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Predictive Policing and Corporate Governance-Reframing Business Judgment Rule as a Preventive Framework for Corruption in Indonesian State-Owned Enterprises

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Abstract
The criminalization of business decisions in Indonesian state-owned enterprises (SOEs) remains a critical challenge in public corporate governance. Enforcement practices dominated by retrospective evaluation frequently blur the boundary between legitimate business risk and corrupt conduct, relegating the Business Judgment Rule (BJR) to an ex post defensive doctrine rather than an effective mechanism for protecting managerial discretion. This condition not only undermines legal certainty but also fosters excessive risk aversion and strategic decision avoidance among SOE directors. This article seeks to reposition the Business Judgment Rule from a defensive liability doctrine to a preventive framework grounded in predictive policing within SOE governance. Employing a qualitative design that combines normative legal analysis with SOE case studies and cross-stakeholder interviews, including SOE management, law enforcement officials, legal scholars, and business actors the study applies thematic analysis to examine relationships between business logic, investigative logic, and corruption prevention mechanisms. The findings yield three principal insights. First, BJR is currently ineffective because it relies on post-event assessment and fails to function as a boundary-setting mechanism between business risk and abuse of discretion. Second, a persistent rationality conflict exists between business logics emphasizing efficiency and innovation and investigative logics oriented toward formal compliance and prosecution. Third, risk-analytics–based early warning systems enable objective verification of directors' good faith and duty of care prior to execution of strategic decisions. The article contributes by advancing the model of Predictive Business Judgment Governance, which integrates BJR principles with predictive policing capacities as an institutional corruption prevention architecture. This model positions policing institutions as preventive governance actors and offers a policy reform pathway for strengthening accountability while preserving SOE effectiveness and innovation.

Keywords: Predictive Policing, Business Judgment Rule, Corporate Governance, State-Owned Enterprises, Corruption Prevention, Police Governance

1. Introduction: Policing Risk in Indonesian State-Owned Enterprises

State-owned enterprises (SOEs) occupy a strategic nexus between development mandates, corporate logics, and public accountability. Governance scholarship consistently associates this hybrid position with elevated integrity risks relative to private corporations, particularly when SOEs operate in high-value sectors such as energy, extractives, transport, and infrastructure, domains characterized by dense licensing regimes, procurement cycles, concessions, and contractor–subcontractor networks (Grossi et al., 2015; Adebayo & Ackers, 2022). Cross-national evidence further indicates that corruption and "irregular practices" in SOEs are not marginal phenomena: a substantial share of SOEs report materialization of such practices in recent years, with acknowledged impacts on profitability and internal control effectiveness (OECD, 2020). Taken together, this literature emphasizes that the core governance challenge lies not merely in formal compliance, but in supervisory designs capable of managing tensions among state control, performance orientation, and the managerial autonomy required for organizational adaptability (Grossi et al., 2015; Adebayo & Ackers, 2022).

In Indonesia, SOE integrity problems entail an additional, critical dimension: the boundary between legitimate business risk and abuse of authority qualifying as corruption often becomes blurred when investment or procurement decisions result in losses (Loren, 2025; Marizal, 2024; Fitriana, 2025). Directors' liability research identifies this context as especially vulnerable to hindsight and outcome bias, the tendency to assess the reasonableness of decisions based on known outcomes rather than on the information, alternatives, and risks reasonably available at the time of decision-making (Strohmaier et al., 2021). Experimental evidence demonstrates that even professional evaluators are prone to retrospective bias once negative outcomes occur, effectively shifting standards of care toward an ex post "should-have-known" benchmark (Strohmaier et al., 2021). In SOE governance practice, such bias contributes to a criminal chilling effect: directors become defensive, avoid strategically valuable risk-taking, and prioritize administrative safety over value optimization, with adverse consequences for innovation and developmental capacity (OECD, 2020; Loren, 2025).

Business Judgment Rule (BJR) emerged within corporate law to shield directors from personal liability for corporate losses provided decisions are taken in good faith, on an informed basis, without conflicts of interest, and within authority (Bainbridge, 2020). Its core purpose is to preserve managerial discretion so that rational risk-taking is not criminalized or reframed as negligence merely because outcomes turn adverse (Bainbridge, 2020). Yet in SOE contexts, BJR often operates ex post, contested only after proceedings commence, thereby shifting its function from governance infrastructure to defensive argument. Indonesian legal scholarship following the strengthening of BJR within the SOE regime underscores the urgency of clarifying operational standards to avoid two simultaneous extremes: criminalization of legitimate business policy on the one hand and opportunistic invocation of BJR to shield bad-faith conduct on the other (Loren, 2025; Marizal, 2024; Fitriana, 2025).

The limitations of purely reactive approaches, intervening after losses materialize are especially pronounced in complex corporate crime and corruption that exploit governance gaps across procurement, financing, and vendor relations (OECD, 2020). Consequently, global anti-corruption debates increasingly emphasize risk-based and data-informed integrity systems, including analytics for anomaly detection, collusive network mapping, and early warning across procurement or investment cycles (APEC, 2025; Resimić, 2025). Transparency International's recent review highlights the potential of artificial intelligence and analytics to support prevention and detection in areas such as procurement integrity and anti–money laundering, while stressing the necessity of ethical governance, accountability, and safeguards against misuse (Resimić, 2025). Similarly, APEC situates anti-corruption technologies within a prevention, detection and enforcement value chain, underscoring that effectiveness depends on institutional integration and appropriate governance design (APEC, 2025).

At this juncture, Police Science contributes a critical conceptual lens through predictive policing and risk-oriented policing capacities. Contemporary literature does not reduce predictive policing to algorithmic tools for forecasting street crime; rather, it frames it as an organizational model leveraging data, intelligence, and analytics to allocate preventive resources with greater precision (Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023; Ugwudike, 2022). Recent empirical work evaluates both effectiveness and operational consequences, highlighting the governance requirements needed to avoid bias, discriminatory feedback loops, and overpolicing of specific groups or spaces (Ugwudike, 2022;

Marciniak, 2023). The principal value proposition of predictive policing thus lies in its potential as a prevention architecture grounded in risk indicators adaptable to economic crime domains provided that indicators, data sources, and decision procedures are bound by accountability and transparency (Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023; Marciniak, 2023).

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Methodologically, the article combines normative legal analysis of BJR and SOE governance with case studies and cross-stakeholder interviews, followed by qualitative thematic analysis to operationalize BJR as a risk-based preventive device. Its academic contribution spans three domains: (1) SOE governance, by proposing a prevention model compatible with hybrid organizational characteristics (Grossi et al., 2015; Adebayo & Ackers, 2022); (2) corporate law, by extending BJR into a proactive governance infrastructure (Bainbridge, 2020; Loren, 2025); and (3) Police Science, by outlining a conceptual pathway from predictive policing to predictive governance for corruption prevention in public corporations (Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023; Ugwudike, 2022; Marciniak, 2023).

2. Conceptual Framework: Linking Corporate Governance and Policing

2.1. Business Judgment Rule in Corporate Governance

The Business Judgment Rule (BJR) is a central doctrine in corporate law designed to protect directors from personal liability for business decisions provided such decisions are made in good faith, with due care, on an informed basis, and without conflicts of interest (Bainbridge, 2020; Velasco, 2021). In the global literature, BJR is understood as an institutional mechanism that balances director accountability with the managerial discretion necessary to navigate market uncertainty (Bainbridge, 2020; Velasco, 2021). By offering a safe harbor for rational risk-taking, BJR aims to prevent over-deterrence that could otherwise suppress innovation and strategic initiative (Bainbridge, 2020).

Conceptually, BJR operates as a boundary-setting mechanism distinguishing legitimate business risk from conduct that departs from fiduciary duty. This boundary is determined not by success or failure ex post, but by the quality of the decision-making process: whether directors undertook reasonable risk assessment, accessed relevant information, considered alternatives, and acted in the company's best interests. Contemporary governance scholarship frames BJR as a process-oriented standard rather than an outcome-oriented liability rule (Velasco, 2021; Clarke, 2022). Within this framework, financial loss does not automatically signify legal breach so long as the decision process meets reasonable standards of care (Clarke, 2022).

However, empirical and doctrinal studies indicate that BJR's effectiveness is highly contingent on institutional context. In state-owned enterprises, BJR is frequently distorted by the tension between public mandates and commercial logics, as well as by more intensive criminal oversight compared to the private sector (OECD, 2020; Loren, 2025). In Indonesia, BJR is still predominantly invoked ex post, thereby failing to function as a governance infrastructure operating before losses occur. Recent Indonesian legal scholarship highlights that criminalization of SOE business decisions is often driven by outcome-based assessment rather than comprehensive evaluation of directors' processes and good faith (Marizal, 2024; Fitriana, 2025).

These limitations are compounded by hindsight bias, the systemic tendency to judge past decisions based on information that becomes available only after outcomes are known. Experimental evidence demonstrates that retrospective bias significantly affects assessments of directors' liability, even among legal and accounting professionals, increasing error attribution when outcomes are negative (Strohmaier et al., 2021). In SOE ecosystems, this bias contributes to a criminal chilling effect, encouraging ultra-conservative behavior and avoidance of strategically valuable risk-taking. Accordingly, the central challenge of BJR implementation in Indonesia lies not merely in normative formulation, but in the absence of operational mechanisms capable of objectively verifying good faith and duty of care at the planning stage of strategic decisions (Loren, 2025; Marizal, 2024; Fitriana, 2025).

2.2. Predictive Policing as Preventive Institutional Capacity

In contemporary Police Science, predictive policing is conceptualized as a risk-based approach that employs data analytics, statistical modeling, and intelligence integration to anticipate criminal events before they occur. Recent scholarship emphasizes that predictive policing is not simply the adoption of algorithmic tools, but a broader institutional transformation toward evidence-based security management and more precise allocation of preventive resources (Ratcliffe, 2020; Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023). This approach positions data as the foundation of operational decision-making while simultaneously requiring robust governance frameworks to mitigate bias, discrimination, and harmful feedback loops (Ugwudike, 2022; Marciniak, 2023).

Predictive policing performs three interrelated functions: early risk detection through identification of anomalies and deviation patterns; network mapping and hotspot analysis of illicit activity; and facilitation of calibrated preventive interventions. Empirical studies indicate that, when implemented with appropriate indicators and ethical oversight, predictive approaches can enhance prevention effectiveness, accelerate response, and strengthen organizational learning within policing institutions (Ugwudike, 2022; Marciniak, 2023). In the domain of economic crime, predictive analytics are increasingly applied to detect suspicious transactions, procurement collusion, and governance deviations through red-flag indicators and risk-scoring models (APEC, 2025; Transparency International, 2025).

The relevance of predictive policing to corporate crime and public-sector corruption has intensified alongside growing transaction complexity and digitalization of business processes. Recent policy analyses argue that integrating artificial intelligence and data analytics enables a shift from reactive, complaint-driven approaches toward early warning systems that continuously monitor procurement, investment, and asset management (Resimić, 2025; APEC, 2025). At the same time, the literature cautions that effectiveness depends on data quality, inter-agency interoperability, and clear institutional mandates; without mature governance design, predictive technologies risk becoming unaccountable surveillance tools or producing risk signals without actionable policy follow-through (Resimić, 2025; Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023).

Within this article, predictive policing is therefore positioned not as a new repressive instrument, but as preventive institutional capacity that is, the ability of policing organizations to support corporate crime prevention through early verification of risk indicators and provision of decision intelligence to governance actors. This framing opens space for a functional shift from case processing toward data-enabled facilitation of accountability.

2.3. Police as Governance Actor

Recent developments in policing and public governance scholarship point to a transformation of police roles from crime processors to guardians of institutional integrity. Under this paradigm, policing is no longer confined to post-violation enforcement but extends to prevention through risk management, cross-sector collaboration, and strengthening compliance mechanisms (Loader & Walker, 2021; Fleming & Rhodes, 2018). This perspective aligns with nodal governance theory, which situates the police as one node within broader public–private networks jointly producing security and institutional integrity.

In the context of administrative and corporate crime, the police's governance role is expressed through preventive policing, risk-oriented regulation, and anticipatory accountability. Preventive policing emphasizes intervention before losses occur; risk-oriented regulation concentrates oversight on areas with the highest probability and impact; and anticipatory accountability shifts responsibility from ex post evaluation to documentation and verification of processes from the planning stage onward (Schuilenburg & Peeters, 2021; Ugwudike, 2022). Together, these concepts provide a theoretical foundation for integrating policing into a more predictive SOE governance system.

Building on this framework, the article advances predictive business judgment governance, whereby BJR principles are translated into continuously monitored risk parameters through analytic systems. In this model, policing institutions supply early detection capacity and risk intelligence, while SOE management retains authority over business decisions. Such synergy enables protection for directors acting in good faith while strengthening the state's ability to identify abuse of discretion at an early stage. Accordingly, the integration of BJR and predictive policing is not intended to expand criminalization of business policy, but to construct a proportional, evidence-based prevention architecture compatible with the hybrid organizational character of SOEs (Bainbridge, 2020; Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023; Ugwudike, 2022).

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design combining normative legal analysis with case studies and cross-stakeholder interviews. The normative juridical approach is employed to examine the legal framework of the Business Judgment Rule, SOE governance arrangements, and post-legislative regulatory implications, particularly with respect to directors' liability and corruption prevention mechanisms. This approach enables systematic interrogation of legal norms, doctrinal developments, and public policy as the conceptual foundation of the analysis (McCrudden, 2006; Hutchinson & Duncan, 2012).

To mitigate the limitations of purely doctrinal inquiry, the study is enriched through case studies of strategic SOEs and in-depth interviews across multiple stakeholder clusters, including SOE directors and senior executives, law enforcement officials, corporate and criminal law scholars/practitioners, and business actors engaged in SOE procurement and project ecosystems. This mixed design situates the research within the socio-legal tradition, which conceptualizes law as a social practice produced through interaction between formal norms and institutional realities (Banakar & Travers, 2013; Halliday & Schmidt, 2018). Such a design enables empirical capture of how the Business Judgment Rule operates in practice while identifying pathways for its integration with predictive policing within SOE governance.

3.1. Data Collection

Data were collected using two primary techniques. First, document analysis was conducted on statutes and regulations, court decisions, SOE governance policies, and institutional reports on corruption prevention and corporate oversight. Document analysis served to map the normative evolution of the Business Judgment Rule, shifts in directors' liability regimes, and policy frameworks relevant to the deployment of risk analytics. This method allows legal and policy texts to be examined as social artifacts reflecting state institutional preferences and governance priorities (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2014).

Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted across four principal informant clusters: (1) SOE management (directors and senior officials), (2) law enforcement authorities, (3) legal academics and practitioners, and (4) business actors directly interacting with SOEs. This cross-cluster strategy was designed to elicit multi-perspective insights into business decision-making practices, enforcement experiences, and perceptions of corruption risk and managerial protection. Interviews were selected for their capacity to capture meaning-making processes, action rationalities, and institutional experiences not accessible through documentary sources alone (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Guest et al., 2014). All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

3.2. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. This method was chosen for its flexibility in identifying patterns of meaning across heterogeneous data sources and its capacity to integrate normative and empirical insights within a unified analytical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Analysis proceeded through iterative stages of initial coding, clustering codes into conceptual themes, and interpreting relationships among themes related to the functioning of the Business Judgment Rule, dynamics of law enforcement, and the prospective role of predictive policing.

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was employed to support data organization, facilitate tracking of thematic co-occurrence, and enhance analytical transparency, without substituting the interpretive role of the researcher. This approach aligns with established practices in qualitative research emphasizing software as analytic support rather than as a producer of meaning (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). To strengthen credibility, triangulation was undertaken between documentary and interview data, alongside cross-cluster consistency checks of emergent themes.

