
Global South Diplomacy and the Reconfiguration of International Order: Indonesia's Emerging Strategic Role

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Abstract

The contemporary international order is characterized by geopolitical fragmentation, institutional pluralism, and demands for inclusive global governance. Existing scholarship explains Indonesia through middle-power diplomacy, strategic hedging, or ASEAN regionalism, but gives limited attention to how its diplomatic positioning produces institutional effects. This article develops the concept of adaptive governance agency to explain how a materially non-dominant state uses agenda mediation, coalition brokerage, and normative translation within asymmetrical governance structures. Employing a qualitative interpretivist design, the study analyzes 75 documents produced between 2014 and early 2026, including presidential speeches, foreign-ministry statements, ASEAN documents, G20 declarations, JETP agreements, partner-government materials, and scholarship. The analysis focuses on Indonesia's 2022 G20 Presidency, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and the Just Energy Transition Partnership. The findings show that Indonesia generated bounded institutional effects through intermediary legitimacy leverage, producing agenda continuity, textual incorporation, and developmental accommodation. Indonesia therefore contributes to the incremental pluralization of international authority through negotiated institutional repositioning, although its influence remains constrained by major-power bargaining, institutional limitations, economic dependence, and domestic interests.

Keywords: *adaptive governance agency; Global South diplomacy; Indonesia; institutional legitimacy; international order.*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary international order is increasingly characterized by geopolitical rivalry, institutional fragmentation, and the diffusion of authority across overlapping global and regional governance arrangements. Although the United States, China, and other major powers remain central to these transformations, changes in international order are not produced exclusively through shifts in material capabilities. They also occur through negotiations over institutional participation, legitimate representation, agenda formation, and the principles governing collective action. The emergence of what Acharya (2017) describes as a “multiplex” world order therefore creates greater analytical space for examining how materially non-dominant states influence international institutions without exercising great-power capabilities (Ruggie, 1992; Ikenberry, 2018; Acharya, Estevadeordal and Goodman, 2023).

Indonesia provides an important case for investigating this form of influence. Its demographic scale, strategic location, economic significance, leadership role within ASEAN, and participation in major multilateral forums give it greater diplomatic

standing than many developing states. Nevertheless, Indonesia remains constrained by significant asymmetries in military capability, technological capacity, development finance, and institutional authority. Its diplomacy therefore operates between material limitation and institutional opportunity. Rather than seeking exclusive alignment with a dominant power or openly challenging the prevailing international order, Indonesia has generally pursued strategic autonomy through multilateral engagement, coalition-building, and the preservation of diplomatic relations across geopolitical divisions (Mubah, 2019; Anwar, 2020, 2023).

Existing scholarship has generated important explanations of this behaviour. Strategic-hedging approaches emphasize Indonesia’s efforts to avoid dependence on either China or the United States, while middle-power scholarship highlights mediation, coalition-building, niche diplomacy, and influence exceeding material capabilities (Efsthopoulos, 2012; Black and Hornsby, 2016; Teo, 2022). Studies of ASEAN regionalism further explain Indonesia’s commitment to ASEAN centrality and inclusive regional architecture in response to intensifying Indo-Pacific competition (Anwar, 2020). These

perspectives clarify why Indonesia avoids rigid alignment and relies upon multilateral institutions. However, they provide a less complete explanation of how Indonesia may convert its intermediary diplomatic position into observable institutional outcomes.

This limitation is significant because strategic autonomy is not only a defensive strategy for minimizing geopolitical risk. It may also function as a process of legitimacy production through which a state establishes itself as a credible convenor, mediator, or representative of development-sensitive interests. Indonesia's diplomatic significance therefore cannot be assessed solely by whether it balances successfully between competing powers. It must also be examined through its capacity to influence institutional agendas, facilitate agreement among divided actors, translate contested principles into acceptable policy language, and secure the incorporation of its priorities into authoritative institutional outputs.

This article addresses that problem through the concept of Global South diplomacy. The Global South is not treated here as a geographically fixed, politically unified, or ideologically homogeneous bloc. Instead, it denotes a relational position within international governance characterized by unequal material capabilities, restricted access to institutional authority,

developmental constraints, and persistent demands for greater representation and policy autonomy (Visoka, 2019; Sabrow, 2020). Global South diplomacy consequently refers to the strategic use of multilateral engagement, coalition brokerage, and normative intervention by structurally non-dominant states seeking to renegotiate their position within asymmetrical institutions. It is distinguished from diplomacy based merely on Southern identity because it must connect structural inequality with claims concerning developmental equity, sovereign policy space, institutional inclusion, or representational legitimacy.

The article argues that Indonesia practices Global South diplomacy through **adaptive governance agency**. Adaptive governance agency is defined as the capacity of a materially non-dominant state to convert an intermediary diplomatic position into observable institutional effects through agenda mediation, coalition brokerage, and normative translation. It is narrower than ordinary diplomacy. Participation in meetings, rhetorical support for multilateralism, or the maintenance of diversified foreign relations does not by itself constitute adaptive governance agency. The concept applies only where an intentional Indonesian diplomatic intervention can be connected to institutional uptake, such as the preservation of an agenda, the incorporation

of particular language into an authoritative document, the establishment of an implementation arrangement, or recognition of Indonesia's convening role.

The proposed causal mechanism is **intermediary legitimacy leverage**. Institutional fragmentation creates disagreement and weakens the ability of dominant actors to produce widely accepted outcomes independently. Under such conditions, multilateral institutions require actors capable of maintaining communication across rival coalitions, framing compromise, and sustaining the appearance and substance of inclusive decision-making. Indonesia can acquire leverage where its participation and mediation contribute to the legitimacy and functionality of a collective process. This leverage is not coercive. It arises from Indonesia's ability to remain accessible to competing actors and translate divergent interests into formulations that can receive broader institutional support.

Three practices activate this mechanism. First, agenda mediation occurs when Indonesia prevents geopolitical conflict from displacing the substantive agenda of a multilateral institution. Second, coalition brokerage occurs when Indonesia coordinates support among actors that do not constitute a stable political coalition.

Third, normative translation occurs when Indonesia reformulates principles such as strategic autonomy, inclusive regionalism, or developmental justice in language compatible with established institutional purposes. Where these practices produce identifiable institutional uptake, they generate **negotiated institutional repositioning**: an improvement in Indonesia's recognized role, representational standing, or policy discretion achieved through engagement within existing institutions rather than withdrawal or systemic confrontation.

The analysis focuses on three cases selected to examine these mechanisms across different governance settings: Indonesia's 2022 G20 Presidency, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and the Just Energy Transition Partnership. The G20 case examines how Indonesia used agenda mediation and cross-bloc engagement during the political divisions generated by the Russia–Ukraine war. The ASEAN Outlook case evaluates whether Indonesia translated its preference for inclusive regionalism and ASEAN centrality into an authoritative regional framework. The JETP case investigates how developmental equity, national circumstances, and transition justice were incorporated into an international climate-financing arrangement. Concentrating on these cases permits closer

examination of intentionality, diplomatic process, institutional uptake, and recognition by other participants.

The article addresses two research questions. First, through what diplomatic mechanisms does Indonesia convert its intermediary position into institutional influence? Second, under what conditions do Indonesia's interventions produce observable institutional uptake rather than symbolic participation or conventional strategic hedging? These questions shift the analysis from broad assertions about Indonesia's growing international importance to a more specific inquiry into what Indonesian officials sought to achieve, what diplomatic practices they employed, how institutional actors responded, and which alternative explanations may account for the resulting outcomes.

