The third variable refers to the application of a satisficing strategy—that is, seeking solutions that are sufficient and adequate for urgent needs—to support the national priority agenda. Amidst global supply chain disruptions caused by geopolitical conflicts, President Prabowo calculated that dependence on a single bloc could jeopardize food security (“the people’s stomachs”). Data shows that diversification towards BRICS is a strategic move; the value of Indonesia’s imports from Russia experienced a growth surge of 22.24% in the 2019-2023 period, dominated by supplies of fertilizers and grains that are important for national agricultural productivity (Putra et al., 2025).

In addition to supply guarantees, BRICS membership also opens up access

to food technology collaboration. Strategic cooperation with Brazil, as one of the world’s largest food producers, is aimed at supporting the implementation of free meal programs through the transfer of agricultural technology and food logistics management (Nahak & Kalisang, 2025). From a poliheuristic perspective, this decision meets the criteria of BRICS’ instrumental rationality to provide the most reliable logistical resources to ensure domestic food availability and social stability amid global commodity market uncertainty.

The final variable is the rationality of infrastructure financing and the transition to green energy. To achieve the target of 50% renewable energy mix by 2025, Indonesia requires substantial and flexible funding. BRICS responds to this need through bilateral partnerships such as a \$2.8 billion strategic agreement with Brazil covering the development of the renewable energy and digital technology sectors (Salsabilla & Wahyu Nugroho, 2025). In addition, collaboration with China and India is focused on the development of biofuel technology, which is a pillar of national energy independence (Armia, 2025).

BRICS offers access to its financial institution, the New Development Bank (NDB), which has an authorized capital of USD 50 billion. The comparative advantage of the NDB over traditional financial institutions (such as the IMF or the World Bank) lies in the absence of burdensome political requirements or policy conditionality (Setiawan, 2025). This allows Indonesia to access green infrastructure development

funds without having to sacrifice domestic policy autonomy. These calculations confirm that BRICS is the most cost-effective and politically safe financing option to support the acceleration of Indonesia's energy transition.

Validating Political Survival: Internal Legitimacy and Risk Mitigation

In the axiom of Poliheuristic Theory, the domestic political dimension is an ultimate constraint that is non-compensatory, whereby a leader will tend to reject policy options that trigger significant political losses (Mintz, 2004). President Prabowo Subianto faces a major challenge because the move to join BRICS is often suspected of pulling Indonesia too far towards the Eastern axis and abandoning the principle of "Free and Active". However, analysis shows that the government has successfully managed the risk by creating a new national consensus through reasonable explanations to the public and political elites.

For President Prabowo Subianto, the strategic challenge in joining BRICS is mitigating audience cost—namely, the risk of resistance from the elite base and constituents who still adhere to the traditional doctrine of "Free and Active". Analysis shows that political acceptability of this decision does not happen instantly, but rather through internal legitimization mechanisms that integrate public dialectics into a new strategic consensus. This process begins with a phase of ideological testing at the epistemic community level, where initial internal criticism focuses on the uncertainty

of the cost-benefit ratio and the potential risk of alignment that could disrupt the equilibrium of Indonesia's relations with the Western bloc (Alexandra, in Tempo, 2025).

However, the potential for political resistance was effectively mitigated through the use of the *balance of power* argument. Integration into BRICS was redefined by academic authorities not as an ideological anomaly, but as a tactical instrument to reduce institutional dependence on the dominance of the OECD bloc (Juwana, in Kompas, 2024). By framing this accession as a policy innovation in navigating the irregularities of the global order (Mantong, in Tempo, 2025), the government succeeded in shifting the elite's perception from geopolitical concerns to an appreciation of diplomatic flexibility. The success of this perception management ensured that BRICS accession was accepted as a legitimate pragmatic adaptation, thereby preventing destructive political polarization at the domestic level.

Indonesia's decision to join the BRICS alliance is an empirical manifestation of a complementary two-stage decision-making mechanism. This analysis finds that the decision was the result of a convergence between ideological aspirations and deep pragmatic calculations. In the First Stage (Elimination), President Prabowo's belief system, rooted in the collective memory of anti-colonialism, served as a non-compensatory filter. The *Status Quo* option was rejected not because of financial loss calculations, but because of its failure to meet the sovereignty threshold to transform Indonesia from a "Nation of Buyers" to a

“Nation of Makers”. This cognitive filter ensures that every policy option must first guarantee the nation’s dignity and strategic autonomy.

After passing the ideological filter, this decision was validated in the Second Stage (Rational Calculation) through the principle of utility maximization. In this stage, strategic macroeconomic data— such as BRICS’s 41.41% dominance of global GDP and the realization of downstream investment amounting to \$4.14 billion— served as determining variables that verified this option in a technocratic manner. This process was then locked in by an inclusive domestic political management strategy, creating a policy equilibrium. The synthesis of the discussion shows that BRICS membership is an optimal choice that can satisfy the desire for national sovereignty while meeting expectations for material economic needs (food, energy, and capital), without sacrificing domestic political stability. In order to ensure permanent political survival, the government complements this discursive legitimacy with an omni-balancing strategy. The maneuver of registering with BRICS, carried out simultaneously with the acceleration of accession to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is a highly calculated diplomatic signal to quell the suspicions of the pro-Western faction while satisfying the nationalist faction that demands economic autonomy (Juned & Saripudin, 2025). Discursively, this policy was adopted through the doctrine of a thousand friends being too few, a narrative hedging instrument that positions BRICS

as an expansion of economic maneuvering space (strategic space) that is fully consistent with the constitutional mandate. The formal support of the Indonesian House of Representatives’ Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Agency (BKSAP) confirmed that there was no legitimacy deficit at the legislative level (DPR RI, 2025). The convergence between parliamentary support, expert legitimacy, and the OECD’s balancing strategy proves that the decision to join BRICS has passed the threshold of political acceptability without harming domestic stability, while also fulfilling the prerequisites in the Poliheuristic decision-making model.

The Convergence between Political Sovereignty and Economic Utility

Indonesia’s decision to join the BRICS alliance is a manifestation of a complementary two-stage decision-making mechanism. This analysis finds that the decision is the result of a convergence between ideological aspirations and pragmatic calculations. In the first stage (elimination), President Prabowo’s belief system, rooted in the collective memory of anti-colonialism, served as a non-compensatory filter. The *Status Quo* option was rejected not because of financial loss calculations, but because of the failure to meet the sovereignty threshold to transform Indonesia from a buyer nation to a producer nation. The cognitive filter ensures that every policy option must first guarantee the nation’s dignity and strategic autonomy.

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Conclusion

The decision to pursue full membership in BRICS was the result of a foreign policy process that can be effectively explained by Poliheuristic Theory. Analysis shows that this choice was not driven by simple cost-benefit calculations, but fundamentally by a cognitive shift in the early stages of decision-making. Under previous leadership, the principles of freedom and activism served as critical dimensions that eliminated the option of membership due to the perceived high political risks. However, under Prabowo Subianto's administration, there was a reconfiguration of the narrative in which BRICS membership was the true expression of an active and independent foreign policy.

This reinterpretation of critical dimensions allowed the membership option to pass the first cognitive filter and advance to the rational analysis stage. In the second

stage, policymakers concluded that the long-term strategic benefits—including economic diversification, access to alternative financing through the NDB, and a strengthened role in the Global South—were more substantial than the risks of economic dependence and geopolitical friction. The final decision was a satisficing choice that successfully aligned a pragmatic economic agenda with a new political vision. These findings show that Indonesia's free and active doctrine is not a rigid dogma, but rather a flexible framework that leaders can recontextualise to address contemporary challenges and national interests.

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