3.3. Analytical Orientation

The study adopts a policy-oriented qualitative analytical orientation, integrating empirical exploration with the formulation of actionable governance implications. Rather than limiting analysis to descriptive accounts, this approach seeks to identify realistic institutional intervention points—particularly in aligning Business Judgment Rule principles with predictive policing capacities as a framework for SOE corruption prevention. This orientation follows the tradition of applied qualitative policy research, which treats qualitative findings as a basis for normative and operational recommendations (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002; Yin, 2018).

Accordingly, analysis focuses on how mechanisms for verifying good faith, mapping decision-related risks, and operationalizing early warning systems can be institutionalized without expanding criminalization of business policy. This methodological stance enables development of the predictive business judgment governance framework, balancing public accountability with protection of managerial discretion while clarifying the role of policing institutions as preventive governance actors.

4. Results

4.1. Ineffectiveness of Ex Post Business Judgment Rule

The thematic analysis reveals that, within Indonesian SOEs, the Business Judgment Rule (BJR) continues to operate primarily as an ex post defensive mechanism rather than as an ex ante preventive instrument. Coding patterns show recurrent co-occurrence of terms such as pressure, fear, politics, and criminal liability in interview segments discussing strategic business decisions, indicating that managerial choices are routinely made under structural pressure and perceived criminalization risk. This pattern suggests that managerial rationality is rarely assessed at the moment decisions are taken; instead, it is reconstructed retrospectively after losses materialize.

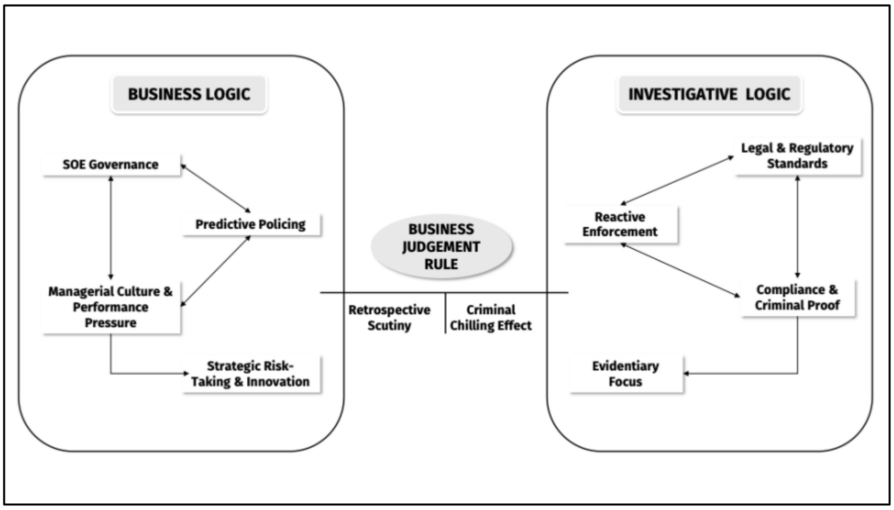

Figure 1: Nvivo Thematic Structure Showing Organizational-Set Conflict Between Business Logic And Investigative Logic

As illustrated in Figure 1 (NVivo thematic structure showing organizational-set conflict between business logic and investigative logic), BJR occupies a central yet contested position between SOE governance and a legal regime dominated by retrospective evaluation. Business losses are frequently reclassified as state losses, while the quality of decision-making processes becomes secondary. This configuration produces a pronounced *criminal chilling effect*: directors consistently report a tendency to avoid strategically significant but risky decisions and to select administratively safest options, even when such choices undermine innovation and operational effectiveness. These findings demonstrate that a post hoc BJR fails to perform its core function of protecting rational managerial discretion.

Further analysis identifies strong co-occurrence between BJR-related concepts (*rationality*, *technical assessment*, *information*, *good faith*) and decision–risk clusters across all informant groups. Discursively, BJR is widely understood as a standard of decision-making quality. However, this understanding is not institutionalized in enforcement practice because no objective mechanism exists to verify informed decision-making and good faith prior to outcome realization. Consequently, business losses are readily translated into state losses, while process quality is relegated to a secondary concern. Empirically, this reinforces the criminal chilling effect and entrenches risk-avoidant managerial behavior.

Overall, these findings indicate that BJR ineffectiveness is not merely a doctrinal issue but stems from the dominance of retrospective evaluation unsupported by real-time process verification. Under such conditions, BJR loses its preventive function and is reduced to a defensive argument deployed only after losses occur.

4.2. Organizational-Set Conflict between Business Logic and Investigative Logic

Matrix coding and primary node structures reveal a persistent rationality conflict between SOE business logic and law enforcement investigative logic. Five dominant thematic domains legal and regulatory frameworks, SOE governance, managerial culture and business ethics, Business Judgment Rule, and predictive policing, capture the fragmentation of institutional perspectives.

From the managerial standpoint, decisions are framed as technical processes shaped by incomplete information, policy pressures, and performance imperatives. By contrast, investigative perspectives reconstruct the same decisions through lenses of formal compliance and criminal proof. This divergence generates what emerges empirically as a difference in “language”; a term of efficiency, innovation, and risk on one side, and a vocabulary of legality, procedure, and prosecution on the other. This misalignment prevents BJR from functioning as a boundary-setting mechanism because no shared medium exists to translate business standards of care into legally verifiable indicators.

Cluster comparison further shows that terms related to *data*, *predictive*, *analytics*, *systems*, and *early warning* appear far more prominently in international benchmark materials than in domestic data, which remain dominated by evidentiary and enforcement terminology. This contrast indicates that while international practices increasingly emphasize data-driven risk management, the domestic context continues to rely on reactive, post-event enforcement. Empirically, this orientation gap weakens BJR implementation and deepens organizational conflict between business actors and law enforcement authorities.

4.3. Early Warning Systems and Objective Verification of Good Faith

The most significant empirical contribution of this study lies in identifying the potential of predictive policing to function as a decision-support system capable of bridging legal and business rationalities through data-driven risk indicators. Thematic integration across legal frameworks, SOE governance, BJR, and predictive policing highlights the demand for mechanisms that translate managerial discretion into auditable accountability parameters. Operationally, risk analytics are projected to perform three core functions such as; (1) documenting decision rationales through *decision audit trails*, enabling directors to demonstrate that choices were informed; (2) tracking deviation indicators such as conflicts of interest, weaknesses in transactional legality, or procedural anomalies; and (3) verifying good faith prior to execution of strategic decisions.

With such predictive support, the BJR principles of informed decision-making and good faith no longer rest on normative claims alone but become grounded in documented process evidence. Moreover, the analysis indicates that integrating predictive policing directly strengthens the accountability component within Following Klitgaard's corruption formula (C = M + D − A), corruption tends to escalate in contexts where monopoly power and discretionary authority are high, while accountability mechanisms remain weak. Strengthening accountability particularly through auditable decision processes and early risk detection thus becomes a critical lever for corruption prevention. Increasing auditable accountability without diminishing managerial discretion. Sentiment patterns dominated by neutral and negative perceptions of existing legal protection reflect limited confidence in the current BJR regime. However, predictive approaches are perceived as capable of shifting this orientation by establishing *process certainty*: when decisions are supported by explicit risk mapping and mitigation records, directors gain objective grounds for BJR protection.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that predictive policing is not antagonistic to the Business Judgment Rule but complementary. By reinforcing accountability while preserving discretion, predictive approaches enable BJR to operate as a genuine institutional prevention mechanism, embedded in governance design and decision systems rather than as a purely punitive, ex post legal safeguard.

5. Discussion

5.1. From Reactive Enforcement to Predictive Policing

The findings indicate that the prevailing enforcement regime governing Indonesian SOEs remains largely reactive: interventions are triggered after losses materialize, and business decisions are reconstructed through post hoc criminal evidentiary logics. This configuration places the Business Judgment Rule in a defensive position and generates a form of structural deterrence that encourages excessive managerial risk aversion. As a result, the discretionary space necessary for strategic decision-making contracts, constraining SOEs' adaptive capacity under economic uncertainty (OECD, 2020; Loren, 2025).

Against this backdrop, predictive policing offers a paradigmatic shift from passive enforcement toward prospective institutional risk management. Rather than operating solely as post-event case processors, policing institutions are repositioned as governance actors contributing to systemic stability through pattern mapping, anomaly detection, and data-driven preventive interventions (Ratcliffe, 2020; Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023). This shift yields two principal implications. First, enforcement efficiency increases as resources can be concentrated on high-risk nodes rather than dispersed across retrospective investigations. Second, corruption prevention becomes more effective because interventions move upstream into decision-making processes, rather than remaining confined to downstream stages after losses have accumulated (Ugwudike, 2022; Marciniak, 2023).

Within this framework, the organizational-set conflict between business logic and investigative logic identified in the Results section can be mitigated through standardized risk indicators that provide a shared evaluative medium. Such indicators enable both domains to assess decisions more proportionally and contextually, reducing reliance on outcome-based judgments while strengthening process-based accountability (Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023; APEC, 2025).

5.2. Reframing Business Judgment Rule as Preventive Infrastructure

This discussion reframes the Business Judgment Rule from a liability shield into a form of preventive governance infrastructure. Conceptually, BJR is designed to protect directors acting in good faith, with due care, and on an informed basis (Bainbridge, 2020; Velasco, 2021). In practice, however, BJR continues to function primarily as an ex post defense because no objective mechanisms exist to demonstrate these standards prior to outcome realization (Marizal, 2024; Fitriana, 2025).

Through integration with risk analytics and predictive policing capacities, BJR can be reconstructed as an ex ante prevention architecture. In this model, the principles of good faith and informed decision-making are translated into documented process evidence from the outset rather than asserted normatively after losses occur. Risk analytics enable early differentiation between legitimate business risk, an inherent feature of corporate activity and signals of discretionary abuse marked by conflicts of interest, procedural deviations, or anomalous transaction patterns (APEC, 2025; Resimić, 2025).

Such reframing operationalizes BJR as a boundary-setting mechanism. The line between lawful business judgment and corrupt conduct is no longer determined primarily by outcomes but by verifiable process quality: documented decision rationales (*decision audit trails*), strategic transaction risk mapping, and early verification of substantive compliance. Consequently, BJR evolves from a passive shield into an active governance architecture that strengthens accountability while preserving the discretionary space required for SOE effectiveness (Bainbridge, 2020; Clarke, 2022).

This approach also addresses the classic tension between corruption prevention and managerial courage. By rendering decision processes prospectively transparent and auditable, the system protects directors acting in good faith without weakening oversight of potential deviations. In doing so, it rebalances Klitgaard's corruption equation ($C = M + D - A$) by increasing accountability through auditable predictive systems while avoiding suppression of discretion essential to business performance (Resimić, 2025; APEC, 2025).

5.3. Policy Implications for Police and SOE Governance

Building on the Predictive Business Judgment Governance framework, the study derives several concrete policy implications for policing institutions and SOE governance.

First, law enforcement agencies require strengthened analytical units dedicated to corporate crime and SOE governance risks. These units should function as *risk intelligence hubs*, integrating procurement, investment, ownership structure, and vendor relationship data to generate early warning indicators. Their orientation should be preventive, with a primary mandate to provide risk mitigation recommendations before strategic decisions are executed (Schuilenburg & Soudijn, 2023; Transparency International, 2025).

Second, SOE internal risk management systems should be integrated with policing prevention frameworks through standardized data-sharing protocols. Such integration promotes consistency of risk indicators across business and enforcement perspectives while reducing informational fragmentation that currently exacerbates organizational conflict (APEC, 2025; Ugwudike, 2022).

Third, institutionalization of strategic decision verification through *decision audit trails* is essential. Material decisions such as major investments, strategic procurement, or asset restructuring should be accompanied by documented rationales encompassing considered alternatives, informational bases, risk assessments, and designed mitigations. This protocol serves a dual function: it provides BJR protection for directors acting in good faith and offers law enforcement an early basis for assessing process quality without waiting for losses to occur (Bainbridge, 2020; Marizal, 2024).

Fourth, the study proposes development of a *joint governance dashboard* linking SOEs and law enforcement agencies. Such dashboards would display real-time risk indicators including procurement red flags, vendor concentration, and procedural deviations enabling anticipatory collaborative oversight. This mechanism is not intended to intrude upon business autonomy, but to create data-driven dialogue spaces between SOE management and enforcement institutions (APEC, 2025; Resimić, 2025).

Taken together, Predictive Business Judgment Governance offers a new governance architecture integrating corporate law and Police Science within a unified prevention framework. The model shifts emphasis from post-event criminalization toward strengthening decision-making processes, positions policing institutions as preventive governance actors, and reconstitutes the Business Judgment Rule as institutional infrastructure for early differentiation between legitimate business risk and abuse of authority. Through this approach, SOEs can operate more adaptively and innovatively, while the state gains oversight mechanisms that are more precise, proportional, and equitable.

6. Conclusion

This article advances the model of Predictive Business Judgment Governance as a synthesis of corporate law, Police Science, and public policy within the context of SOE governance. Building on empirical evidence that the Business Judgment Rule has largely operated retrospectively and that enforcement remains dominated by post-event intervention, the study demonstrates the need for a fundamental shift toward predictive governance centered on prevention. In the proposed model, the Business Judgment Rule is repositioned from a liability shield into an ex ante preventive governance infrastructure, while predictive policing functions as an institutional enabler through the provision of risk intelligence, deviation indicators, and early verification of decision-making process quality.

The article offers multidimensional contributions. First, within Police Science, it extends predictive policing beyond conventional crime domains into public corporate governance, positioning policing institutions as institutional risk managers responsible for safeguarding the integrity of strategic SOE decision-making. Second, in policy studies, it proposes a risk-based prevention architecture that reorients governance away from post hoc criminalization toward anticipatory governance through integration of risk analytics, decision audit trails, and cross-institutional collaborative oversight. Third, in corporate law, the study transforms prevailing understandings of the Business Judgment Rule from a defensive liability doctrine into a proactive preventive instrument capable of distinguishing legitimate business risk from early signals of discretionary abuse.

Practically, these findings underscore the importance of developing institutional frameworks that place policing institutions at the center of SOE anticipatory governance. Such frameworks include strengthening analytical capacities for corporate crime, integrating SOE risk management systems with policing prevention mechanisms, institutionalizing decision audit trail protocols for strategic decisions, and developing joint governance dashboards as data-driven oversight platforms. Through this approach, protection for directors acting in good faith can coexist with strengthened public accountability, enabling SOEs to operate more adaptively and innovatively without compromising governance integrity.

Ultimately, Predictive Business Judgment Governance offers not only a novel conceptual framework but also an operational policy pathway for building a more precise, proportional, and equitable corruption prevention system in state-owned enterprises. By relocating accountability to the decision-making process itself and positioning policing institutions as strategic partners in institutional risk management, the model redefines the foundations of SOE governance toward a forward-looking, evidence-based, and prevention-centered paradigm.

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Ethics / Informed Consent: All participants involved in the were informed about the objectives of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced. All data were analyzed and reported anonymously to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

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Social Media Use among Students with Special Educational Needs: Educational Opportunities and Digital Challenges – A Narrative Review

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Abstract
The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed communication patterns, learning environments, and social interaction among adolescents worldwide. For students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), including those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, and other developmental conditions, social media platforms represent both opportunities and challenges. The present article examines the role of social media in the lives of students with SEN by reviewing recent empirical and theoretical research on digital participation, social interaction, identity development, and educational engagement. The review explores how online platforms can support communication, peer interaction, access to information, and social inclusion, particularly for students who experience barriers in face-to-face communication contexts. At the same time, the literature highlights several risks associated with social media use, including cyberbullying, problematic digital engagement, difficulties interpreting online social cues, and potential impacts on mental health and well-being. Special attention is given to the ways in which neurodevelopmental conditions may influence patterns of digital participation and vulnerability in online environments. The article also discusses the role of educators, families, and educational policies in promoting safe, inclusive, and educationally meaningful use of social media. Emphasis is placed on the importance of digital literacy education, responsible online behavior, and supportive school environments that enable students with SEN to benefit from digital technologies while minimizing potential risks. The review concludes that, when accompanied by appropriate guidance and inclusive educational practices, social media can function as a valuable tool for enhancing communication, social participation, and learning opportunities for students with special educational needs.