The article advances three contributions. First, it develops adaptive governance agency as a concept for explaining how materially non-dominant states may exercise bounded institutional influence. This concept complements middle-power diplomacy but places greater emphasis on structural asymmetry, developmental representation, and observable institutional effects. Second, the article specifies intermediary legitimacy leverage as a causal mechanism connecting cross-bloc access with agenda mediation,

coalition brokerage, normative translation, and institutional uptake. Third, it provides a focused empirical analysis of three Indonesian diplomatic engagements using official statements, presidential speeches, institutional declarations, policy documents, partner-government materials, and supporting scholarship.

The argument is deliberately bounded. Indonesia does not independently transform the international order, redistribute material power, or determine institutional outcomes. Major-power bargaining, domestic political incentives, economic interests, and established institutional procedures remain important explanations of the three cases. Indonesia's contribution lies instead in negotiating institutional space within these constraints. By securing agenda continuity, textual incorporation, representational recognition, or limited accommodation of developmental priorities, Indonesia can reposition itself within existing governance arrangements. Repeated instances of such negotiated repositioning may contribute incrementally to the pluralization of international authority, even when the underlying hierarchies of power remain intact.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Reconfiguring International Order and the Resurgence of Global South Agency

Debates on contemporary international order increasingly focus on the erosion of post-Cold War hierarchy and the emergence of a more fragmented and pluralized governance environment. Realist accounts generally explain order transition through shifts in material capabilities and intensifying competition among major powers, particularly the United States and China (Degterev, Ramich and Tsvyk, 2021). Liberal institutionalist scholarship instead emphasizes the continuing importance of multilateral rules, institutional cooperation, and embedded forms of international authority despite geopolitical disruption (Ruggie, 1992; Ikenberry, 2018). More recent accounts describe the international system as increasingly multiplex, with authority distributed across regional organizations, informal coalitions, issue-specific partnerships, and overlapping governance arrangements rather than concentrated within a single hegemonic structure (Acharya, 2017; Acharya, Estevadeordal and Goodman, 2023).

These perspectives clarify the structural transformation of international order but often retain a major-power bias. Emerging states are commonly treated as actors that respond to institutional changes produced

elsewhere rather than as participants capable of influencing governance outcomes (Sabrow, 2020). This limitation has encouraged greater attention to middle powers and Global South states as coalition-builders, mediators, and norm entrepreneurs whose influence may exceed their material capabilities (Efstathopoulos, 2012; Black and Hornsby, 2016; Teo, 2022). Their diplomatic significance lies not necessarily in controlling institutions, but in connecting otherwise divided actors, shaping legitimate policy language, and expanding the range of interests incorporated into multilateral decision-making.

The dispersal of authority across multiple institutions creates both constraints and opportunities for such actors. Contemporary governance increasingly operates through regional organizations, informal forums, minilateral arrangements, and specialized partnerships that overlap rather than follow a single institutional hierarchy (Das and Takahashi, 2009; As-Saber and Härtel, 2023). Polycentric governance scholarship similarly emphasizes the interaction of multiple decision-making centers whose authority is neither fully centralized nor entirely independent (Black, 2008; Levi-Faur, 2012). In this environment, institutional influence may arise through agenda coordination, coalition-building, interpretive framing, and the ability to move between

governance venues. Materially non-dominant states may therefore exercise bounded influence where dominant powers require broader participation, procedural legitimacy, or intermediaries capable of sustaining cooperation.

Critical Global South scholarship strengthens this analysis by foregrounding the historical and structural inequalities embedded within international institutions. It emphasizes colonial legacies, unequal access to decision-making authority, developmental constraints, and the continuing marginalization of non-Western perspectives in global governance (Visoka, 2019; Sabrow, 2020). From this standpoint, Global South diplomacy involves more than participation in institutions created by dominant states. It also concerns the negotiation of representation, policy autonomy, and institutional legitimacy within structures that remain materially and normatively unequal.

However, the category of the Global South must be used carefully. Treating Southern states as a coherent geopolitical bloc risks obscuring differences in state capacity, regional position, domestic interests, and diplomatic strategy (Mohan, 2021). Some states pursue confrontational reform, while others seek selective accommodation, coalition leadership, or institutional

mediation. Critical scholarship has also tended to privilege resistance to dominant institutions over the hybrid strategies through which emerging powers simultaneously contest, use, and adapt those institutions (Visoka, 2019; As-Saber and Härtel, 2023). A more precise approach must therefore explain not only why Global South states oppose unequal governance, but how they convert structural disadvantage into specific forms of institutional agency.

Indonesia between Middle-Power Diplomacy and Strategic Autonomy

Indonesia is commonly analyzed as a middle power whose diplomatic significance derives from its demographic size, strategic location, economic weight, and leadership role within ASEAN. Middle-power scholarship highlights mediation, coalition-building, multilateral activism, and niche diplomacy as instruments through which states with limited coercive capabilities can exercise influence (Efsthopoulos, 2012; Black and Hornsby, 2016). Applied to Indonesia, this approach explains its preference for inclusive regionalism, institutional moderation, and ASEAN-centered diplomacy (Anwar, 2020; Dannhauer, 2024). It also captures Indonesia's recurring effort to present itself as a bridge between developed and developing states.

Nevertheless, conventional middle-power theory does not fully address the structural purposes of Indonesia's diplomacy. Its focus on diplomatic function may explain how Indonesia acts, but it is less precise about why representation, developmental equity, sovereign policy space, and institutional legitimacy remain central to those actions. South Africa, for example, has used coalition diplomacy to challenge unequal bargaining arrangements more directly, while Indonesia generally favors less confrontational forms of mediation and institutional accommodation (Efsthopoulos, 2012; Black and Hornsby, 2016). This variation suggests that middle-power behavior must be situated within the different structural positions and representational claims of Global South states.

Strategic hedging provides a second influential explanation. Scholarship in this tradition interprets Indonesia's foreign policy as an effort to avoid excessive dependence on either China or the United States while maintaining beneficial relations with both (Mubah, 2019; Anwar, 2023). This interpretation is closely connected to Indonesia's "free and active" foreign-policy doctrine and its preference for decision-making autonomy under conditions of great-power rivalry (Wardhani and Dugis, 2023). Recent work similarly characterizes Indonesia's conduct as partial multialignment

or strategic diversification across competing political and economic relationships (Wicaksana and Yakti, 2025).

Hedging explains Indonesia's avoidance of rigid alignment, but it does not necessarily demonstrate institutional influence. A state may diversify its partnerships and preserve autonomy without changing a multilateral agenda, shaping negotiated language, or producing wider governance effects. The distinction is important because Indonesia's diplomacy cannot be evaluated solely through its success in minimizing alignment risks. Its activities within ASEAN, the G20, and climate-governance arrangements also raise questions about whether strategic autonomy can be converted into recognized institutional authority.

Existing strategic-autonomy scholarship often treats autonomy as a defensive capacity to avoid entrapment or external dependence (Mubah, 2019; Anwar, 2023). This interpretation underestimates its possible role in legitimacy production. Strategic autonomy may allow Indonesia to establish credibility among actors with competing preferences, maintain access across political divisions, and present itself as an acceptable convenor. Under these conditions, autonomy becomes not only freedom from alignment, but also a diplomatic resource that can support

mediation, coalition coordination, and institutional agenda-setting.