Keywords: Social Media, Special Educational Needs, Digital Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Digital Literacy

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, social media has become an integral part of adolescents' daily lives, fundamentally transforming communication, information exchange, and social interaction. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook allow users to interact in real time, share experiences, and form online communities that extend beyond geographic and social boundaries. For young people, social media often functions not only as a communication tool but also as an environment for identity exploration, peer interaction, and informal learning (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed communication patterns, learning environments, and social interaction among adolescents worldwide (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Masri-zada et al., 2025). The growing use of social media among adolescents has also raised questions about its influence on students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Students with SEN represent a heterogeneous group of learners who experience cognitive, emotional, developmental, or behavioral challenges that affect their learning processes and social functioning. These needs may include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and communication disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) represent a heterogeneous group of learners who experience cognitive, emotional, developmental, or behavioral challenges that affect learning processes and social participation (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Borgström, 2019).

Research suggests that individuals with SEN may experience difficulties in traditional social contexts, particularly in peer communication and social participation (Mazurek & Wenstrup, 2013). For many of these students, online environments may provide alternative opportunities for interaction and self-expression. Digital communication allows individuals to interact asynchronously, giving them time to process information and formulate responses. This can reduce social pressure and facilitate participation for individuals who experience anxiety or communication difficulties (Ellison et al., 2011). At the same time, the increasing integration of social media into adolescents' daily lives has raised concerns about its potential risks. These include exposure to cyberbullying, problematic internet use, and negative mental health outcomes (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Students with neurodevelopmental conditions may be particularly vulnerable to these challenges because they may experience difficulties interpreting social cues, regulating online behavior, or understanding digital safety norms (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Recent research has increasingly examined how social media affects individuals with disabilities and neurodevelopmental differences. Some studies suggest that digital platforms can promote social inclusion, peer support, and identity development among individuals with autism and other disabilities (Skafle et al., 2024). Online communities may allow individuals to share experiences, discuss challenges, and connect with others who have similar conditions, which can enhance feelings of belonging and self-acceptance (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014).

However, other research highlights that excessive social media use may contribute to problematic behaviors, particularly among adolescents with ADHD or difficulties in self-regulation (Dekkers et al., 2022). Problematic social media engagement has been associated with sleep disturbances and reduced academic performance among adolescents (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Given these mixed findings, there is a growing need to examine both the opportunities and the challenges associated with social media use among students with SEN. Understanding how digital environments influence social participation, identity development, and educational engagement is essential for developing effective support strategies.

2. Method

This article adopts a narrative literature review approach to examine research on social media use among students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Relevant peer-reviewed studies were identified through searches in academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as social media, special educational needs, autism, ADHD, and digital inclusion were used to locate relevant publications. Studies focusing on adolescents and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions were prioritized. Both empirical studies and systematic reviews published between 2010 and 2026 were included in order to provide a comprehensive overview of current research on the opportunities and risks associated with social media use in this population.

3. Theoretical Context

3.1 Social Media and Digital Participation

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and exchange information within virtual communities. These platforms are characterized by user-generated content, interactive communication, and networked relationships. Recent studies indicate that adolescents spend a substantial portion of their daily time using social media platforms, which function as important spaces for social interaction and identity exploration (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). For many young people, online interactions complement traditional face-to-face communication. From an educational perspective, social media can support collaborative learning and information sharing. Digital platforms enable students to exchange ideas, participate in discussions, and access learning resources outside the classroom environment (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

For students with disabilities, digital communication may offer opportunities to overcome barriers associated with traditional forms of interaction. Online environments often reduce the complexity of social interaction by allowing individuals to communicate through text, images, or videos (Holmes & O'Loughlin, 2014). Research focusing on autistic individuals has shown that online environments can provide a more comfortable communication context compared with face-to-face interactions. Many individuals with autism report that digital communication allows them to control the pace of interaction and reduces the need to interpret complex nonverbal cues (Alon-Tirosh et al., 2023). Research suggests that online communication may provide more structured and predictable interaction contexts for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, reducing the complexity associated with face-to-face social interaction (Alon-Tirosh et al., 2023; Hassrick et al., 2021). Similarly, adolescents with ADHD may experience difficulties regulating digital engagement due to impulsivity and attention challenges (Barkley, 2015). These characteristics may influence how students interact with digital environments and social media platforms. Nevertheless, digital participation requires competencies such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to manage online interactions responsibly. Adolescents who lack these skills may encounter difficulties navigating online environments safely (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Successful participation in digital environments requires the development of digital literacy skills, including critical evaluation of online content, awareness of online safety, and responsible digital communication (Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

3.2. Social Media Use Among Students with Special Educational Needs

The increasing accessibility of digital technologies has enabled many students with SEN to participate more actively in online communities. Research indicates that individuals with disabilities often use social media platforms to communicate with peers, seek information, and share personal experiences. For individuals with autism spectrum disorder, social media can serve as a valuable tool for communication and self-expression. Studies suggest that autistic adolescents often use online platforms to build friendships, share interests, and participate in online communities centered around common experiences (Leung et al., 2023).

Online autistic communities have become particularly significant spaces for identity formation and social support. Participation in these communities allows individuals to discuss challenges related to autism, share coping strategies, and advocate for neurodiversity (Skafle et al., 2024). Students with learning disabilities may also benefit from digital platforms that allow access to educational resources and peer support networks. Online forums and educational videos provide opportunities for students to explore learning strategies and seek assistance beyond the classroom environment (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Online communities may also promote neurodiversity perspectives and positive identity development among autistic individuals (Skafle et al., 2024; Davies et al., 2024).

However, research also suggests that individuals with SEN may face specific risks in online environments. Adolescents with autism may sometimes experience difficulties interpreting humor, sarcasm, or ambiguous language in digital communication, which may lead to misunderstandings or social conflicts (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014). Recent studies also indicate that patterns of digital engagement among autistic adolescents may differ from those of typically developing peers, with some individuals demonstrating higher levels of online activity and dependence on digital communication (Alhujaili et al., 2022; Cardillo et al., 2025). Furthermore, adolescents with

ADHD may be more susceptible to problematic patterns of social media use due to difficulties with impulse control and self-regulation (Dekkers et al., 2022). Meta-analytic research also suggests that problematic internet use may occur more frequently among individuals with autism spectrum disorder compared with the general population (Muris et al., 2025).

4. Benefits of Social Media for Students with SEN

4.1 Social Inclusion and Peer Support

One of the most frequently reported benefits of social media for students with SEN is the potential for increased social inclusion. Adolescents with disabilities often experience social isolation or limited peer relationships in traditional educational settings. Online communities may provide alternative spaces where individuals can form friendships and participate in supportive networks (Ellison et al., 2011). Digital environments may facilitate a sense of belonging among autistic adolescents who often experience difficulties establishing social relationships in traditional educational contexts (Gies et al., 2025; Leung et al., 2023).

4.2 Identity Development

Social media also plays an important role in identity formation during adolescence. Online platforms allow young people to present themselves through profiles, posts, and digital interactions. For students with SEN, online environments may allow them to construct identities that are not defined solely by their disabilities. Participation in online communities may foster self-expression and positive identity development (Skafle et al., 2024).

4.3 Access to Educational Resources

Digital platforms also provide access to a wide range of educational resources, including instructional videos, discussion forums, and peer support groups. Students with learning disabilities may use these resources to supplement classroom instruction and explore alternative learning strategies (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Technology-mediated learning environments can also support engagement and participation among students with diverse learning needs when appropriately integrated into inclusive educational practices (Hassrick et al., 2021).

5. Risks and Challenges

Despite these benefits, social media use also presents several risks for students with SEN. Cyberbullying is one of the most significant concerns associated with online environments. Students with disabilities are often more vulnerable to bullying and harassment due to social differences or perceived vulnerabilities (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Research indicates that children with disabilities may be disproportionately affected by cyberbullying and online harassment compared with their typically developing peers (Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Ophir et al., 2023). Another challenge is problematic social media use. Excessive engagement with digital platforms may negatively affect sleep patterns, academic performance, and mental health. Adolescents with ADHD may be particularly vulnerable to compulsive patterns of social media use (Dekkers et al., 2022). Excessive digital media use has also been associated with sleep disturbances, emotional difficulties, and reduced academic engagement among adolescents (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Cuddihy et al., 2025). Additionally, difficulties interpreting online social cues may lead to misunderstandings in digital interactions. Individuals with autism may struggle to recognize sarcasm or implicit meanings in online communication (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014).

6. Discussion

The findings of the present narrative review highlight the complex and multifaceted role of social media in the lives of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The literature suggests that digital environments may simultaneously function as spaces of opportunity and risk for adolescents with neurodevelopmental conditions. This dual nature reflects broader debates in the field of digital media research regarding whether social media should be conceptualized primarily as a tool for empowerment or as a potential source of psychological and social vulnerability (Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

One of the most consistent findings across the reviewed studies concerns the potential of social media to promote social participation among individuals with disabilities. Adolescents with SEN often experience barriers to social interaction in traditional face-to-face environments due to communication difficulties, social anxiety, or stigma associated with disabilities (Borgström, 2019; Mazurek & Wenstrup, 2013). Digital communication environments can reduce these barriers by enabling asynchronous communication and providing users with greater control over the pace and format of interaction. Research has demonstrated that individuals with autism spectrum disorder frequently report feeling more comfortable interacting in online environments than in direct social interactions (Alon-Tirosh et al., 2023; Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014). Furthermore, online communities may function as important spaces for peer support and collective identity formation. Participation in digital networks allows individuals with similar experiences to exchange information, share coping strategies, and discuss challenges related to disability and social inclusion (Skafle et al., 2024; Deng et al., 2026). These online communities often promote the concept of neurodiversity and encourage positive identity development among autistic individuals (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014). Such findings align with broader theories of online social capital, which suggest that digital networks can strengthen social connections and provide emotional and informational support (Ellison et al., 2011).

In addition to social benefits, the literature also emphasizes the educational potential of social media platforms. Digital environments can provide access to informal learning opportunities that complement formal educational settings (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Students with learning disabilities may use social media platforms to access video tutorials, collaborative learning communities, and educational discussion forums. These resources can support independent learning and provide alternative explanations of academic content that may be more accessible than traditional classroom instruction. Previous research has suggested that technology-mediated learning environments can enhance engagement and motivation among students with diverse learning needs (Hassrick et al., 2021). However, despite these potential benefits, the literature also highlights several significant risks associated with social media use among students with SEN. One of the most frequently identified concerns is exposure to cyberbullying. Studies have shown that children and adolescents with disabilities are more likely to become targets of online harassment compared with their typically developing peers (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Cyberbullying can have severe consequences for mental health, including increased levels of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. Another important issue concerns problematic or excessive social media use, particularly among adolescents with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Individuals with ADHD often experience difficulties with impulse control, sustained attention, and self-regulation (Barkley, 2015). These characteristics may contribute to compulsive patterns of digital engagement and difficulties limiting time spent on social networking platforms (Dekkers et al., 2022). Research has also linked excessive social media use to sleep disturbances, decreased academic performance, and reduced psychological well-being among adolescents (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

For individuals with autism spectrum disorder, additional challenges may arise due to difficulties interpreting online social communication. Digital interactions frequently rely on implicit meanings, sarcasm, humor, or culturally specific communication styles that may be difficult to interpret for individuals who rely on literal language processing (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014). Misinterpretations of online messages can lead to misunderstandings or social conflicts. Consequently, some researchers have argued that individuals with autism may require targeted support in developing digital communication skills (Gabarron et al., 2023). Another important dimension emerging from recent research concerns the role of families and support networks in shaping digital participation. Parents and caregivers often play a crucial role in guiding children's digital behavior and helping them navigate potential online risks (Naggar et al., 2024). Parental mediation strategies such as open communication, monitoring online activities, and providing guidance about online safety can contribute to healthier patterns of social media use. Parents often play an important role in shaping children's digital media use through monitoring, mediation, and guidance regarding online safety (Naggar et al., 2024; Gardiner et al., 2025). From an educational perspective, the findings of this review underline the importance of integrating digital literacy education into inclusive schooling practices. Digital literacy involves not only technical skills but also critical thinking, ethical awareness, and the ability to navigate online environments safely (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). For students with SEN, digital literacy education may need to include explicit instruction on recognizing online risks, understanding privacy issues, interpreting digital communication, and managing screen time.

Teachers also play an important role in promoting inclusive digital learning environments. When used pedagogically, social media tools can encourage collaboration, peer interaction, and knowledge sharing among students (Holmes & O'Loughlin, 2014). Educational practices that incorporate digital communication, multimedia expression, and collaborative learning may support participation among students who experience difficulties in traditional classroom interactions. Despite the growing body of research on digital participation among individuals with disabilities, several gaps in the literature remain. Many existing studies focus primarily on autism spectrum disorder, while comparatively fewer studies examine social media use among students with other types of SEN, such as learning disabilities or intellectual disabilities (Borgström, 2019). Moreover, most research relies on cross-sectional designs, making it difficult to determine the long-term developmental effects of social media use. Longitudinal studies are needed to better understand how digital participation influences psychological well-being, social development, and educational outcomes over time.

Future research should also explore the effectiveness of digital interventions designed to support safe and positive online engagement among students with SEN. For example, programs that teach digital citizenship, online communication skills, and emotional regulation strategies could potentially reduce risks associated with problematic social media use. Additionally, technology-based interventions such as virtual social skills training programs or moderated online communities may provide new opportunities for supporting social participation among individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions. Recent systematic reviews also emphasize that the developmental impact of social media depends on individual characteristics, environmental support, and digital literacy competencies (Masri-zada et al., 2025). Overall, the evidence suggests that social media should not be viewed solely as either beneficial or harmful for students with SEN. Rather, its impact depends on a range of factors, including individual characteristics, digital literacy skills, family support, and educational practices. When supported by appropriate guidance and inclusive policies, digital technologies can contribute to the social inclusion and educational participation of students with diverse learning needs.

7. Conclusion

The present review examined the role of social media in the lives of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), focusing on both the opportunities and the challenges associated with digital participation. The findings from the reviewed literature suggest that social media platforms have become increasingly important environments for communication, social interaction, identity development, and access to educational resources among adolescents with diverse learning needs. As digital technologies continue to shape contemporary educational and social contexts, understanding the implications of social media use for students with SEN has become an essential issue for educators, researchers, and policymakers. One of the most significant conclusions emerging from this review is that social media can serve as a powerful tool for social inclusion. Students with SEN frequently experience social isolation or difficulties establishing peer relationships in traditional school environments due to communication barriers, social anxiety, or stigma associated with disabilities. Online environments can provide alternative communication channels that reduce these barriers by allowing asynchronous interaction, written communication, and greater control over social engagement. Research suggests that many adolescents with autism spectrum disorder report feeling more comfortable interacting in digital environments than in face-to-face communication contexts (Leung et al., 2023). Similarly, online communities may enable students with disabilities to connect with peers who share similar interests or experiences, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and emotional support (Ellison et al., 2011; Skafle et al., 2024).

Another important finding concerns the role of social media in identity development. Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by the exploration and formation of personal identity. For students with SEN, social media platforms may offer opportunities to construct identities that extend beyond their disabilities. Through online profiles, discussions, and participation in digital communities, individuals can express interests, talents, and opinions that may not always be visible in traditional school contexts. Participation in online neurodiversity communities has been shown to promote self-acceptance and empowerment among autistic individuals, contributing to positive identity formation and advocacy (Skafle et al., 2024). These findings highlight the potential of social media to support psychological well-being by allowing students to engage in meaningful social interactions and develop positive self-concepts. In addition to social benefits, social media platforms can also provide valuable educational opportunities for students with SEN. Digital environments offer access to diverse educational materials, including video tutorials, discussion forums, and peer learning networks. Students with learning disabilities often use online resources to review academic content, access alternative explanations, and collaborate with peers outside the classroom environment (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Such resources can complement formal instruction and support independent learning. In this sense, social media can function as a bridge between formal and informal learning environments, expanding educational opportunities for students who may require additional support.

Despite these potential advantages, the literature also emphasizes that social media use among students with SEN is associated with several risks. One of the most significant concerns involves exposure to cyberbullying. Studies indicate that students with disabilities are more likely to experience online harassment than their typically developing peers (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Cyberbullying can have severe psychological consequences, including increased anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem. For students who already face social challenges, negative online experiences may further exacerbate feelings of exclusion or vulnerability. Another important risk concerns problematic or excessive social media use. Adolescents with ADHD, in particular, may be more vulnerable to problematic patterns of digital engagement due to difficulties with impulse control and self-regulation (Dekkers et al., 2022). Research has linked excessive social media use with sleep disturbances, reduced academic performance, and increased emotional difficulties among adolescents (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Meta-analytic research also suggests that problematic internet use may occur more frequently among individuals with autism spectrum disorder compared with the general population (Muris et al., 2025). These findings highlight the importance of developing strategies to support healthy and balanced digital habits. Furthermore, students with autism or communication disorders may encounter challenges interpreting online communication. Digital interactions often involve implicit meanings, sarcasm, humor, or ambiguous language that can be difficult to interpret. Misunderstandings in online communication may lead to social conflicts or confusion for individuals who rely on literal interpretations of language (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2014). Consequently, students with SEN may require additional support to develop the digital literacy skills necessary to navigate online interactions successfully.

From an educational perspective, the findings of this review underline the importance of integrating digital literacy education into inclusive educational practices. Schools play a crucial role in preparing students to participate safely and responsibly in digital environments. Teaching students about online safety, privacy protection, respectful communication, and critical evaluation of online information can help reduce risks associated with social media use. Digital literacy education should also address issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and responsible digital citizenship. Teachers can further support inclusive digital participation by integrating social media tools into pedagogical practices in ways that encourage collaboration, creativity, and communication. When used appropriately, social media platforms can promote student engagement and provide opportunities for participation among learners who may feel reluctant to contribute in traditional classroom discussions. Digital learning environments that incorporate multimedia communication, collaborative projects, and peer interaction may be particularly beneficial for students with diverse learning needs (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

Family involvement is another critical factor in supporting healthy social media use among students with SEN. Parents and caregivers can help children develop responsible digital habits by monitoring online activity, discussing potential risks, and encouraging balanced use of digital technologies. Open communication about online experiences can help children feel supported and more confident in addressing potential challenges such as cyberbullying or inappropriate online interactions. Policy considerations also emerge from the findings of this review. Educational policies should recognize the importance of digital inclusion for students with disabilities and ensure equitable access to technology, digital learning resources, and support services. Inclusive digital education policies should promote accessibility, universal design principles, and targeted support for students who may require additional assistance navigating digital environments. Another important implication concerns the need for further research in this field. Although existing studies have begun to explore the relationship between social media use and the experiences of students with SEN, many questions remain unanswered. Future research should examine how different types of disabilities influence patterns of social media use and explore the long-term psychological and educational outcomes associated with digital participation. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for understanding how social media influences developmental trajectories among students with neurodevelopmental conditions. Additionally, future research should investigate how educational interventions can promote positive digital engagement among students with SEN. For example, studies could examine the effectiveness of digital literacy programs, peer mentoring initiatives, or technology-based social skills interventions designed to support online communication. Such research could provide valuable evidence for developing targeted educational strategies that maximize the benefits of social media while minimizing potential risks.

In conclusion, social media represents a complex and multifaceted environment for students with special educational needs. While digital platforms offer valuable opportunities for social inclusion, identity development, and educational engagement, they also present potential risks related to online safety, mental health, and digital overuse. The impact of social media on students with SEN is therefore shaped by multiple factors, including individual characteristics, digital literacy skills, family support, and educational practices. When accompanied by appropriate guidance, digital literacy education, and inclusive policies, social media can become a powerful tool that supports the social and educational development of students with SEN. By fostering safe and inclusive digital environments, educators and policymakers can ensure that all students—regardless of their abilities—are able to participate meaningfully in the digital society of the twenty-first century.

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Geopolitical Pragmatism and Resilience: The Indonesia-Slovakia Emerging Strategic Partnership

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Abstract
As the global geopolitical architecture fractures, small and middle powers increasingly adopt pragmatic foreign policies to enhance their state resilience. This article examines the structural shifts in Slovakia's foreign policy, transitioning from strict Euro-Atlantic institutional compliance to a multidirectional, national-pragmatic approach beyond Europe, and its implications for cross-regional bilateral governance. Utilizing the Indonesia-Slovakia relationship as a primary case study, this research analyzes how Slovakia’s pivot toward a "four corners of the compass" diplomacy intersects with Indonesia's free and active foreign policy within the Visegrad Group (V4). Grounded in neoclassical realism, this study suggests that while geopolitical pragmatism has manifested in diplomatic milestones, including high-level engagements and defense agreements, the resilience of the partnership is tested by institutional bottlenecks and systemic European Union normative barriers. This article aims to provide contemporary global politics literature with empirical insights into how small and middle powers operationalize pragmatic diplomacy to navigate systemic polarization and bureaucratic friction.

Keywords: Geopolitical Pragmatism, State Resilience, Neoclassical Realism, Middle Power Diplomacy, Visegrad Group, Indonesia-Slovakia Relations

1. Introduction

As the contemporary global geopolitical architecture undergoes profound fragmentation, the international system is transitioning from a unipolar structure to a multiplex world order, characterized by intensified great power competition and the burgeoning agency of the Global South (Acharya, 2018; Allison, 2020). In Europe, particularly across Central and Eastern Europe, the convergence of compounding systemic shocks, specifically the conflict in Ukraine, the resultant regional energy crisis, persistent inflationary pressures, and the rift of the US-Europe alliance, has fundamentally disrupted conventional paradigms regarding Euro-Atlantic institutional security and economic integration (Rose, 2025).

Consequently, states within the region are increasingly compelled to recalibrate their foreign policies to navigate this systemic volatility. In this regard, Slovakia represents a salient empirical case of such recalibration, precipitated by domestic political transformation and a populist resurgence. The republic has transitioned from an inward-looking, strictly institutional compliance model to a highly pragmatic, multidirectional foreign policy (Chryssogelos, 2017). This "four corners of the compass" strategy underscores the existential necessity of engaging with non-traditional markets in Asia and the Global South to institutionalize domestic economic stability and buffer against regional shocks.

Concurrently, Indonesia has increasingly solidified its posture as a proactive and resilient global power. Governed by the constitutional mandate of a "free and active" (bebas aktif) foreign policy, Indonesia meticulously operationalizes economic diplomacy and strategic hedging to diversify its diplomatic portfolio beyond the orbit of traditional hegemons, specifically the United States, China, and major European Union (EU) states, notably Germany and France (Anwar, 2020; Juned & Sutiono, 2024; Rüland, 2018). Within this shifting geopolitical architecture, the Central European and Visegrad Group (V4) sub-regional formations have emerged as a salient strategic frontier for Indonesia's multifaceted diplomatic and economic expansion into the broader European single market.

This shifting geopolitical landscape and the bilateral trajectory between Indonesia and Slovakia are characterized by unprecedented strategic momentum throughout 2022–2026. Such engagements have fundamentally transcended routine institutional maintenance, highlighted by substantive high-level political milestones, most notably the official visit of Indonesia's 13th Vice President to Bratislava in November 2023 (personal observation)[1]. This intensified political volition has subsequently been operationalized into robust outcomes across both the economic and security dimensions. In the macroeconomic sphere, Slovak Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Indonesia witnessed a dramatic 277% surge in 2024, reaching USD 11.1 million across 191 discrete projects, with a sustained upward trajectory observed in 2025 (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, n.d.). Concurrently, the institutionalization of traditional and non-traditional security alignments was manifested through the formalization of a Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 2023, ratified by the Slovak government in August 2024, and the inauguration of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cyber Cooperation in March 2023 (KBRI Bratislava, personal observations).

The intensification of bilateral alignment is fundamentally catalyzed by a mutual strategic exigency emanating from their respective domestic political recalibrations. For the Republic of Indonesia, Slovakia is not merely a bilateral partner but a pivotal strategic gateway into the Visegrad Group (V4) subregional architecture and the broader European economic core. Conversely, within Slovakia's pragmatic framework, Indonesia functions as a vital democratic anchor and salient economic powerhouse in the dynamically evolving Indo-Pacific. Consequently, this research prioritizes an analysis of the convergence between these strategic trajectories, interrogating the fundamental nexus of how Slovakia’s structural transition toward geopolitical pragmatism intersects with Indonesia's proactive middle-power diplomacy and how this interplay impacts the resilience and operationalization of their cross-regional bilateral governance.

Methodologically, this research operationalizes a qualitative, single-case study design to facilitate a granular and contextual interrogation of the Indonesia-Slovakia diplomatic corridor (Yin, 2018). The primary empirical dataset was synthesized from sustained diplomatic observations and institutional immersion at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava from 2022 to 2026. These observations are further substantiated through rigorous formal document analysis (Bowen, 2009), specifically leveraging the End-of-Assignment Memorandum (2022–2026), a critical instrument detailing bilateral trajectories, systemic institutional bottlenecks, and evolving consular dynamics. To preempt institutional bias and facilitate robust empirical validation, primary diplomatic evidence was systematically triangulated with secondary analytical literature, including peer-reviewed academic discourse, macroeconomic databases and third-party geopolitical intelligence reports.

Theoretically, this inquiry is anchored in the architectural framework of Neoclassical Realism (Cerioli, 2025; Lobell et al., 2009). This paradigm asserts that systemic conditions manifested through global economic volatility or supranational supply chain disruptions are mediated by intervening domestic political variables to catalyze specific foreign policy standings. Both sovereign actors operationalize geopolitical pragmatism as a calibrated

[1] The observation on the Embassy of Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava

instrument to enhance state resilience (Joseph, 2013). Notwithstanding the robustness of this framework, this study acknowledges inherent analytical limitations; specifically, the research is temporally and spatially delimited to the Indonesia-Slovakia bilateral trajectory from 2022 to 2026. Furthermore, reliance on primary diplomatic observations necessitates meticulous cross-verification with exogenous macroeconomic variables to preserve strict analytical objectivity and mitigate subjective biases.

2. Theoretical Framework

To facilitate a systematic interrogation of the structural recalibration characterizing Slovakia's contemporary foreign policy and its subsequent intersection with Indonesia's strategic diplomatic footprint across Central Europe, this study operationalizes a synthesized theoretical framework. This framework is anchored fundamentally within the paradigm of neoclassical realism and is further augmented by scholarly discourse pertaining to middle-to small-power hedging and the multidimensional engineering of state resilience.

While neorealism asserts that sovereign entities respond uniformly to the systemic pressures of an anarchic international architecture based upon relative material capabilities (Waltz, 2010), such structural determinism fails to account for Slovakia's idiosyncratic behavioral recalibrations, which would be limited to choosing the side of the EU, the US, Russia, or China. In this regard, neoclassical realism (NCR) facilitates a more granular analytical bridge by arguing that systemic conditions are meticulously translated into specific foreign policy outputs through domestic intervening variables, including elite perceptions, state-society relations, and domestic political institutions (Cerioli, 2025; Lobell et al., 2009).

In the contemporary geopolitical architecture, the systemic pressures confronting European sovereign actors have attained a state of acute intensity, precipitated by the protracted conflict in Eastern Europe, pervasive energy insecurity, and the fundamental reconfiguration of global supply chain networks (Rose, 2025). Notwithstanding the normative expectations for institutional alignment within the Euro-Atlantic bloc, the Slovak Republic's strategic response has been mediated through the prism of highly polarized domestic political variables. The resurgence of national populism, coupled with the existential prioritization of immediate domestic economic survival, has fundamentally recalibrated foreign policy executives' strategic calculations (Chryssogelos, 2017; Marušiak, 2019). The previous researchers of Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016) state that when state leadership encounters heightened domestic political vulnerability, foreign policy outputs will disproportionately favor short-term domestic stability over sustained structural alignment, as the government would be greatly influenced by the demands of internal parties. Consequently, Slovakia's operationalization of a "four corners of the compass" doctrine represents a prototypical neoclassical realism outcome of a national-pragmatic strategy engineered to navigate systemic vulnerability by leveraging domestic political mandates to facilitate multidirectional economic engagement rather than according to the demand of the system.

The strategic convergence of Slovakia's national-pragmatic posture with Indonesia's foreign policy recalibration necessitates a rigorous interrogation of contemporary middle- and small-power dynamics. As a burgeoning middle power, the Republic of Indonesia meticulously operationalizes its constitutional mandate of a "free and active" (bebas aktif) foreign policy, which fundamentally repudiates rigid alignment with any singular hegemon or institutional bloc (Anwar, 2020; Rüland, 2018). Within an increasingly fragmented and multipolar global architecture, middle powers are increasingly compelled to utilize strategic hedging, a calibrated behavioral mechanism characterized by the maintenance of multifaceted, often divergent, strategic partnerships to mitigate systemic risks and optimize economic extraction (Kuik, 2021). The author's personal communication with Juraj Marusiak from the Slovak Academy of Science suggested that for small powers, a strategic pragmatic relationship with middle powers is often perceived to be more negotiable and beneficial in the short term than a strict alignment with great and super powers.

For the Republic of Indonesia, one of the strategic endeavors to penetrate the European single market necessitates meticulous navigation of formidable supranational normative barriers instituted by the European Union (EU), most notably the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). To circumvent these pervasive institutional bottlenecks, contemporary middle-power theory emphasizes the strategic utility of "niche diplomacy" and the institutionalization of subregional coalition building (Cooper, 1997; Emmers, 2014). By proactively targeting the Visegrad Group (V4) sub-regional architecture in general and pragmatically recalibrating the Slovak Republic specifically, Indonesia employs a calibrated sub-regional hedging strategy. Within this geopolitical nexus, Slovakia functions as a pliable, economically driven gateway into the broader European ecosystem, aligning with Indonesia's imperative to diversify its geo-economic dependency.

Ultimately, the strategic convergence of the Slovak Republic's multi-directional reorientation and Indonesia's calibrated strategic hedging is fundamentally catalyzed by a mutual exigency to augment state resilience (Bourbeau, 2015; Joseph, 2013). In this regard, geopolitical pragmatism is operationalized as the primary instrument for engineering such resilience. By decoupling foreign policy from rigid ideological constraints and prioritizing transactional, mutually beneficial outcomes, specifically manifested through increased foreign direct investment, the transfer of agricultural technologies, and robust cyber defense cooperation, both sovereign entities effectively insulate their domestic architectures from possible external coercion. As articulated by Korosteleva and Flockhart (2020), state resilience in the international system is inextricably linked to the strategic diversification of external networks. Consequently, the Indonesia-Slovakia strategic corridor, characterized by burgeoning trade volumes, formalized defense alignments, and high-level political dialogue, represents not merely a routine bilateral expansion but a sophisticated organizational ecosystem engineered to fortify the socioeconomic and political resilience of both states amid an epoch of profound global volatility.