Norm entrepreneurship provides a third relevant perspective. Indonesia has been described as an actor that promotes principles such as ASEAN centrality, inclusive regionalism, and consensus-based cooperation (Teo, 2022). Norm-oriented approaches help explain how states influence expectations of appropriate regional conduct even without coercive power. Yet norm entrepreneurship typically concentrates on the promotion and diffusion of particular standards. It is less suited to explaining diplomatic activity that combines normative framing with agenda preservation, cross-bloc brokerage, institutional flexibility, and developmental bargaining.

Institutional entrepreneurship offers a related but broader explanation by focusing on actors that mobilize resources to create or transform institutional arrangements. However, Indonesia's diplomacy does not consistently seek the creation of new institutions or fundamental changes to formal rules. Its characteristic interventions are often more limited. They involve preserving existing forums, adjusting institutional language, embedding development-sensitive principles, or improving Indonesia's representational position within established arrangements. The relevant outcome is

therefore more accurately understood as negotiated accommodation than comprehensive institutional transformation.

From Balancing Behaviour to Institutional Influence

The literature consequently identifies several important features of Indonesia's foreign policy but does not integrate them into a sufficiently precise account of institutional agency. Middle-power scholarship explains Indonesia's use of mediation and multilateralism. Hedging theory explains its reluctance to align exclusively with major powers. Norm entrepreneurship explains its promotion of inclusive regional principles. Global South scholarship clarifies the structural inequalities and developmental claims informing its international engagement. Each approach is valuable, but none independently explains how Indonesia converts these diplomatic resources into observable institutional outcomes.

This limitation is particularly visible in studies of ASEAN centrality, the Indo-Pacific, and Indonesia's G20 diplomacy. Existing research demonstrates that Indonesia promotes inclusive regionalism, preserves strategic flexibility, and seeks a larger diplomatic role (Anwar, 2020; Sudiarto, Triantama and Pramono, 2024; Dannhauer, 2024). Yet assertions that Indonesia shapes governance narratives or contributes to

international-order transformation often remain underspecified. They do not always identify the relevant diplomatic intervention, the mechanism connecting that intervention to an outcome, or the evidence demonstrating institutional uptake.

The central analytical gap therefore concerns the relationship between diplomatic positioning and institutional effect. It is insufficient to establish that Indonesia participated actively, articulated a preferred norm, or maintained relations across geopolitical divisions. A stronger explanation must identify what Indonesian officials sought to achieve, what diplomatic practices they employed, how other actors responded, and whether Indonesia's priorities entered authoritative agendas, declarations, procedures, or implementation arrangements. It must also consider whether the same outcomes could be explained more convincingly by major-power compromise, institutional routines, domestic political incentives, or immediate economic interests.

This study addresses that gap by shifting attention from general diplomatic activism to the production of bounded institutional effects. It treats Indonesia's strategic autonomy as a potential source of legitimacy and intermediary access rather than merely as balancing behavior. It also conceptualizes Global South diplomacy as a relational

strategy shaped by structural asymmetry, developmental claims, and engagement with existing institutions. The resulting framework examines whether agenda mediation, coalition brokerage, and normative translation enable Indonesia to achieve negotiated institutional repositioning within fragmented governance structures.

The analysis therefore moves beyond the binary distinction between status-quo acceptance and systemic revisionism. Indonesia does not possess the material capability to redesign international order independently, but neither is it simply a passive participant in institutions controlled by dominant powers. Its influence is more plausibly located in incremental changes to participation, agenda formation, authoritative language, institutional legitimacy, and policy accommodation. These processes provide the basis for evaluating whether Indonesia's diplomacy contributes to the gradual pluralization of international authority without overstating its capacity to alter the underlying distribution of global power.

Global South Diplomacy as an Analytical Framework

To address the limitations of conventional middle-power and strategic-hedging approaches, this article develops a Global South diplomacy framework informed by constructivist institutionalism and critical

Global South International Relations scholarship. The framework does not treat the Global South as a geographically fixed, politically unified, or ideologically homogeneous bloc. Instead, it understands the Global South as a relational position within international governance, characterized by historically unequal access to institutional authority, asymmetrical material capabilities, developmental constraints, and persistent demands for more equitable representation. States occupying this position differ substantially in their interests, capacities, domestic structures, and diplomatic strategies. Accordingly, not every foreign-policy action undertaken by Indonesia constitutes Global South diplomacy.

For the purposes of this study, a diplomatic practice qualifies as Global South diplomacy when it displays three characteristics. First, it responds to a structurally asymmetric governance environment in which the state possesses less material and institutional power than the dominant actors. Second, it articulates claims concerning representation, developmental equity, sovereign policy space, or institutional inclusion. Third, it seeks to advance those claims through engagement with, rather than complete withdrawal from or wholesale rejection of, existing international institutions. Global South diplomacy is therefore defined as **the**

strategic use of multilateral engagement, coalition brokerage, and normative intervention by structurally non-dominant states seeking to renegotiate their position within asymmetrical international institutions while preserving strategic autonomy and expanding institutional influence. This definition distinguishes Global South diplomacy from diplomacy based merely on geographical identity, anti-Western alignment, or generalized opposition to the prevailing international order.

Constructivist institutionalism provides the theoretical basis for explaining how states with limited material capabilities may nevertheless exercise institutional influence. Constructivist scholarship demonstrates that international structures are constituted not only by distributions of material power but also by socially produced norms, identities, expectations, and standards of legitimate conduct (Wendt, 1992; Finnemore, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996). Institutions consequently do more than constrain state behaviour. They create political roles, authorize particular forms of participation, define legitimate interests, and provide arenas in which actors can contest established meanings. Diplomatic engagement can therefore influence international governance when states successfully alter how an issue is framed,

which actors are recognized as legitimate participants, or which policy claims become institutionally acceptable.

This study translates that theoretical proposition into the concept of adaptive governance agency. Adaptive governance agency refers to the capacity of a materially non-dominant state to convert its intermediary diplomatic position into observable institutional effects through agenda mediation, coalition brokerage, and normative translation, without exclusively aligning with a dominant geopolitical bloc or seeking the wholesale replacement of existing institutions. The concept is “adaptive” because the state adjusts its diplomatic strategy across different institutional settings rather than following a single alliance or ideological orientation. It is “governance-oriented” because its effects must extend beyond bilateral relationship management or diplomatic visibility to influence institutional agendas, authoritative texts, decision-making arrangements, or recognized standards of legitimate governance. It constitutes “agency” because these effects must be connected to intentional diplomatic interventions rather than attributed solely to structural change or the initiatives of more powerful states.

Adaptive governance agency is therefore narrower than ordinary diplomacy.

Diplomatic communication, participation in summits, or rhetorical support for multilateralism does not by itself constitute adaptive governance agency. The concept applies only where four conditions are present: an institutionally fragmented environment; purposeful engagement across multiple governance venues or geopolitical groupings; an identifiable Indonesian attempt to mediate, broker, or reframe a contested issue; and observable institutional uptake of that intervention. Where Indonesian officials merely repeat existing institutional language, attend negotiations without shaping their content, or obtain no discernible agenda, textual, procedural, or policy effect, the evidence does not support a finding of adaptive governance agency.