3. Research Methods

Methodologically, this inquiry operationalizes a qualitative, single-case study design to facilitate a granular, contextual interrogation of the Indonesia-Slovakia diplomatic corridor (2018). As Yin (2018) articulated, the case study paradigm is uniquely calibrated to address the "how" and "why" of contemporary phenomena within their naturalistic environments, particularly where the demarcation between the phenomenon and its broader context remains porous. By maintaining an exclusive analytical focus on the bilateral trajectory between 2022 and 2026, this research design enables sophisticated longitudinal tracing of the mechanisms through which systemic shifts toward geopolitical pragmatism are operationalized at the micro level. This approach permits an intensive examination of diplomatic processes, intricate economic negotiations, and institutional responses to supranational normative pressures, such as European Union regulations, which might otherwise be obscured by more reductive quantitative methodologies.

Methodologically, the empirical foundation of this inquiry is anchored in the systematic synthesis of primary and secondary datasets, operationalizing a robust dual-methodological framework of direct diplomatic observation and rigorous formal document analysis to encapsulate the nuances of high-level diplomatic engagement. The primary empirical corpus was derived from sustained participant observation and institutional immersion at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava from 2022–2026. This privileged observational access facilitated the longitudinal tracing of elite-level decision-making processes and substantive bilateral negotiations in naturalistic environments. Salient observational nodes encompassed the institutional facilitation of high-level political milestones, most notably the official visit of Indonesia's 13th Vice President in November 2023, the strategic negotiation of security architectures, including the 2023 Defence Cooperation Agreement and the Memorandum of Understanding on Cyber Cooperation, and the operationalization of economic diplomacy through 22 discrete business matching forums and international trade exhibitions.

To supplement the observational data, this study conducted a rigorous document analysis (Bowen, 2009). The primary instrument analyzed was the Comprehensive End-of-Assignment Memorandum (Memorandum Akhir Tugas) 2022–2026 of the Indonesian Ambassador to Slovakia, Mr. J. E. Sidharta. This official institutional document provides highly classified evaluations of bilateral outcomes, detailing statistical surges in foreign direct investment, mapping the demographic shifts of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) from under 100 in 2022 to 1,650 by 2026, and identifying specific institutional bottlenecks (such as the stagnation of the Joint Economic

Commission). The document was systematically coded to extract empirical milestones that reflected the theoretical concepts of pragmatism and resilience.

To facilitate sophisticated contextualization of the primary findings within the fractured European geopolitical landscape, this study systematically synthesized exogenous datasets. This secondary empirical corpus prioritizes the interrogation of macroeconomic databases tracking the trajectory of Slovak foreign direct investment (FDI) outflows alongside stringent European Union regulatory frameworks, specifically those pertaining to the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Furthermore, to mitigate analytical bias and ensure empirical robustness, primary data were triangulated with intellectual outputs from preeminent Central European think tanks, including the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) and the Central European Institute for Asian Studies (CEIAS).

The synthesized empirical dataset was subjected to a rigorous qualitative thematic analysis. Raw institutional corpora and primary observational nodes were categorized into three salient analytical themes: (1) Strategic Security Alignments, (2) Economic Diplomacy and Regulatory Friction, and (3) Consular Dynamics and Human Security. Given that the data were derived from direct diplomatic immersion, mitigating institutional bias and positionality was paramount. To facilitate robust empirical validation and preserve strict analytical objectivity, this study operationalized the methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2012). Empirical claims synthesized from internal diplomatic memorandums, specifically those evaluating the efficacy of economic diplomacy, were systematically cross-verified against exogenous independent variables, including third-party macroeconomic statistics on Slovak FDI in Indonesia and formal bilateral trade reports. Concurrently, internal qualitative assessments of Slovakia's strategic pivot were triangulated with peer-reviewed academic discourse and independent geopolitical intelligence, ensuring that the research conclusions accurately reflected structural systemic realities rather than localized institutional narratives.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Historical Evolution of Bilateral Relations

The architectural foundation of the bilateral trajectory between Indonesia and Slovakia was fundamentally catalyzed by the profound geopolitical reconfiguration characterizing the immediate post-Cold War era. Subsequent to the peaceful dissolution of the Czechoslovak federation on January 1, 1993, the Indonesian state apparatus meticulously operationalized its diplomatic volition, extending official recognition and institutionalizing formal diplomatic ties with the newly sovereign Slovak Republic. This strategic commitment was tangibly manifested in 1995 through the official inauguration of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava, a milestone that effectively inaugurated a dedicated paradigm of bilateral governance and cross-regional engagement.

Throughout the subsequent period, the bilateral trajectory proceeded with relative consistency but remained fundamentally devoid of a robust architecture for comprehensive economic integration. A transformative structural milestone was reached in 2011 with the formalization of the Agreement on Economic Cooperation, an instrument meticulously engineered to catalyze cross-regional trade and investments. To operationalize this framework, the sovereign entities inaugurated the maiden session of the Joint Economic Commission (Sidang Komisi Ekonomi Bersama/SKEB) in 2013, which was conceptualized as the preeminent institutional mechanism for bilateral economic evaluation and strategic alignment between the two countries.

Throughout 2022–2024, the bilateral trajectory between the two sovereign entities underwent rapid acceleration, entering a phase of unprecedented high-level diplomatic intensification catalyzed by mutual geopolitical pragmatism. In a calibrated response to contemporary non-traditional security imperatives, the states institutionalized a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cyber Cooperation in March 2023. This strategic momentum attained its political zenith in November 2023, manifested through the most significant bilateral engagement of the period: the official visit of Indonesia's 13th Vice President, K.H. Ma'ruf Amin, to

Bratislava. Concurrently, the institutionalization of the security architecture was advanced through the circular execution of a Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 2023, a framework subsequently solidified when the Slovak government formally concluded its internal ratification in August 2024 (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, n.d.).

Building on this solidified political and security architecture, the bilateral trajectory by 2025 underwent substantive recalibration toward economic and scientific implementation. This contemporary phase is increasingly characterized by the operationalization of concrete cross-regional initiatives, most notably manifested through joint academic-industrial research endeavors targeting the cultivation of tropical wheat to augment agrarian resilience, alongside the strategic localization of advanced Slovak organic fertilizer technologies within the Indonesian agricultural sector and the promotion of strategic partnership discussions between academic institutions (personal observation).

The procedures for selecting participants included (a) the sampling method, if a systematic sampling plan was used; (b) the percentage of the sample approached that participated; and (c) the number of participants who selected themselves into the sample. Describe the settings and locations in which the data were collected, any agreements and payments made to participants, agreements with the institutional review board, ethical standards met, and safety monitoring procedures.

4.2 The Indonesia-Slovakia Strategic Corridor

The zenith of this bilateral engagement was manifested through the official visit of Indonesia's 13th Vice President, K.H. Ma'ruf Amin, in November 2023. Such high-level diplomatic exchanges transcend routine institutional maintenance, signaling a shared commitment to augmenting the bilateral status within the international order. This political volition was further institutionalized in the defence and security sectors. Specifically, the two states formalized a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in 2023, which the Slovak government ratified in August 2024. Moreover, addressing the exigencies of non-traditional security threats, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cyber Cooperation was inaugurated in March 2023, reflecting the mutual prioritization of resilient digital ecosystems (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, n.d.).

From a macroeconomic perspective, the Slovak Republic’s intensely liberalized and export-driven economic profile, where the aggregate value of external trade surpasses 85% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), functions as a significant, albeit contestable, frontier for Indonesian commodity penetration. Capitalizing on Slovakia’s geostrategic centrality in Central Europe, Indonesian diplomatic maneuvers have increasingly operationalized Bratislava as a vital entry point into the broader Visegrad Group (V4) subregional architecture of Central Europe. The institutionalization of this partnership has been further augmented by robust Track II diplomatic engagements, notably through high-level Policy Planning Dialogues and strategic synergies established between Indonesia’s Foreign Policy Strategy Agency (BSKLN) and esteemed Slovak academic institutions, including the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA) and the Central European Institute for Asian Studies (CEIAS) (Indonesian Ambassador to Slovakia, 2026).

Within the macroeconomic sphere, the operationalization of targeted business matching and robust participation in trade exhibitions yielded substantive commercial outcomes. Between 2022 and 2026, diplomatic facilitation successfully institutionalized 22 bankable business instruments, including Non-Disclosure Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, and Heads of Agreements. This political and economic volition catalyzed an exponential surge in Slovak Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which reached USD 11.1 million across 191 projects in 2024, representing a 277% increase from the preceding year and subsequently transcending the USD 11.7 million threshold in 2025 (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, n.d.; Indonesian Ambassador to Slovakia, 2026), personal observation).

4.3 Pragmatism, Middle-Power Hedging, and the Limits of Institutional Resilience

The empirical evidence delineating the 2022–2026 bilateral trajectory between Indonesia and the Slovak Republic manifests a salient structural paradox: an unprecedented, rapid acceleration of high-level strategic and economic milestones occurring in tandem with persistent institutional stagnation. Operationalized through the synthesized theoretical prisms of neoclassical realism, middle-power hedging, and state resilience, these findings elucidate the granular mechanics of contemporary geopolitical pragmatism and the inherent boundaries of cross-regional bilateral governance.

The unprecedented intensification of bilateral milestones throughout the 2023–2024 interval represents not a mere organic evolution of routine diplomacy but rather the substantive materialization of Slovakia's domestic political recalibration. Anchored in the paradigm of neoclassical realism, the systemic imperatives currently destabilizing the European architecture precipitated by the conflict in Ukraine and compounding energy-inflation crises are meticulously filtered through the Republic's pragmatic and national-populist domestic environment (Lobell et al., 2009). This internal mediation has necessitated a strategic departure from strict Euro-Atlantic ideational alignment toward a multi-directional "four corners of the compass" foreign policy.

This theoretical premise elucidates the rapid institutionalization of security frameworks with a non-traditional, geographically distant partner such as the Republic of Indonesia. The inauguration of the Cyber Cooperation MoU (2023) and the Defence Cooperation Agreement (signed in 2023; ratified in 2024) constitute calibrated defensive hedging maneuvers. By proactively diversifying its strategic and economic portfolio, Slovakia has operationalized geopolitical pragmatism as the primary instrument of state resilience (Joseph, 2013). Furthermore, the dramatic 277% surge in Slovak foreign direct investment (FDI) into Indonesia in 2024, reaching a threshold of USD 11.1 million, demonstrates a calculated effort to insulate its intensely open, export-dependent domestic architecture from Eurocentric economic shocks by embedding capital within the dynamically evolving Indo-Pacific landscape (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, n.d.; Indonesian Ambassador to Slovakia, 2026).

From the perspective of the Indonesian state apparatus, the synthesized empirical outcomes substantiate the efficacious operationalization of proactive middle-power hedging (Kuik, 2021). As an emerging middle power endeavoring to penetrate the highly regulated architecture of the European single market, Indonesia faces significant structural asymmetries. To circumvent the rigid, frequently ideologically contingent foreign policy postures characteristic of traditional Western European capitals, Indonesia has meticulously operationalized a calibrated sub-regional hedging strategy, specifically targeting the Visegrad Group (V4) sub-regional formation and a pragmatically receptive Slovak Republic (Indonesian Ambassador to Slovakia, 2026).

The official visit of Indonesia's 13th Vice President to Bratislava in November 2023 constitutes a prototypical execution of "niche diplomacy" (Cooper, 1997). By injecting substantial high-level political capital into this specific middle-power alignment, Indonesia has effectively catalyzed localized economic extraction and strategic depth. This political volition directly facilitated the institutionalization of 22 formal business instruments—encompassing Non-Disclosure Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, and Heads of Agreements throughout the period of observation. Through the cultivation of this pragmatic corridor, Indonesia has successfully operationalized the Slovak Republic as a pivotal strategic gateway, leveraging bilateral alignments to anchor its broader geo-economic imperatives in Central Europe.

Notwithstanding the efficacious operationalization of pragmatic diplomacy, the empirical evidence elucidates a salient structural paradox: the rapid acceleration of strategic milestones occurs in tandem with persistent institutional stagnation that threatens the long-term sustainability of the bilateral ecosystem. As articulated by Bourbeau (2015), engineering state resilience necessitates robust organizational governance to absorb systemic shocks; however, this relationship currently manifests severe institutional friction. The most palpable manifestation of this discrepancy is the protracted dormancy of the Joint Economic Commission (Sidang Komisi Ekonomi Bersama/SKEB), which has remained functionally paralyzed since its inaugural session in 2013. This bureaucratic stagnation underscores a profound misalignment between high-level political volition and mid-level institutional execution, leaving the 22 recently formalized business instruments without a dedicated mechanism for evaluation or propulsion and rendering the economic momentum structurally fragile.

Furthermore, this bilateral pragmatism is fundamentally circumscribed by supranational normative friction. While sovereign actors may successfully negotiate at the state-to-state level, the broader penetration of Indonesian commodities into Central Europe remains bottlenecked by the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). This dynamic illustrates the inherent boundaries of sub-regional hedging; as suggested by Ruland (2018), middle powers cannot entirely circumvent the pervasive structural and normative barriers instituted by the Union's supranational apparatus through purely bilateral maneuvers.

Finally, the profound demographic transformation manifested within the consular datasets, specifically, the exponential influx of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) from a cohort of under 100 in 2022 to a salient population of 1,650 by 2026, introduces an acute non-traditional security challenge (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, n.d.). This demographic shock, precipitated by Slovakia's structural labor deficits, has significantly outpaced existing bilateral labor protections and consular capacities. This underscores that state resilience must transcend elite-level diplomatic treaties and capital investments. To ensure a truly durable bilateral architecture, both administrations must urgently adapt their legal and bureaucratic frameworks to address the human security dimensions of transnational labor migration.

5. Conclusions

The recalibration of Slovak foreign policy toward a paradigm of geopolitical pragmatism represents a salient opportunity for the institutional consolidation of the Indonesia-Visegrad strategic corridor. Analyzed within a neoclassical realist framework, the operationalization of Bratislava's "four corners" diplomacy serves as a rational domestic response to systemic economic and security imperatives, aimed at augmenting state resilience through the diversification of strategic partnerships. The empirical milestones achieved in defense alignment, cyber cooperation, and the exponential surge in bilateral investment underscore the substantive potential of cross-regional middle power collaboration.

Nevertheless, for this strategic window to catalyze durable bilateral resilience, both administrations must proactively mitigate the stagnation of formal institutional mechanisms while navigating the normative friction generated by supranational barriers, such as the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Future academic inquiry into global politics should further investigate the optimization of bureaucratic ecosystems to ensure that they remain commensurate with rapid shifts in pragmatic foreign policy, thereby effectively translating high-level political volition into sustainable economic and security cooperation.

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Education for Citizenship: Rethinking Social Studies in the Context of Indonesian National Insight

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Abstract
This research aimed to analyse the significance of social studies in the context of education for citizenship framework and democratic politics. It also highlighted the fundamental issue of growing intolerance as well as radicalism in schools and campuses, reflecting a discernable trend in national insight over the past two decades. National insight, within the context of national education, refers to the standard instruction in classrooms aimed at promoting social understanding and civic efficacy. However, this crucial aspect has been disregarded in social studies, rendering it seemingly irrelevant within the framework of education for citizenship and democratic politics for students. The negligence of critical scientific and pedagogical elements, as well as the absence of repositioning, and actualisation contributed to a one-dimensional understanding and a dual standard in the approach to social studies. This consequently facilitated conventional practices and the status quo of education for citizenship towards national insight.

Keywords: Citizenship, Social Studies, National Insight

1. Introduction

This research is motivated by the rise of intolerance and radicalism during the Reformation era in Indonesia, a country with diverse religions, ethnicities, languages, and cultures in Southeast Asia, and even globally. In this study, these two social phenomena are linked to educational failures, particularly in social studies at the elementary, secondary, and even tertiary levels. This research specifically examines the social studies curriculum, which is a compulsory course from elementary school to university. Despite being taught at all levels of education, why do radicalism and intolerance, which contradict the principles of good citizenship, continue to increase in Indonesia? This is research that explores the relevance of social studies and its relation to national insight in Indonesia within the framework of education for citizenship and political democracy. It also highlighted the crucial issues of increasing intolerance and radicalism observed in junior and senior high schools, as well as on campuses, over the last two decades. These trends, particularly concerning religion, ethnicity, and race, not only contradict the principles of multiculturalism, aimed at fostering social cohesion, but also undermine Indonesia's aspiration to be a safe, comfortable, emancipatory, humane, and peaceful country.

This research further delved into the potential link between the perceived failure of education for citizenship and the role of social studies as a fundamental source of these problems. While acknowledging that other factors may be involved, the vitality of social studies also plays a crucial role in early preparation for social and citizenship competencies, fostering national insight, identity, patriotism, and democratic politics. In addition to examining the social studies curriculum that aligns with national insight in the context of citizenship, this study also compares curriculum trends in various pluralistic countries, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Japan. This is done to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the social studies curriculum in Indonesia and provide relevant implementation examples. In many countries, social studies curriculum policies are adjusted to the country's goals which are based on the order and structure of society in realizing national integration. The investigation established a relation between the social studies curriculum from Grades 1 to 12 and Semesters 1 to 4 with the prevalence of deviant behaviour among students. Understanding the urgency and significance of this research formed the basis for considering potential curriculum repositioning. The data from 2000 to 2022 showed the extent of intolerance and radicalism among students, teachers, and lecturers. Interestingly, 9.5% of teachers rejected pluralism, 48.95% of students rejected other religions, and 58.5% of content textbooks and parallel textbooks rejected ethnic diversity (Kirana, 2018). Furthermore, 23.4% of university students and 23.3% of Senior High School students supported *Jihad* and the Islamic State, 16.8% advocated for Islam as the state ideology and 39% of university students in 15 provinces were exposed to radicalism (Ali & Purwandi, 2017). In 2018, as many as 23% of students at Brawijaya University, the University of Indonesia, and Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University supported the Islamic Caliphate (Pranawati, 2012; Hamdi, Mukaffa & Masrifah, 2019). Regional disparities were also observed, with 51.6% of students in Makassar displaying intolerance, and religion emerging as the dominant factor influencing students' intolerant and radical attitudes in Lampung (Syafe'i, 2018). Ironically, 39% of students in 10 state universities across Jakarta, West Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, and East Nusa Tenggara were exposed to intolerance and radicalism (Azhari & Ghozali, 2019). In 2022, for example, it was reported that 10% of the Radicalism Potential Index comprised women, with over 600 sites disseminating 900 propaganda content through social media platforms. The Terrorism Risk Index could be classified into two dimensions, 51.54 for targets and 29.48 for perpetrator supply (Kirana, 2018).

Unfortunately, students were the predominant group vulnerable and ingrained to intolerance and radicalism, which reflected in acts of violence, the penetration of identity politics, and the division of society. These negative tendencies were also perpetuated through the medium of organisations and social platforms (Mufid, 2011; United Nation Development Project [UNDP], 2018). Consequently, educational institutions were no longer seen as centres of knowledge and critical inquiry but rather as breeding grounds for intolerance and radicalism. This shift was evidenced by the increasing number of students who engaged in intra-organisational setups that no longer prioritised research and innovation (Tempo, 2018). Most of the resolutions are militaristic approaches such as Special Detachment 88, the State Intelligence Agency, the Strategic Intelligence Agency, the National Counterterrorism Agency, and even religious institutions. Despite the government issuance of Regulation Number 55 of 2018 on Pancasila Ideology Development, social studies has remained entirely overlooked. This situation posed a pressing question; how students understand and combat intolerance and radicalism when they are not educated from an early age? Education for citizenship in this research encompassed three main aspects; (1) the examination of the social studies curriculum in schools and campuses, (2) an exploration of the influence of the New Order and Reformation eras on national insight and citizenship promotion, as well as (3) an in-depth analysis of 47 textbooks and parallel textbooks.

This research specifically aimed to investigate the function of social study as an early foundation for fostering national insight amidst the internet revolution and globalisation, as well as its position in addressing deviant behaviour, an aspect that has not been extensively addressed. The subject was found to be essential for 21st-century education, not only for well-being but also for enhancing students' ability to learn and develop a strong sense of national insight. Based on national perspective, social studies represent standard instruction in classrooms aimed at promoting social understanding and civic efficacy. However, they are considered irrelevant in the context of education for citizenship framework and its impact on students. The findings, novelty, and contribution of this research lay in presenting a new perspective on social studies as the most relevant education for citizenship framework in 21st-century Indonesia. Within this research, intolerance is defined as being "least liked" towards individuals or groups with different attributes, while radicalism denotes a disposition towards violence and law-breaking against fellow citizens. Social studies, as an integrated teaching of the social sciences and humanities, serve to promote social understanding and civic competence. National insight, on the other hand, involves adopting a broader perspective on the nation and country that transcends individual and group interests, emphasising self-awareness and loyalty as citizens to build social cohesion. The education for citizenship framework acts as a mechanism to promote social understanding and civic efficacy effectively. Lastly, rethinking social studies entails examining conventional thinking and practices, embracing critical pedagogy, repositioning, and actualising social studies to support the status quo of education for citizenship.

Based on 476 textbooks during 1950-2011 examined in 78 countries, it is confirmed that the waning of social awareness is the impact of prioritisation of individual rights (Lerch, Bromley, Ramirez & Meyer, 2017). Various other research in 43 countries affirmed the importance of democratic personalities (Inglehart, 1997), the Melting Pot (Glazer, 2000), and civic culture (Almond & Verba, 1963). Moreover, separatism in Eurasia strongly indicated ethnic politics (Hale, 2008) and religious conflicts in the Middle East (Fox, 2001; Schleutker, 2016). These diverse investigations highlighted the significant role of social studies in fostering social understanding and civic efficacy (Chitadze, 2022; European Commission, 2018; OECD, 2022; Hadiz & Dhakidae ed., 2005; Carreras & Verghese, 2018). *As a coordinated and systematic* research*, the integration of social sciences with humanities content is a crucial aspect of developing national insight. Within the context of education for citizenship framework, social studies aim to equip students with early social understanding and civic efficacy (Ross, Mathison, and Vinson, 2014; Brant, Chapman & Isaacs, 2016). Social studies programmes are designed to promote social and civic competence by integrating knowledge, skills and attitudes, enabling students to build a knowledge base and attitudes drawn from various academic disciplines. This specialised view of reality reflects the changing nature of knowledge and fosters entirely new and highly integrated approaches to resolving issues of significance to humanity (National Council for Social Studies [NCSS], 2023).*

In line with the explanation above, the current standardisation of the curriculum not only encompasses various issues, such as race, gender, sexuality, critical multiculturalism, visual culture, moral deliberation, democracy, digital technology, controversies, globalisation, and the environment (Brant, Chapman & Isaacs, 2016; Camicia, 2008; European Commission, 2012) but also addresses intolerance and radicalism, including crime, health, drugs, and free sex. The objectives is beyond presenting current issues in classrooms, as it entails elements that shape daily life. This provides students with learning experiences to interact and understand how society and individuals function (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Ross, 2017; European Commission, 2018). In this context, teachers (and lecturers) play a crucial role in evaluating the needs of students to develop their interests, abilities, verbal intelligence, high-level cognition, social skills, and attitudes. The awareness and responsiveness of educators to cognitive, emotional, social, physical, motivational, and self-concept aspects of students are also essential for supporting their success. An example of the general developmental complexities of most students is illustrated in "Stepping Stones" (Government of Ontario, 2021), which recognises individual differences, life experiences, and expectations, while not solely relying on age as a determining factor. Cognitive, emotional, physical, and social domains are interconnected and influenced by the environment or context of an individual. Within the centre of these aspects is the enduring, but changing sense of self, or spirit connecting the different facets of development and experience (Ministry of Education, 2018; Government of Ontario, 2021). This approach elevates instructions that promote students to think critically about ideas, concepts, people, places, events, and facts rather than merely repeating the information heard or read (Yell, 2009).

Despite the challenges in defining and conceptualising social studies due to its diverse understanding and approaches across different countries, it remains oriented towards three fundamental points: (1) building national identity and patriotism, (2) supporting human rights, humanities, and emancipation, and (3) promoting citizenship and democratic politics (Coleman, 2021; Ross, 2006). Different countries prioritise specific aspects, for instance, the United States emphasises national identity and patriotism (Myers, 2006), Germany focuses on nationalism (Erdman, 2015), Japan on sustainable professional development and humanity (Shimura, 2015), and Finland on citizenship and humanities (Lofstrom, 2019). Denmark, Turkey, the Netherlands, and Canada place emphasis on human rights and democracy (Ersoy, 2010; Kus, 2014; Hansen, 2020; De Kort, 2018), while Wales, England, Australia, and France prioritise humanities (Hughes, Makara & Stacey, 2020; ACARA, 2013; Heilbron, 2004). Besides textbooks, students are equipped with social research guidelines as an effective mechanism to consume and implement interdisciplinary outcomes, to balance knowledge, skills, values, underlying developments, and the practical complexity of learning (Steinberg, 2015; Manfra & Bolick, 2017; Solhaug, Borge & Grut, 2020; Rutherford & Boehm, 2004; Evans, 2018). The method follows the C3 Framework, College, Career, and Civic Life, to frame content understanding, concept implementation, evaluation, conclusion drawing, and follow-up plans (Herczog, 2013; NCSS, 2013; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2022).

In Indonesia, the introduction of social studies in schools in 1975 led to numerous research primarily focusing on philosophy, concepts, and applications (Gunawan, 2016; Jaenudin, 2014; Sapriya, 2017), professions (Rachmah, 2014), teaching methods, and models (Damanik, 2019a; 2020a; Wahab, 2007), training and learning resources (Depdiknas, 2011). Despite the increasing suicide bombings involving women, students, teachers, and lecturers, targeting minorities and public facilities (Damanik, 2020b; 2022), none of these investigations addressed social studies. Related questions on the position of social studies are limited even though social and religious tolerance has significantly decreased. Since the Reformation in 1999, extremists have selected schools and campuses as places to plan and discuss intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism (Darni, 2018; Kuntjara, 2019; Suryana, 2022). The rise of extremism began in the early 1980s and peaked during the transition period following Soeharto's resignation (Sidel, 2007; Hasani, 2012), influenced by the collapse of the World Trade Center in 2001 (Kuntjara, 2019; Ropi, 2017; Van Bruinessen, 2014). However, the military approach taken was repressive, and top-down, and did not address the root causes. While the vision and purpose of social studies in Indonesia are directed towards social understanding and civic efficacy, such as social concern, recognition of diversity, and support for human rights, humanities, and emancipation (Depdiknas, 2005), the country is practically grappling with intolerance and radicalism, both vertically and horizontally, in various fields, including schools and campuses.

This research referred to social tolerance (Inglehart & Baker, 2000) and religion (Grim & Finke, 2006) as democratic politics, an essential part of developing national insight. It also highlighted the failure of social studies as an education for citizenship framework in light of the prevalent intolerance and radicalism in schools and campuses. The interdisciplinary approach of social studies enabled students to explore various concepts, ideas, and issues, offering integrated learning experiences that fostered a deeper understanding of the interconnections between social, political, economic, health, environmental, and other issues. Schools and campuses can facilitate high-quality learning by providing opportunities that align with national strengths, needs, and situations. The curriculum is thoughtfully designed to reach its full potential by offering coherent, relevant, and age-appropriate programmes that demand critical thinking, enabling students to synthesise information, make decisions, communicate effectively, or thrive in an ever-changing national and global community. By guiding self-understanding and its impact on both the country and the world at large, the social studies curriculum aims to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes as well as the perspective to foster informed, productive, caring, responsible, and engaged citizens within the communities, nation, and the world

2. Method

This research focused on educational institutions in Indonesia over three years from 2021 to 2023, using social research methods (Bryman, 2012) and conducted qualitatively with a mixed approach (Creswell, 2014; Schutt, 2016). The primary aim was to address the fundamental issues of social studies as an education for citizenship framework in developing national insight and examining intolerance and radicalism in schools and campuses. The investigation established a relation between the social studies curriculum from Grades 1 to 12 and Semesters 1 to 4 with the prevalence of deviant behaviour among students.

The research procedure involved six key steps; (1) analysing the curriculum from Grades 1 to 12 since 1975, compulsory courses, and faculty courses in semesters 1 to 4, with a specific focus on overall and specific expectations. This phase involved an in-depth examination of applications, including causes, consequences, and interrelationships; an inquiry into perspectives; and an understanding of context, patterns, trends, and significance, (2) comparing the vision, purpose, and mechanisms of social studies during the New Order and the Reformasi period, (3) examining 47 textbooks and parallel textbooks to evaluate weaknesses, such as the rule of frameworks, meaningful names, manageable numbers, hierarchy, and repetition that emphasised authority, currency, coverage, purpose, accuracy, and objectivity, including content and didactics (Gurung, 2003).

Furthermore, (4) conducting a critical review through focus group discussions (FGD) on October 10, 2024, and March 4, 2025, involving 5 curriculum experts in social studies, 5 members of the Teacher Working Group (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran* [MGMP]), 5 members of the Indonesian Teachers Association (*Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia* [PGRI]), 5 lecturers, and 10 teachers. (5) distributing questionnaires to 73 teachers and lecturers, 118 randomly selected students from public and private schools, and 150 university students in April 2023. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions with four Likert scale options (Bertram, 2007). Lastly, (6) conduct a critical analysis of the 21st-century social studies model in Indonesia involving 2 curriculum experts, 3 teachers, and 2 lecturers.

The literature review followed four sequential stages: (1) searching relevant databases and abstract reading, (2) evaluating relevant publications, (3) categorising relevant publications according to the analysis phase and type of problem, and (4) searching for the most cited publications on e-books, e-journals, reports, and official websites (vom Brocke, 2015). Reflective data were collected by watching, asking, and examining, enriching the data collection process (Kozinets, 2010). All data and information were presented as narrative text, depicting a series of events in chronological order, based on the competence of the informants and transcribed verbatim. They were subsequently categorised and tabulated manually. Qualitative-interpretative analysis was conducted to conclude, develop follow-up actions, and propose the concept of 21st-century social studies as an education for citizenship framework in the context of Indonesia.

3. Results

In Indonesia, the introduction of social studies in schools and campuses was inspired by England and the United States, which were the first two countries to implement it as a subject. Similar to these nations, education experts in Indonesia recognised the intricate interplay of religion and belief, race and ethnicity, language and dialect, socio-politics, economics, and territorial issues. It was concluded that teaching social sciences and humanities separately would not adequately prepare early students for social understanding and civic efficacy. As a result, social studies was introduced as a subject in 1975, with history and geography being the main components. In 1994, the focus shifted towards promoting citizenship and democratic politics. The vision and purpose of the curriculum showed a dual standard, as it aimed to foster national insight and democratisation as well as the importance of faith, piety, and noble character. This ambivalence has had a profound impact on the formulation of national identity, leading to persistent and unresolved struggles between religion and ethnicity.

The social studies curriculum is tailored with different emphases for Grades 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12, including semesters 1-4 at the university. This differentiation was based on vision and purpose, as well as developmental psychology. The subject was integrated thematically, encompassing Indonesian language for Grades 1-3, history, economics, geography, sociology, and natural sciences for Grades 4-6, history, economics, geography, and sociology for Grades 7-9, as well as history, economics, geography, sociology, and anthropology for Grade 10-12. On campus, more specifically in semesters 1-4 taught separated into three compulsory courses; religion, Pancasila and Citizenship Education (*Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan* [PPKn]) and the Indonesian language. More specifically, at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, a course on identity was developed which consisted of Indonesian Social and Cultural Studies, pluralism and multiculturalism. Despite the overarching vision and purpose of fostering social understanding and civic efficacy, the main differentiating characteristics in Indonesia included the existence of religion, the Indonesian Language, and PPKn as compulsory subjects taught separately in Grades 1-12 and semesters 1-4 at university. Figure 1 shows the current design of social studies through compulsory and supporting courses currently applicable to the development of national insight.