Causal Mechanism: Intermediary Legitimacy Leverage

The framework proposes **intermediary legitimacy leverage** as the principal causal mechanism connecting Indonesian diplomatic practices to institutional outcomes. Geopolitical fragmentation creates constraints for materially non-dominant states, but it also generates institutional demand for actors capable of maintaining communication across rival groupings. Multilateral institutions require broad participation, procedural inclusiveness, and sufficient political

consensus to preserve their authority. States that retain access to competing coalitions can therefore acquire leverage not because they can coerce other actors, but because their participation, mediation, and endorsement contribute to the legitimacy and functionality of collective governance arrangements.

Indonesia can activate intermediary legitimacy leverage when it combines recognized multilateral standing with the capacity to communicate across geopolitical divisions. Its influence does not derive from material dominance. It arises from its ability to present itself as an acceptable interlocutor among actors that might otherwise resist one another's initiatives. This position allows Indonesia to translate contested demands into formulations that are sufficiently inclusive to attract institutional support.

The framework identifies three interconnected practices through which this mechanism operates.

First, **agenda mediation** occurs when Indonesia seeks to prevent geopolitical conflict from displacing the substantive agenda of a multilateral institution. Agenda mediation involves defining which issues should receive collective attention, separating areas of practical cooperation from unresolved political disputes, and proposing formulations capable of

preserving negotiations among divided participants. Its observable indicators include Indonesian proposals appearing on meeting agendas, repeated use of Indonesian issue framing during negotiations, the preservation of institutional dialogue despite political polarization, and the incorporation of mediated priorities into final declarations. Indonesia's 2022 G20 presidency provides the principal case through which this practice is examined.

Second, **coalition brokerage** refers to the construction or coordination of support across states or institutional groupings that do not otherwise constitute a stable political coalition. Coalition brokerage differs from simple coalition membership because the intermediary actor must connect actors with divergent preferences rather than merely join a group of like-minded states. Its observable indicators include consultations across rival blocs, the coordination of compromise language, third-party recognition of Indonesia's mediating role, and agreement among otherwise divided participants. Coalition flexibility is therefore treated as a diplomatic resource, while brokerage is the practice through which that resource produces an institutional effect.

Third, **normative translation and institutional embedding** occur when Indonesia reformulates principles such as

strategic autonomy, inclusive regionalism, developmental justice, or sovereign policy flexibility in language capable of receiving wider institutional acceptance. Normative translation is more specific than normative moderation. It does not merely involve adopting less confrontational language. It involves connecting Indonesia's preferred principles to established institutional purposes, thereby making them acceptable to actors operating from different political positions. Institutional embedding occurs when this translated language is incorporated into official declarations, regional frameworks, financing arrangements, procedural practices, or other authoritative outputs. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the Just Energy Transition Partnership provide the principal cases for examining this process.

The immediate outcome of these practices is conceptualized as **negotiated institutional repositioning**. This refers to an improvement in a state's recognized role, representational standing, or policy discretion achieved through negotiation within existing institutions rather than through institutional withdrawal or direct systemic confrontation. Negotiated institutional repositioning may be demonstrated by agenda access, textual incorporation of Indonesian proposals, recognition of Indonesia as a convenor or

intermediary, preservation of ASEAN-led procedures, accommodation of developmental concerns, or the protection of domestic policy space within international arrangements.

This outcome is analytically distinct from a claim that Indonesia has transformed the international order as a whole. Individual diplomatic interventions are unlikely to produce systemic reconfiguration independently. The argument advanced here is more bounded: repeated instances of negotiated institutional repositioning can contribute incrementally to the pluralization of international authority by demonstrating that institutional outcomes are not produced exclusively by great powers. International-order reconfiguration is therefore treated as a cumulative and uneven process arising from changes in participation, agenda formation, normative legitimacy, and institutional accommodation across multiple governance arenas.

Distinguishing Adaptive Governance Agency from Existing Concepts

Adaptive governance agency overlaps with, but remains distinguishable from, strategic hedging, middle-power diplomacy, norm entrepreneurship, and institutional entrepreneurship. Strategic hedging primarily concerns the diversification of external relations to reduce the risks

associated with dependence or exclusive alignment (Anwar, 2023; Wicaksana and Yakti, 2025). A state may hedge successfully without altering an institutional agenda or producing any wider governance effect. Adaptive governance agency requires evidence that diversified engagement has been converted into institutional influence.

Middle-power diplomacy generally emphasizes coalition-building, mediation, niche diplomacy, and influence exceeding a state's material capabilities (Efsthopoulos, 2012; Black and Hornsby, 2016). Adaptive governance agency incorporates these practices but situates them within the structural inequalities confronting Global South states. Its explanatory focus is not simply why a medium-sized state acts multilaterally, but how a structurally non-dominant state uses institutional fragmentation to renegotiate legitimacy, representation, and policy space.

Norm entrepreneurship concerns the promotion, diffusion, and institutionalization of particular standards of appropriate conduct (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Adaptive governance agency may include norm promotion, but it is not limited to the diffusion of a single norm. It also encompasses agenda mediation, cross-bloc coalition brokerage, and the protection of institutional flexibility. Institutional

entrepreneurship, by comparison, generally concerns actors that mobilize resources to create new institutions or transform established institutional arrangements (Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum, 2009). Adaptive governance agency does not require the creation of a new institution or fundamental rule transformation. Its characteristic outcome is a bounded accommodation or repositioning within existing arrangements.

The concepts can be differentiated as follows.

adaptive governance agency within fragmented international order structures.

Operationalization and Evidentiary Tests

The framework is operationalized through four categories of empirical evidence. First, **intentionality evidence** identifies whether Indonesian officials explicitly articulated the institutional objective later attributed to their diplomacy. Such evidence may be found in presidential speeches, foreign-ministry statements, negotiating documents, policy papers, or official press releases. Second, **process evidence** establishes what Indonesian actors did during agenda formation, consultations, drafting, coalition coordination, or negotiations. Third, **institutional-uptake evidence** examines whether Indonesian proposals or frames

appeared in official declarations, regional frameworks, financing arrangements, procedures, or other authoritative outputs. Fourth, **recognition evidence** assesses whether other participants or institutional actors attributed a convening, mediating, or agenda-setting role to Indonesia.

A case supports the framework only where the evidence establishes a traceable connection between Indonesian intervention and institutional outcome. Temporal sequence alone is insufficient. Similarity between Indonesian rhetoric and a final declaration must be supported by evidence showing that Indonesia introduced, defended, brokered, or secured acceptance of the relevant formulation. The analysis must also distinguish substantive institutional uptake from diplomatic symbolism. Official praise, summit visibility, or generalized references to leadership do not demonstrate adaptive governance agency unless accompanied by identifiable changes in agenda content, negotiated language, institutional procedure, representation, or policy discretion.

The framework is open to disconfirmation. The adaptive-governance explanation would be weakened where final outcomes were determined principally by great-power bargaining; where Indonesia adopted language already agreed upon by other

actors; where no identifiable Indonesian proposal entered an institutional output; where coalition-building occurred without any institutional effect; or where Indonesian conduct is explained more convincingly by domestic political legitimation, immediate economic interest, or conventional risk-avoidance. These alternative explanations are assessed in the cross-case analysis rather than presumed to be incompatible with Global South diplomacy. Domestic interests and material incentives may coexist with adaptive governance agency, but the latter is established only when those motivations are translated through identifiable diplomatic practices into observable institutional effects.