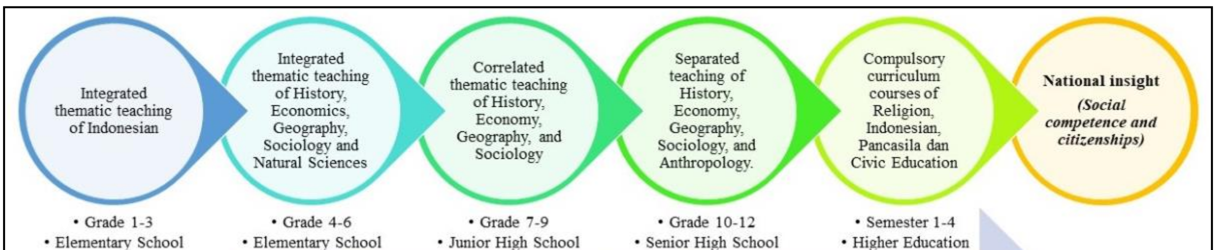

Figure 1: Social Studies Design for the Development of National Insight

Based on Figure 1, the primary objective of introducing social studies in schools was to foster social competence and citizenship that reflects national insight. The separation from other subjects resulted in a double standard of learning, as social studies aim to develop social competence and citizenship, religion focuses on dogmatics based on holy scriptures, and PPKn addresses Pancasila morals. The lack of significant and adequate integration among these three subjects had a profound impact on students. This fundamental issue also led to divided awareness and loyalty among students who struggled to balance ethnic nationalism and religious beliefs. Another concerning issue is the negligence of intolerant and radical content, including terrorism, narcotics, free sex, criminality, and ethics on social media as learning material. The phenomenon of social studies during the Reformation period was entirely different from the New Order period, whose mechanism and pattern of developing national insight through social studies were centralised, structured, systematic, and coordinated. Besides being one of the subjects in the national final exam, the curriculum, textbooks, and parallel textbooks were also determined by the Minister of Education and Culture, with notable figures such as Soemantri Brojonegoro, J.B. Sumarlin, Syarief Thayeb, and Daoed Joesoef serving as early initiators. Nugroho Notosusanto, who served as the Minister of Education and Culture from 1983 to 1985, significantly contributed to the foundation of history in social studies and also played a vital role as the chief editor and backbone in writing the six volumes of the National History of Indonesia, which was the main social studies textbook until 1999. These six volumes were significant content sources for History Education and the Struggle of the Nation (*Pendidikan Sejarah dan Perjuangan Bangsa* [PSPB]), which was extensively printed and distributed. In addition, the production and widespread distribution of struggle films, including the controversial film "Movement of 30 September 1965/Indonesian Communist Party (*Gerakan 30 September 1965/Partai Komunis Indonesia* [G30S/PKI]) in 1984, along with the establishment of various struggle monuments across the country, including the capital city, sub-districts, regencies, cities, and provinces, were all part of the efforts to instil national insight and identity. Despite controversies, Nugroho Notosusanto was considered successful in the "indoctrination mission" to build national insight and identity (McGregor, 2007).

In 1979, Education Development Agency for Implementing Guidelines for Understanding and Practicing Pancasila (*Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan Pelaksanaan Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila* [BP7]) was established to coordinate and popularise the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. This agency published the Outlines of State Policy (*Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara* [GBHN]) and Guidelines for Understanding and Practicing Pancasila (*Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila* [P4]), two main books used in P4 training, and a short national insight course lasting for two weeks for new students. The agency was also involved in designing the curriculum and determining the content, textbooks, and parallel textbooks used in all educational institutions. The curriculum emphasised national insight and identity, with a particular focus on the role of the Indonesian Army during the period 1942-1971, the Youth Pledge of 1928, and the Oath of Palapa Gajah Mada from the Majapahit Kingdom. Besides these obligations, students were also required to memorise national songs. During the New Order regime, any student organisations or activist movements that criticised the state were suppressed by the military or paramilitary forces. For instance, on campuses, the Student Regiment, a trained paramilitary group connected to the local Military Command, was established to monitor "Cipayung Group," a student organisation comprising the Association of Islamic Students, the Association of Indonesian Catholic Students, the Indonesian National Student Movement, the Indonesian Christian Student Movement, and the Indonesian Muslim Student Movement. At the grassroots level, mass-based paramilitary organisations such as Youth of Pancasila, Indonesian Youth Renewal Force, Forum of Communication for Sons and Daughters of

Veterans, and others carried out monitoring. Discussing ethnicity, locality and other sensitive topics was considered taboo and subversive, which could result in the arrest and imprisonment of violators. For instance, the Tanjung Priok riot in 1984, which began with brochures criticising the government and rejecting the singular principle of Pancasila, was resolved with force and the involvement of mysterious shooters. During this authoritarian regime, intolerance and radicalism, including terrorism were non-existent. Social studies, at this period, served as a tool of the state to "enforce" citizen compliance, organised in a centralised, structured, measurable, systematic, and coordinated manner.

During the Reformation period in the mid-1999, all mechanisms of the New Order were criticised and abolished. Alongside regional autonomy, educational institutions were also decentralised through Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Although still under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology control, the management responsibilities were divided into three levels: (1) higher education, controlled by the Directorate General, (2) secondary education, controlled by governors, and (3) primary and junior secondary education, controlled by mayors or regents. This decentralisation led to two politicisations: (1) the appointment of school principals requiring approval from the executive or rector by the minister, and (2) the publication of textbooks and parallel textbooks containing local content and lacking standardisation. In the second point, the potential of locality was tendentiously directed towards religious, ethnic, racial, and linguistic themes, resulting in segregation and intimidation through regulations or the formation of new territories (Damanik, 2019b; 2020c). Despite a change in weightage to 30% religious knowledge and 70% general knowledge in Islamic schools (*madrasah*) according to Law Number 20 of 2003, the figures practically obtained were vice versa. This reality is no different from *Pondok Pesantren*, a type of boarding school focused on religious knowledge. Since 2005, curriculum segregation has emerged in all Islamic educational institutions, offering specialised subjects such as Islamic Education, Islamic Economics and Business, Islamic Law, Islamic Archeology, Islamic Cultural Studies, Islamic Basic Natural Sciences, Islamic Geography, Islamic Ethics, Islamic Anthropology, Islamic Sociology, Islamic Culture, and others. This characteristic specialisation aligned with the Arab Spring since 1999, supporting political parties, regulations, or religious-based business institutions while rejecting what is perceived as secular Western knowledge.

Although decentralisation of education is an essential part of democratisation, its implementation has been heavily influenced by direct elections of executives and legislators, the formation of new territories, and the presence of multi-party systems, including local parties that exploit ethnicity as a political tool. Since there was an explicit desire from many parties to resist the secularisation of knowledge, many students, teachers, and professors were not only caught up in identity politics but also displayed intolerance, radicalism, and even terrorism, including those who rejected Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. All of these reflected the impact of educational decentralisation on identity politics and significantly affected the development of national insight. In response to the changing face of education in 21st-century Indonesia, the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency was formed in 2017 as a Presidential Work Unit to develop ideology-related policies and standardise educational implementation. This agency collaborated with the National Counterterrorism Agency, the State Intelligence Agency, and the Indonesian Armed Forces Intelligence Agency to monitor government institutions, civil servants, political parties, community organisations, schools, and campuses.

An examination of 47 textbooks and parallel textbooks from 2000 to 2020 revealed the following facts: (1) despite the emphasis on education for citizenship, double standards in overall and specific expectations led to biased perceptions towards national insight and citizenship, (2) the content in grades 1-9 did not emphasize integrated and correlated thematic but rather provided a summary of social sciences. In grades 10-12 and semesters 1-4, although taught separately, the subjects did not support each other effectively, (3) based on vision and goals, social studies was less effective in supporting social and citizenship competencies, and (4) the taxonomy used in the textbooks primarily emphasised Low Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) for cognitive characteristics, such as remembering, understanding, and applying, affection focusing on attending, responding, and valuing, as well as psychomotor skills for academic tasks. As a result, social studies was less effective in fostering nationalism, emancipation, humanism, and human rights. Crucial issues, such as intolerance, radicalism, terrorism, corruption, promiscuity, social segregation, drug abuse, stunting, robbery, and other crimes were not addressed at all. The lack of coverage of these important issues in classroom instruction hindered students' ability to achieve social understanding and civic efficacy.

Based on the results and explanations, social studies currently face four fundamental issues: (1) the irrelevance of vision and goals to the curriculum, (2) the environment and context lacking a balance of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical aspects, (3) the irrelevance of content and conventional learning practices, and (4) the lack of focus on big ideas, framing questions, and competence for social understanding and civic efficacy. These issues significantly impacted three fundamental points: (1) the double standard of vision and objectives, which emphasised faith, piety, and noble character but irrelevant to the development of national insight, identity, and patriotism; (2) the development principle highlighting knowledge internalisation without balancing skills and attitudes; as well as (3) the lack of orientation towards innovation, collaboration, and creative thinking. These three gaps contributed to the failure and irrelevance of social studies as an education for citizenship framework in providing early national insight and promoting citizenship and democratic politics. In line with these limitations, a survey was conducted from 2000 to 2022 on 341 respondents to reinforce the presence of social intolerance within educational institutions.

Table 1: The Trend of Social Intolerance in Educational Institutions

	Neighbor and house choosing	*Mate and schools choosing*	*Socio-political institutions choosing*	*Ethnic minorities and gender equality*	*Employees choosing*	*Social diversity*	*Religious and cultural expressions*	*Interpersonal trust*
Religion	201	233	149	197	184	239	219	169
Ethnic or Race	79	56	47	85	59	0	0	97
Socio-economic	17	14	56	22	0	0	0	42
Moderate	42	38	89	37	98	102	122	33
N	341	341	341	341	341	341	341	341

Religion, as shown in Table 1, had become a determining factor that reflects the strengthening of social intolerance in educational institutions. This reality contradicted the concept of democratic personality based on World Global Values, which emphasised cohesion, harmony, and social integration. From a social studies perspective, social tolerance represents the understanding and acceptance of beliefs or practices that differ from or conflict with one's own. It involves shared values that serve as the foundation for social cohesion, recognition, equal rights, and fostering peace among diverse groups to support self-actualisation. Therefore, social tolerance lies at the core of life and is an integral part of human rights. The reality of social tolerance was not different from religious tolerance, where 177 respondents strongly agreed with government regulation, and 168 strongly agreed with government favouritism. However, 203 respondents strongly disagreed with the social regulation of religion. Based on these facts, social and religious intolerance was deeply rooted among the younger generation. Another reality in Indonesia was the existence of many regional regulations based on religion and gender bias. In Aceh, the Sharia Police was established, applying caning as punishment for offenders. At the national level, from 2014 to 2016, the Ministry of Home Affairs revoked 1,400 regional regulations that contradicted Pancasila and the Indonesian Constitution, and disbanded two radical organisations, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI).

Whether social or religious, intolerance reflects a "least liked" attitude towards individuals and groups with different attributes, stemming from perceptions of superiority in beliefs and lifestyles. The "least liked" phenomenon is a social ailment and a threat to social life, leading to intolerant behaviour and thoughts as well as denial of coexistence. This is marked by prejudice that leads to radicalism, including discrimination, ostracism, defamation, intimidation, expulsion, segregation, and even destruction. In reality, schools are expected to equip students from an early age to be competent and critical towards intolerance. In this context, social and religious tolerance not only reflects openness towards intolerance but also prioritises social cohesion. Whether social or religious, tolerance can only thrive in a tolerant framework that embodies closeness, cooperation, and social stability. The essence of tolerance lies in social cohesion, reflecting democratic personalities according to global values, a component of national insight that represents permissive values, norms, and attitudes.

4. Discussion

In Indonesia, referring to Figure 1 above, social studies provided two alternatives: (1) updating by integrating religion and civic education (PPKn), or (2) rebuilding its curriculum and content, religion, and PPKn to align with 21st-century social and human literacy. This included promoting the New Human to uphold fundamental rights, emancipation, humanities, critical multiculturalism, and moral deliberation. Integrating content on intolerance and radicalism not only introduced contemporary issues in the classroom but also exposed elements present in daily life to provide students with learning experiences, interactions, and understanding of how societies and individuals function (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Ross, 2017; 2018; European Commission, 2018; Munniksma et al, 2023). While the factors were not singular, the vitality of social studies played a crucial role in the early preparation of social competence and citizenship, fostering national insight, national identity, patriotism, and democratic politics.

Table 2: Intolerant and Radical Content Strands in Social Studies

Grade	*Overall expectation*			*Social Studies Expectations*
	Application	*Inquiry*	*Understanding context*	
1-3	**Focus on Perspective, Cause and Consequence:** Compare some significant social and religious tolerance and radicalism among diverse groups and it different times, and identify some of the reasons.	**Focus on Continuity and Change:** Use the social studies inquiry process to investigates social and religion tolerance and radicalism and bring about social cohesions in the families and communities in which they belong.	**Focus on Interrelationships and Significance:** Describe some of the major groups in their community, including different types of families, religion, race, ethnic, and languages and some of the ways in which traditions are passed on by such groups.	Provide opportunity to explore a number of concepts connected to the education for citizenship framework including beliefs and values, culture, identity, relationships, and stewardship.
4-6	**Focus on Interrelationships, Patterns and Trends:** Demonstrate an understanding of some key aspects of the interrelationships between humanity, emancipation and human right with social cohesions and national development.	**Focus on Cause, Consequence and Perspective:** Use the social studies inquiry process to investigate social and religious tolerance as it parallels social cohesions and national development and action taken to reduce the negative impact.	**Focus in Significance:** Describe social and religious tolerance as well as global values and their significance for building social cohesion and national development including meeting the necessities of life.	Provide opportunity to explore a number of concepts connected to the education for citizenship framework including beliefs and values, community, culture, power, relationships, and stewardship.
7-9	**Focus on Cause and Consequence, Patterns and Trends:** Assess contributions to Indonesian identities made by various groups	**Focus on Perspective:** Use the process of social study inquiry to investigate different historical and geographic	**Focus on Significance, Continuity and Change:** Demonstrate an understanding of significant experiences	Provide opportunity to explore a number of concepts connected to the education for citizenship framework including

	and communities and by various features of Indonesian communities and regions.	perspectives or contemporary experiences from different communities in Indonesia.	and major changes and aspects of life in various historical and contemporary communities in Indonesia.	beliefs and values, equity, freedom, identity, power and authority, and relationships.
10-12	**Focus on Interrelationships; Perspective:** Explain the importance of international cooperation in addressing global issues, and evaluate the effectiveness of selected actions by Indonesia and Indonesian citizens in the international arena.	**Focus on Cause and Consequence:** Use the process of social studies inquiry to investigate global issues of political, social, economic or environmental importance and their impact on the global community, and responses for issues.	**Focus on Significance, Patterns and Trends:** Describe significant aspects of the involvement of Indonesia and Indonesian in some regions around the world, including the impact of this involvement.	Provide opportunity to explore a number of concepts connected to the education for citizenship framework including democracy, equity, inclusiveness, law and justice, power and authority, relationships, respect, and rights and responsibilities.
Sem. 1-4.	**Focus on Cause and Consequence, Perspective:** Assess the impact of several key social, economic and political factors, including social, economic or political inequalities, on various groups and communities, and on the creation and expansion of Unity of Indonesia.	**Focus on Significance, Perspective:** Use processes of historical and global inquiry to investigate the perspectives of various groups and communities on key events, developments or issues affecting Indonesia.	**Focus on Significance, Cause and Consequence:** Describe various significant people, events, and developments and its impact on Indonesian independence.	Provide opportunity to explore a number of concepts connected to the education for citizenship framework including beliefs and values, collaboration, cooperation, culture, equity, freedom, identity, relationships, and respect.