The framework also has clear scope conditions. Adaptive governance agency is most likely where international authority is dispersed across overlapping institutions; where dominant actors require broader participation to sustain institutional legitimacy; where the intermediary state possesses recognized convening credibility; and where decision-making permits negotiation, consensus formation, or normative contestation. Its influence is likely to be weaker where outcomes are determined through coercion, rigid alliance structures, unilateral decision-making, or highly unequal material bargaining. The framework therefore does not deny the continuing importance of economic

dependency, military power, or technological asymmetry. It explains a narrower phenomenon: how materially constrained actors may exercise bounded governance influence within institutional environments that remain structurally unequal.

The analysis applies this framework to three cases: Indonesia's 2022 G20 presidency, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and the Just Energy Transition Partnership. Each case examines a different practice—agenda mediation, coalition brokerage, or normative translation—while applying the same evidentiary tests. This focused comparison allows the study to determine whether Indonesia's diplomacy produces consistent patterns of institutional uptake or merely reflects context-specific diplomatic activity.

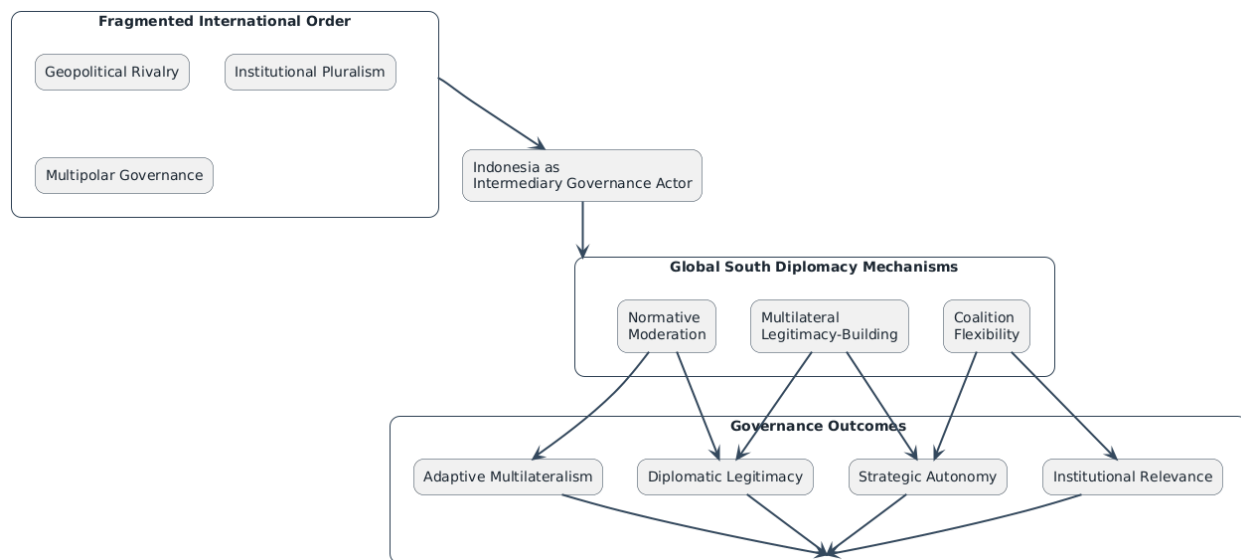
Taken together, the framework positions Indonesia neither as a passive rule-taker nor as a revisionist power capable of independently transforming international order. It conceptualizes Indonesia as an intermediary actor whose influence depends upon its capacity to convert cross-bloc access, representational claims, and normative credibility into bounded institutional accommodation. Indonesia

contributes to the reconfiguration of international order only where such interventions produce demonstrable changes in agendas, authoritative language, institutional procedures, recognized roles, or sovereign policy space. Figure 1 presents this causal architecture and its observable institutional outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative interpretivist research design to examine how Indonesia exercises adaptive governance agency within an increasingly fragmented international order. Guided by constructivist institutionalism and Global South International Relations scholarship, the study seeks to explain how Indonesia translates diplomatic initiatives into institutional influence through processes of agenda mediation, coalition brokerage, and normative translation. Rather than providing a comprehensive account of Indonesian foreign policy, the analysis focuses on three strategically significant cases: Indonesia's 2022 G20 Presidency, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP).

Figure 1. Indonesia's Global South Diplomacy Framework within Fragmented International Order



Source: Developed by the author based on constructivist institutionalism and Global South diplomacy literature (Acharya, 2017; Visoka, 2019; Mohan, 2021; Acharya et al., 2023).

These cases were selected because they represent distinct arenas of global and regional governance while enabling comparison of the mechanisms through which Indonesia seeks to shape institutional outcomes.

The empirical analysis draws upon 75 publicly accessible documents published between 2014 and early 2026. Primary sources include presidential speeches, Ministry of Foreign Affairs statements, official policy documents, ASEAN communiqués, the AOIP, G20 Leaders' Declarations, JETP agreements, and statements issued by participating governments and international organizations. Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed literature and policy reports, are used to contextualize diplomatic

developments and evaluate alternative interpretations.

Documents were selected through purposive sampling using four criteria: (1) direct relevance to one of the three case studies; (2) evidence of Indonesia's diplomatic objectives or strategic positioning; (3) information concerning negotiation processes, coalition-building, or institutional agenda-setting; and (4) evidence of institutional responses or policy outcomes. This strategy ensured that the empirical materials directly corresponded to the study's analytical framework and research objectives.

The analysis combined thematic coding, interpretive discourse analysis, and within-case process tracing. Thematic coding

identified recurring patterns relating to strategic autonomy, institutional legitimacy, ASEAN centrality, inclusive multilateralism, coalition flexibility, and Global South cooperation. Interpretive discourse analysis examined how Indonesian officials framed diplomatic narratives to construct legitimacy, reconcile competing interests, and position Indonesia as an intermediary actor within contested governance environments. Process tracing was then employed to reconstruct the sequence linking Indonesia's diplomatic initiatives with subsequent institutional responses, allowing the study to assess the plausibility of the proposed causal mechanism across the three cases.

Adaptive governance agency was operationalized through four observable indicators: (1) clearly articulated diplomatic objectives, (2) documented diplomatic initiatives or negotiation strategies, (3) incorporation of Indonesian proposals, language, or priorities into institutional outcomes, and (4) recognition by partner states or international organizations of Indonesia's intermediary or convening role. Institutional influence was inferred only where multiple sources demonstrated a credible connection between Indonesia's diplomatic actions and identifiable institutional outcomes. Diplomatic participation or rhetorical consistency alone

was not considered sufficient evidence of influence.

Methodological robustness was enhanced through source triangulation across Indonesian government documents, multilateral institutional records, partner-government statements, and independent academic scholarship. The analysis also considered alternative explanations, including domestic political considerations, economic interests, conventional hedging behaviour, and outcomes primarily shaped by major-power bargaining, thereby reducing the risk of attributing institutional change solely to Indonesian diplomacy.

The study is limited by its reliance on publicly available documentary sources, which cannot fully capture confidential negotiations or internal policy deliberations. Nevertheless, the combination of multiple primary sources, systematic triangulation, and explicit analytical criteria provides a transparent and theoretically grounded basis for explaining how Indonesia contributes to institutional adaptation and the evolving role of Global South diplomacy within the contemporary international order. Table 1 summarizes the case studies, principal sources, analytical mechanisms, and evidentiary indicators employed throughout the analysis.

Table 1 summarizes the three cases examined in the study and aligns each case

with the relevant diplomatic mechanism, evidence, and expected institutional strategic objective, primary documentary outcome.

Table 1. Analytical Mapping of the Selected Cases and Evidentiary Indicators

Case	Diplomatic Mechanism	Strategic Objective	Principal Evidence	Expected Institutional Outcome
Indonesia's 2022 G20 Presidency	Agenda mediation and coalition brokerage	Preserve institutional continuity and sustain the G20's economic and developmental agenda amid geopolitical division	Presidential statements, Ministry of Foreign Affairs releases, summit records, and the G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration	Agenda continuity, negotiated consensus, and recognition of Indonesia's convening role
ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific	Normative translation and coalition brokerage	Preserve ASEAN centrality and prevent regional polarization around competing Indo-Pacific strategies	Indonesian foreign-policy statements, ASEAN communiqués, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific	Incorporation of inclusive regional principles into an authoritative ASEAN framework
Just Energy Transition Partnership	Normative translation and institutional embedding	Reconcile decarbonization commitments with developmental equity, national circumstances, and transition justice	JETP political declaration, Comprehensive Investment and Policy Plan, Indonesian government statements, and partner-government documents	Institutional incorporation of development-sensitive and just-transition priorities

Source: Developed by the authors from Indonesian presidential and foreign-ministry statements, ASEAN documents, the G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration, the Indonesia JETP political declaration, and the Comprehensive Investment and Policy Plan analyzed in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The three cases reveal a consistent but bounded pattern of Indonesian diplomatic influence. Indonesia did not compel major powers, create a competing institutional order, or fundamentally alter existing

distributions of material power. Instead, it used recognized convening positions to mediate agendas, connect actors with divergent preferences, and translate Indonesian or developing-country concerns into language that could obtain wider institutional acceptance. Evidence of adaptive governance agency is strongest where four elements converge: an explicit Indonesian objective, a documented diplomatic intervention, incorporation of the relevant proposal or framing into an authoritative institutional output, and recognition of Indonesia's intermediary role.

Indonesia's 2022 G20 Presidency: Agenda Mediation and Coalition Brokerage

Indonesia's 2022 G20 presidency provides the strongest evidence of agenda mediation and coalition brokerage. The presidency occurred during the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the escalation of the Russia–Ukraine war, which divided members over Russia's participation and threatened agreement on a joint declaration. Indonesia's initial agenda emphasized global health architecture, digital transformation, and sustainable energy transition under the theme "Recover Together, Recover Stronger." The war, however, created pressure to transform an economic forum

into an arena of geopolitical confrontation (Sudiarto et al., 2024; Djuyandi et al., 2026).

Indonesia responded by defining institutional continuity as an explicit diplomatic objective. In April 2022, President Joko Widodo stated that "Indonesia aims to bring the G20 together. We must avoid disunity." (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022b). He communicated with leaders from both sides of the dispute, invited Ukraine to participate, maintained Russia's participation, and linked peace and stability to global economic recovery. These actions provide intentionality and process evidence: Indonesia did not merely invoke neutrality but conducted cross-bloc consultations designed to preserve participation and prevent the collapse of the summit process (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022a).

This intervention reflected agenda mediation rather than conventional neutrality. Indonesia neither removed geopolitical disagreement from the summit nor permitted it to displace the presidency's economic and developmental priorities. Instead, it sought to separate areas in which consensus remained possible from the unresolved political dispute. This approach was consistent with Indonesia's broader "free and active" doctrine, but it extended beyond defensive hedging because it was directed

toward maintaining the functionality of a multilateral institution rather than merely protecting Indonesia from alignment costs (Anwar, 2023; Wicaksana & Yakti, 2025).

Institutional uptake is visible in the G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration. Despite disagreement over Ukraine, members adopted a 52-paragraph declaration reaffirming the G20 as the principal forum for international economic cooperation and retaining commitments concerning health, food and energy security, digital transformation, climate action, and inclusive recovery (G20, 2022). The declaration did not eliminate geopolitical disagreement; The declaration itself reaffirmed that "the G20 is the premier forum for international economic cooperation," demonstrating that institutional continuity remained the shared objective despite disagreement over Ukraine (G20, 2022). It recorded differences among members while preserving a shared institutional programme. This outcome corresponded with Indonesia's stated objective of maintaining unity without requiring political uniformity.

Recognition evidence further supports a facilitative causal inference. Following the summit, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi described Indonesia's role as bridging sharp differences among G20 members. The Global Governance Group also welcomed the summit's substantive outcome and

specifically recognized Indonesia's engagement with states outside the G20 during its presidency. These statements do not independently prove causation, but they corroborate the process evidence by showing that external participants recognized Indonesia's convening and bridging functions (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022b).

The Bali agreement cannot, however, be attributed exclusively to Indonesian diplomacy. Major powers shared an interest in preventing institutional failure, and the final language reflected compromises negotiated among actors with substantially greater material leverage. Established G20 procedures and the economic costs of institutional paralysis also encouraged agreement. Indonesia's role was therefore facilitative rather than determinative. It increased the possibility of consensus by maintaining communication, protecting the economic agenda, and offering an acceptable convening platform, but it did not control the preferences of the participating powers.

The G20 case consequently supports a bounded claim of adaptive governance agency. Indonesia converted its presidency and cross-bloc access into intermediary legitimacy leverage, which contributed to institutional continuity and a negotiated

declaration. The outcome represents negotiated institutional repositioning because Indonesia gained recognition as a credible convenor while advancing development-oriented priorities. It does not establish that Indonesia reconfigured the international order independently.

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific: Normative Translation and ASEAN Centrality

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) demonstrates a second form of adaptive governance agency: normative translation. Indonesia promoted the Outlook amid competing Indo-Pacific strategies advanced by major powers and growing concern that Southeast Asia would become an arena of bloc competition. Indonesia's objective was to preserve ASEAN's role in regional governance while avoiding direct alignment with any externally designed strategic architecture (Anwar, 2020; Dannhauer, 2024).

Indonesia translated this objective into principles capable of obtaining agreement among ASEAN members with different security interests and external relationships. The ASEAN Outlook explicitly states that the Indo-Pacific should be "a region of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry" and emphasizes "ASEAN Centrality" as its guiding principle (ASEAN, 2019). Rather

than directly opposing the Indo-Pacific strategies of the United States, China, Japan, Australia, or India, the proposed framework emphasized ASEAN centrality, openness, inclusivity, respect for sovereignty, and cooperation through existing ASEAN-led mechanisms. The AOIP consequently described the region as one of "dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry" and identified ASEAN as an "honest broker" within a strategic environment characterized by competing interests (ASEAN, 2019).

The adoption of the AOIP by ASEAN leaders in 2019 constitutes institutional uptake of Indonesia's preferred framing. The final document did not merely endorse an abstract commitment to regional cooperation. It designated ASEAN centrality as the organizing principle of Indo-Pacific engagement, rejected the creation of a replacement institutional architecture, and prioritized maritime cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and economic cooperation. Indonesia therefore helped translate concerns about strategic polarization into a regional framework that could be accepted without requiring ASEAN members to choose a geopolitical camp (Anwar, 2020; Teo, 2022).

This process differs from strategic hedging. Hedging explains why Indonesia avoids excessive dependence on China or the

United States and diversifies its external relationships (Mubah, 2019; Anwar, 2023). It does not fully explain Indonesia's attempt to embed an inclusive conception of regional order within a collective ASEAN document. The AOIP case involves a governance effect: Indonesia's national preference for non-exclusive regionalism became part of ASEAN's authoritative institutional language.

Subsequent developments provide evidence that the framework achieved some institutional embedding. ASEAN partners adopted cooperation initiatives framed around the AOIP, while ASEAN-led bodies pursued implementation in areas such as maritime cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and defence dialogue. Japan, for example, reported numerous cooperation projects linked to AOIP priorities. ASEAN members also continued discussing the mainstreaming of the Outlook through existing ASEAN-led mechanisms. These developments show that the document generated a limited implementation pathway rather than remaining solely a declaratory statement.

Nevertheless, the AOIP's institutional effects remain primarily normative and coordinative. It is non-binding and does not prevent major powers from developing security arrangements outside ASEAN. The Quad, AUKUS, and bilateral strategic partnerships

continue to shape regional security without ASEAN direction (Li, 2022; Suharto et al., 2024; Edwina & Edwina, 2025). ASEAN's consensus rules, divergent national interests, and limited enforcement capacity further constrain collective responses to the South China Sea and the Myanmar crisis (Emmers & Le Thu, 2021; Prasetya et al., 2020).

Alternative explanations must also be considered. ASEAN members may have accepted the AOIP because its flexible language imposed few binding obligations and allowed each government to maintain existing external relationships. Major powers may support ASEAN centrality because ASEAN provides a neutral convening platform without seriously limiting their strategic freedom. Indonesia's diplomacy therefore contributed to the Outlook's adoption, but institutional flexibility and the interests of other participants also made agreement possible.

The AOIP nevertheless demonstrates a recognizable causal sequence. Indonesia identified the risk of regional polarization, reformulated that concern through inclusive ASEAN principles, brokered agreement among members, and secured the incorporation of those principles into a formal regional document. The result was not Indonesian control over Indo-Pacific

governance, but the preservation of ASEAN's representational standing within an increasingly fragmented regional architecture.

The JETP: Developmental Justice and Institutional Embedding

The Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) illustrates how Indonesia connects Global South developmental claims with participation in a financing arrangement led largely by developed states. The partnership was launched during the 2022 G20 Summit by Indonesia and the International Partners Group. It combined decarbonization targets with external financing intended to support Indonesia's transition from a coal-dependent power system (European External Action Service [EEAS], 2022).

Indonesia entered the partnership from a structurally asymmetric position. It required substantial external finance and technology, while donor governments and financial institutions retained considerable influence over the terms and forms of funding. At the same time, Indonesia possessed bargaining relevance because of the size of its economy, its energy demand, its coal dependence, and its importance to international climate targets. This combination of dependency and strategic significance created an institutional setting in

which Indonesia could negotiate policy space without controlling the partnership.

Indonesia's contribution is most visible in the partnership's framing of transition as a developmental and social process rather than merely a technical reduction of emissions. The JETP was designed around a "just" transition, country-specific implementation, economic development, employment considerations, and the mobilization of concessional and private financing. This framing corresponds with Indonesia's wider emphasis on sovereign development priorities and the political legitimacy of economic transformation (Gede Wahyu Wicaksana, 2021; Tahalele, 2022).

Institutional embedding became clearer in the 2023 Comprehensive Investment and Policy Plan. The plan established a pathway for Indonesia's power sector, including renewable-energy targets, emissions limits, financing priorities, grid development, the managed reduction of coal generation, and measures directed toward a just transition. It was presented as a roadmap jointly implemented by Indonesia and the international partners rather than as a uniform decarbonization model imposed independently of national conditions (EEAS, 2023).

This outcome supports a finding of normative translation, although the causal evidence is

weaker than in the G20 and AOIP cases. Indonesia participated in defining how international climate objectives would be reconciled with its domestic energy structure and development needs. The resulting framework formally recognized financing, social consequences, national implementation conditions, and the need to combine emissions reduction with economic transition. Developmental equity was therefore incorporated into the partnership's institutional design rather than remaining external diplomatic rhetoric.

The JETP also reveals the limits of negotiated institutional repositioning. The composition of financing, reliance on loans and private investment, regulatory conditions, and dependence on foreign technology constrain Indonesia's policy autonomy. Implementation has also faced concerns regarding local-government participation, employment effects, coal-dependent regional economies, and the inclusion of affected communities. Formal recognition of a just transition does not ensure that transition costs will be distributed equitably in practice.

Alternative explanations are particularly important in this case. Donor states pursued their own climate, commercial, and geopolitical objectives. Indonesia's government also had domestic incentives to

obtain investment, modernize energy infrastructure, and present itself as a climate leader. The agreement may therefore reflect converging material interests as much as Global South diplomatic agency. The adaptive-governance explanation remains persuasive only to the extent that Indonesia's developmental concerns can be traced into the partnership's design and implementation arrangements.

Accordingly, the JETP should not be portrayed as evidence that Indonesia successfully transformed global climate governance. It demonstrates a narrower effect: Indonesia used its developmental position and strategic importance to negotiate partial accommodation of domestic conditions within an externally supported transition framework. Whether that accommodation produces substantive justice depends on implementation, financing quality, and domestic participation.

Cross-Case Comparison and Alternative Explanations

Across the three cases, Indonesia's influence operated through different but connected mechanisms. During the G20 presidency, agenda mediation and coalition brokerage helped preserve institutional cooperation under severe geopolitical

division. In the AOIP, normative translation converted Indonesia's preference for non-exclusive regionalism into an ASEAN framework. In the JETP, developmental claims were incorporated into the formal design of an international climate-financing arrangement. The outcomes differed, but each case involved an attempt to convert intermediary positioning into institutional uptake.

Table 2 synthesizes the empirical findings across the three case studies by comparing Indonesia's diplomatic objectives, adaptive governance mechanisms, institutional uptake, alternative explanations, and the strength of the causal inference. The comparison demonstrates that Indonesia's influence is exercised primarily through agenda mediation, coalition brokerage, and normative translation, resulting in negotiated institutional repositioning rather than systemic transformation

Table 2. Cross-Case Comparison of Adaptive Governance Agency across Indonesia's Diplomatic Engagements

Case	Principal Mechanism	Observable Intervention	Institutional Uptake	Strength of Causal Inference
2022 G20 Presidency	Agenda mediation and coalition brokerage	Cross-bloc consultations, continued engagement with opposing parties, and protection of the economic agenda	Adoption of the Bali Leaders' Declaration and continuation of development priorities	Relatively strong but facilitative
ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific	Normative translation and coalition brokerage	Reframing geopolitical rivalry through inclusivity, ASEAN centrality, and cooperation	Adoption and subsequent implementation of the AOIP through ASEAN-led mechanisms	Strong for textual uptake; limited for material effects
Just Energy Transition Partnership	Normative translation and institutional embedding	Linking decarbonization with development, financing, social transition, and national circumstances	Inclusion of just-transition principles and national implementation priorities in the partnership and CIPP	Moderate and dependent on implementation

Source: Developed by the authors based on thematic analysis of Indonesian government documents, ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (2019), G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration (2022), the Just Energy Transition Partnership Comprehensive Investment and Policy Plan (2023), and supporting scholarly literature analyzed in this study.

What makes these practices specifically Global South diplomacy is not Indonesia's location or membership in a unified Southern bloc. It is the combination of structural asymmetry, claims concerning developmental equity or representational inclusion, and continued engagement with institutions whose resources and rules remain shaped by more powerful actors. Indonesia used conventional diplomatic instruments mediation, coalition-building, and multilateral negotiation but directed them toward preserving sovereign policy space and expanding the institutional recognition of non-dominant states.

Indonesia in Comparative Perspective: Brazil, India, and South Africa

Comparison with Brazil, India, and South Africa clarifies both the shared foundations and the distinctive characteristics of Indonesia's Global South diplomacy. All four states operate from positions of material and institutional inequality relative to the dominant powers, while possessing sufficient regional standing and diplomatic capacity to seek reform from within existing international institutions. Their strategies combine demands for greater Southern representation with continued participation in multilateral governance rather than withdrawal from the prevailing order. The development of the India–Brazil–South

Africa Dialogue Forum similarly demonstrates how emerging Southern powers have used coalition coordination to increase their influence over international institutions and articulate alternative development priorities (Alden & Vieira, 2005).

Brazil has generally relied more heavily on coalition leadership and explicit norm-shaping. Its diplomacy has used groupings of developing states to challenge unequal representation and advance reforms in trade, climate governance, development finance, and international security. In climate negotiations, Brazil combined coalition formation with proposals intended to reconcile differentiated responsibilities, developing-country interests, and collective emissions-reduction objectives (Albuquerque, 2019). This strategy resembles Indonesia's normative translation because both states connect Southern concerns to institutionally acceptable frameworks. Brazil, however, has more frequently sought to organize relatively coherent negotiating coalitions and project itself as a representative leader of the South. Indonesia's approach is usually less dependent on bloc leadership and more focused on mediating among actors that do not share a stable political position.

India similarly combines strategic autonomy with claims to Global South leadership, but it operates with greater material capabilities and a more explicit ambition to influence the distribution of authority in global institutions. During its 2023 G20 presidency, India sought to articulate a development-oriented agenda, secure consensus among geopolitically divided members, and support the African Union's admission as a permanent G20 member. These practices involved agenda mediation and coalition brokerage comparable to Indonesia's 2022 presidency. India's strategy, however, was accompanied by a stronger claim to political and intellectual leadership of the Global South and greater capacity to connect institutional reform with its own emergence as a major power (Bery, 2024). Indonesia presents itself less as the principal voice of the South than as an acceptable intermediary capable of maintaining dialogue among Southern states, Western powers, and competing regional actors.

South Africa offers a more distributive and occasionally confrontational model of Southern middle-power diplomacy. Its participation in multilateral trade negotiations and developing-country coalitions has involved combative diplomacy directed at challenging unequal bargaining structures and advancing the interests of African and developing states (Efsthathopoulos, 2012).

South Africa's international role also derives from its claim to represent African concerns within institutions whose decision-making structures continue to privilege established powers (Black & Hornsby, 2016). Although Indonesia similarly seeks greater representation and developmental accommodation, it generally avoids framing negotiations through direct North–South confrontation. It instead reformulates potentially divisive claims through the language of inclusivity, consensus, sovereignty, and institutional continuity.

The comparison therefore shows that Indonesia's diplomacy is neither an ordinary form of middle-power activism nor an exact reproduction of established Global South strategies. Brazil emphasizes coalition leadership and norm-shaping; India combines consensus brokerage with an explicit claim to major-power and Global South leadership; and South Africa frequently foregrounds distributive inequality and African representation. Indonesia's distinctive contribution lies in **intermediary rather than representative leadership**. It does not ordinarily claim to speak for the Global South as a unified constituency. Instead, it uses its non-exclusive relationships, ASEAN standing, and multilateral credibility to translate competing demands into formulations capable of attracting broader institutional acceptance.

This comparative distinction reinforces the concept of adaptive governance agency. Indonesia's influence depends less on mobilizing a cohesive Southern bloc than on converting cross-bloc accessibility into intermediary legitimacy leverage. Its characteristic practices are the preservation of negotiation, coordination of compromise, and institutional embedding of inclusive or development-sensitive language. This approach may produce less visible redistribution than the strategies associated with Brazil, India, or South Africa, but it can generate negotiated institutional repositioning where direct confrontation would prevent agreement. Indonesia's Global South diplomacy is therefore distinctive not because its instruments are entirely unique, but because it combines structural asymmetry, developmental representation, strategic non-alignment, and consensus-oriented institutional mediation in a specific configuration.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Indonesia's emerging international role is best understood as a form of Global South diplomacy exercised through adaptive governance agency. Across the 2022 G20

Presidency, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and the Just Energy Transition Partnership, Indonesia sought to preserve strategic autonomy while translating geopolitical and developmental tensions into institutionally acceptable forms. Its influence derived less from material power than from its capacity to mediate competing interests, broker coalitions, and frame contested issues through principles of inclusivity, developmental equity, and multilateral cooperation.

The findings identify three mechanisms through which this agency operates. Indonesia used agenda mediation to preserve the developmental orientation and institutional functionality of the G20 during the geopolitical crisis. Through the ASEAN Outlook, it employed normative translation and coalition brokerage to secure regional endorsement of an inclusive Indo-Pacific framework. In the JETP, Indonesia incorporated developmental justice, national circumstances, and transition equity into the governance of climate finance. These outcomes were limited and negotiated, but they demonstrate that Indonesia can convert diplomatic positioning into institutional uptake.

The study contributes to International Relations scholarship by distinguishing Global South diplomacy from conventional

middle-power diplomacy. Middle-power approaches explain Indonesia's reliance on mediation, multilateralism, and coalition-building, but they insufficiently capture the structural and normative purposes of these practices. Global South diplomacy emphasizes how states operating under unequal conditions use such instruments to advance sovereign autonomy, developmental representation, and greater institutional inclusion. The concept of adaptive governance agency therefore explains how materially non-dominant states may generate intermediary legitimacy leverage without pursuing exclusive alignment or systemic rupture.

Indonesia should not, however, be portrayed as an independent architect of international order. Its diplomatic influence remains constrained by major-power bargaining, ASEAN's institutional weaknesses, external financing, technological dependence, and unequal economic structures. The evidence consequently supports a claim of negotiated institutional repositioning rather than comprehensive transformation. Indonesia can shape agendas, language, and representational frameworks, but it cannot independently alter the material hierarchies governing regional and global institutions.

The study is limited by its reliance on publicly available documents, which provide

incomplete access to confidential negotiations, bureaucratic disagreement, and informal diplomacy. Its conclusions are also derived from a single-country analysis and should not be generalized automatically to other Global South states. Future research should test the proposed mechanisms through comparative case studies, elite interviews, archival evidence, and analysis of unsuccessful diplomatic initiatives. Such research would clarify the conditions under which intermediary legitimacy produces substantive institutional change rather than symbolic recognition.

Overall, Indonesia's diplomacy demonstrates that contemporary order transformation occurs not only through great-power rivalry but also through incremental struggles over representation, legitimacy, and institutional design. Indonesia's emerging role lies in creating negotiated space between competing powers and governance frameworks, thereby contributing to the gradual pluralization rather than wholesale replacement of international authority.

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