According to Table 2, the success of social studies depended on achieving cognitive, psychomotor, and attitudinal balance through curriculum development based on relevant content. This included: (1) emphasising the main elements of national insight that reflect relevant inter-topic connections, (2) incorporating disciplinary thinking concepts to develop critical abilities for analysing important cases and issues beyond the confines of the classroom, and (3) promoting inquiry processes to investigate and communicate significant events, developments, and problems. The social studies programmes at each grade level should be designed to provide students with diverse experiences and opportunities to learn and apply the four elements of citizenship, namely identity, attributes, structures, and active participation (Ministry of Education, 2018). These elements could serve as valuable guidelines for teachers in developing an education for citizenship framework.

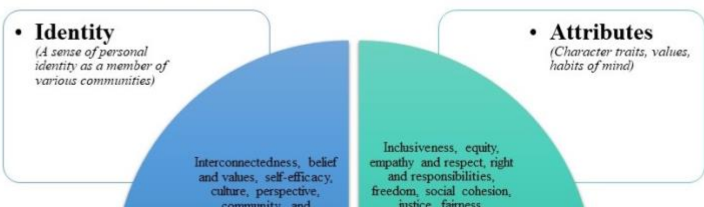

Figure 2: Education for Citizenship Framework based on Social Studies

Figure 2 identifies four main elements of the education for citizenship framework namely identity, attributes, structures, and active participation, each of which was explained in detail. The figure also shows a list of various terms connected to other elements. Teachers used these themes and topics to establish connections between the content reflected in the curriculum. Practically, terms and topics could be applied to more than one element as shown by the circular arrows, fostering interconnectedness within each unit to build education for citizenship. Content related to deviant, intolerant, and radical behaviour was integrated and closely linked to all four components, reinforcing social understanding and civic efficacy. This process enhanced and developed students' critical thinking, problem-solving skills, evaluative judgments, and effective communication of ideas (Ministry of Education, 2018).

In essence, curriculum standardisation aimed to strike a balance between knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions, with a focus on factual content rather than higher-order thinking skills. Suggested variations for curriculum design included expanding horizon models, cognitive taxonomies, subject-specific disciplinary thinking, or using NCSS National Curriculum Standard and C3 Framework; College, Career, and Civic Life (NCSS, 2013). These programmes encouraged students to explore various ideas, concepts, and issues through interdisciplinary and integrated learning experiences, facilitating a deeper understanding of social, political, economic, environmental, and other interconnected issues. Based on the grade level of each class, students were guided to utilise social studies thinking concepts to process relevant content or research skills, formulate questions, as well as gather, interpret, and analyse information, data, or evidence from various primary and secondary sources. This could be achieved by employing various tools and technologies to communicate ideas, conclusions, and judgments effectively.

In the 21st century, social studies connect people globally through the internet, enabling interaction and engagement among individuals (Engle and Ochoa, 1988; Stanley, 2021; Adler, 2004; Wang, Lin, Spalding, Odell, and Klecka, 2011; Miliziano, 2009). However, these crucial aspects are often disregarded, leaving students vulnerable to being influenced by narratives on social media and the internet. It is important to incorporate this dimension in social studies to better understand social relations and functions as well as guide students in interacting with people from different backgrounds. This ultimately prepares them to become responsible citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attributes to contribute positively inside and outside the classroom, communities, and the workforce (Coleman, 2021; Ross, 2006). Based on this research, the education for citizenship framework reflected the crucial aspects of social studies within overall education. In each class, the curriculum provided opportunities for learning that extended beyond the school, empowering students to become responsible and active citizens in a diverse society. Students were encouraged to recognise their roles in multiple communities and as global citizens. Therefore, responsible and active citizens are expected to participate in the common good of a community, as education equips them with these responsibilities. This presents the earliest and fundamental mechanism for developing social and citizenship competencies.

Through the abandonment of scientific and critical pedagogy and the adoption of repositioning as well as actualisation, social studies can overcome superficial understanding and dual standards, challenging conventional practices and the status quo of education for citizenship towards national insight. Revision and repositioning enable the curriculum to actively address intolerance and radicalism, considering their relationships and content. The most relevant approach in this context is interdisciplinarity, which integrates related disciplines to develop transferable skills as needed by students. Knowledge transfer aims to equip students to apply knowledge effectively in various contexts, enabling them to critically examine information, assess the significance of events and processes, develop understanding, respect different perspectives, formulate conclusions, and propose resolutions. The contribution and limitation of the research significantly depended on the political will of the government to act in the interests of the state. This consequently brings together curriculum designers, teachers, lecturers, and supporting organisations to collectively think and formulate the vision and objectives of social studies in the context of the 21st century.

In conclusion, social studies, from a national perspective, served as standard instruction in classrooms to foster national insight while promoting social understanding and civic efficacy as well as assessing its impact on students. Advancing national education entailed creating a learning experience through an up-to-date curriculum that embraced a student-centred education ecosystem. Operating as an education for citizenship framework, the vision and objectives of social studies were firmly grounded in the contents of national insight, including identity, attributes, structures, and active participation. The achievement of these objectives significantly relied on the standardisation of a curriculum that struck a harmonious balance between cognitive, psychomotor, and attitudinal aspects. This entailed ensuring meaningful connections or relevancy between topics, encouraging interdisciplinary and critical analysis of significant cases and issues outside the confines of the classrooms, as well as fostering an inquiry process to investigate or effectively communicate findings regarding crucial events, developments, and problems. However, the negligence of critical scientific and pedagogical elements, as well as the absence of repositioning and actualisation contributed to a one-dimensional understanding and a dual standard in the approach to social studies. This consequently facilitated conventional practices and the status quo of education for citizenship towards national insight. Addressing these challenges, it was imperative to conduct specific studies that explored the interconnections and relevance between various topics, aligning with cognitive, psychomotor, and attitudinal aspects while promoting active citizenship and democratic politics.

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The Microfoundations and Security Implications of Technological Sovereignty in the Digital Age

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Abstract
In the age of artificial intelligence, firms' technological capabilities have become a critical variable underpinning the logic of national security; however, the mechanisms through which micro-level technological evolution translates into macro-level security outcomes remain insufficiently understood. Taking the Chinese embodied intelligence Unitree Robotics as a case study, this article develops an analytical framework of "technological capability–mechanism–security outcome" and identifies three causal mechanisms: the Capability Effect, the Dependency Effect, and the Rule Effect. Drawing on process tracing and multi-source data, the study yields three major findings. First, firms' technological innovation capabilities can directly enhance national strategic autonomy by providing alternative pathways for critical technologies; however, such effects remain constrained by dependence on underlying hardware and software infrastructures. Second, the dependency structures generated through firms' integration into global technological systems improve operational efficiency while simultaneously introducing latent security vulnerabilities. Third, firms' technological advantages can only be transformed into stable institutional power once they are institutionalized as industry standards. These three mechanisms exhibit a progressive relationship characterized by "capability foundation–dependency constraint–rule diffusion," jointly shaping the dynamic process through which firm-level technological capabilities are converted into national security resources. By moving beyond a state-centric perspective and shifting the level of analysis from the state to the firm, this study elucidates the logic through which firms' micro-level capabilities are transformed into national security assets. It further argues that technological capability building at the firm level should be incorporated into the broader framework of national security governance.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Technological Sovereignty, National Security

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has fundamentally reshaped both the scope and boundaries of national security (Hoadley & Lucas, 2018). In frontier domains such as embodied intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and autonomous systems, critical technological breakthroughs are increasingly driven by leading technology firms (Feng et al., 2025). Through its indigenous innovation in embodied intelligence, Unitree has emerged as a pivotal node within the global technological ecosystem and as a representative case for the study of national security in the AI era (Chen, 2025; China National Intellectual Property Administration, 2025). Similarly, Boston Dynamics and the capital and military-industrial networks underpinning it have been regarded as critical connectors of U.S. security capabilities (Scharre, 2018), while European AI firms have increasingly served as strategic vehicles for the European Union's pursuit of technological sovereignty (European Commission, 2024). These developments suggest that, in the age of artificial intelligence, firms are evolving from mere competitors in technology markets into critical nodes within national security architectures (Ren, 2024). This transformation not only reconfigures the organizational logic of technological innovation, but also raises pressing theoretical challenges regarding the mechanisms through which national security is constituted and sustained.

Existing studies on technological sovereignty largely conceptualize the state as a unitary and rational technological actor, while treating firms as passive implementers of state policy. Such perspectives overlook the agency of firms in shaping technological trajectories and innovation ecosystems. In practice, however, the pace and direction of innovation in fields such as embodied intelligence are highly contingent upon firms' micro-level research and development activities (He et al., 2025a). Firm-level technological capabilities do not merely serve national strategies in a subordinate manner; rather, they profoundly shape national security outcomes by redefining capability boundaries and restructuring dependency relations (He et al., 2025b). Accordingly, this article asks the following core question: How do firms' technological capabilities constitute the microfoundations of national technological sovereignty? Furthermore, through what pathways and mechanisms are these capabilities transformed into national-level security resources?

This article takes Unitree, a leading Chinese robotics firm, as a case study to examine how firm-level technological capabilities are transformed into national security resources. The analysis proceeds along three dimensions. First, it investigates how firms expand the boundaries of national security capabilities through breakthroughs in core technologies (Capability Effect). Second, it examines how dependency structures emerging from firms' integration into the global division of labor generate new constraints on national security (Dependency Effect). Third, it explores how firms' technological trajectories become institutionalized as industry standards and subsequently reshape governance rules in a recursive manner (Rule Effect). Building upon this framework, the article further identifies both the synergies and tensions between firms' commercial logics and national security objectives, and analyzes how this dynamic relationship influences the stability of technological sovereignty at a deeper structural level.

The contributions of this article are reflected at both the theoretical and empirical levels. Theoretically, the study moves beyond the static perspective that conceptualizes technological sovereignty solely as a state-level macro-strategy. Instead, it develops a micro–macro interactive framework centered on firms, thereby shifting the analytical focus of technological sovereignty from national strategy to firm-level capability structures. Empirically, through in-depth case analysis and process tracing, the article systematically examines the interactive dynamics between technological evolution and security governance in the field of embodied intelligence. This framework not only explains the security spillover effects associated with Unitree, but also provides a transferable theoretical tool for analyzing state–firm security relations in other strategic technological domains, including semiconductors and quantum computing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 From Sovereignty to Technological Sovereignty

Sovereignty, the cornerstone of the modern international order, was conceptualized by Jean Bodin (1576) as absolute authority and later institutionalized via the Peace of Westphalia as a territorial principle of political authority (Yang, 2011). Traditionally, this mandated exclusive state control over defined geography and populations. However, the transboundary nature of information technology is reshaping this spatial logic. Grant (1983) early identified that technological embeddedness erodes geographical constraints, while Edler et al. (2020) argue that the challenge has shifted from territorial integrity to structural dependence on external technological systems. Consequently, external control over critical technologies poses a direct threat to national security (da Ponte et al., 2023).

In the AI era, algorithms, data, and computing power have become core strategic resources (Toffler, 2006), positioning "technological sovereignty" as the primary nexus between technology and national security (March & Schieferdecker, 2023). Despite its growing prominence, scholarship lacks a unified operational definition and a consensus framework to systematically explain how technological capabilities translate into state power.

2.2 Diverging Approaches to Technological Sovereignty

Current research diverges into three primary analytical strands based on distinct problem orientations and theoretical assumptions.

The EU-centric approach conceptualizes technological sovereignty as "strategic autonomy" attained through institutional governance. Prompted by the Snowden revelations (Maurer et al., 2015), the EU leveraged instruments like data protection and technical standards to reduce external dependencies (da Ponte et al., 2023). This strategy seeks to externalize internal regulatory norms globally, establishing a form of "normative power" (Qi & Chen, 2021; Liu, 2023). However, critics note that without robust core innovation, this approach remains a governance aspiration rather than an actualized capability.

The US-centric approach embeds sovereignty within the logic of great-power competition, prioritizing absolute technological leadership. Here, sovereignty is sustained through continuous innovation and technological superiority (Yin & Liu, 2025), reinforced by export controls and supply chain restructuring (Wang, 2025; Geng, 2025). While emphasizing capability, this approach is criticized for the "securitization" of technology, which risks distorting market mechanisms and fragmenting the global technological ecosystem.

The China-centric approach emphasizes "indigenous controllability," viewing technological sovereignty as a pillar of national modernization and security (Xi, 2018). Strategy focuses on core technology breakthroughs and industrial chain restructuring to achieve endogenous control (Gao & Yan, 2025). Key policy frameworks (State Council, 2015, 2017) aim to minimize external dependence by strengthening state-led resource allocation (Allen, 2019). Yet, an overreliance on state leadership may stifle market dynamism and international cooperation, complicating its long-term efficacy.

Despite divergent orientations, these approaches remain state-centric, treating technological sovereignty as a macro-level outcome while neglecting the micro-mechanisms of its production. Consequently, this study shifts the analytical focus to the firm level to explain the underlying logic of technological sovereignty through micro-level capabilities and behaviors.

2.3 Firm Capability Structures and the Microfoundations of Technological Sovereignty

Scholarship is increasingly shifting from the state to the firm level, emphasizing companies' foundational role in securing critical technological domains (Dibiaggio et al., 2024).

First, firms' competitive advantages manifest in full-stack innovation and ecosystem leadership, spanning R&D, industrial coordination, and trajectory guidance (Song & Li, 2024). Through resource orchestration, leading firms shape innovation pathways and ecosystem structures, directly influencing national autonomy in critical sectors (He et al., 2025b).

Second, data has evolved into a critical production factor essential for knowledge creation (Central Committee of the CPC & State Council, 2020; Jiang et al., 2024).. Beyond enhancing innovation efficiency, data serves as a carrier of external knowledge that shapes a firm's absorptive capacity (Xie et al., 2020; Qu et al., 2025). Consequently, firm-level data governance is no longer just a market advantage but a cornerstone of national data sovereignty and technological security (National and Local Co-Built Innovation Center, 2024).

Finally, standards competition acts as the intermediary transforming technological capability into institutional power. Prior research has investigated the effects of technological diversification and network embeddedness on firms' standard-setting capabilities (Zou et al., 2017). Firm-led trajectories, once institutionalized as industry norms or international standards, extend influence beyond markets into the domain of global rule-making (Tian, 2024). Thus, strengthening firm standardization is vital for anchoring technological achievements (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China & State Council, 2021).

Overall, while technological sovereignty is a state attribute, its practical boundaries cam be shaped by firms' innovation, data governance, and standardization capabilities. However, current research relies on fragmented, single-dimensional analyses. A systematic framework is required to theorize how multidimensional firm capabilities embed into national technological systems through specific causal mechanisms to produce security outcomes.

2.4 Theoretical Advances and Gaps in Firm-Level Case Studies

Innovation research is shifting from outcome-oriented performance metrics toward systematic micro-mechanism analyses, following three primary trajectories.

The first trajectory focuses on capability evolution, explaining how firms achieve upgrades through organizational adjustment and technological iteration (Feng et al., 2025). While this dynamic capabilities perspective clarifies endogenous innovation (Yu et al., 2025; Yin, 2025), it remains confined to firm-level performance, neglecting broader structural impacts. Building upon this, the second strand utilizes resource orchestration and innovation ecosystems, situating firms within broader networks to examine meso-level industrial structures (Ma et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2024). However, its focus on innovation efficiency overlooks the political implications of firm-led ecosystem evolution. The third strand situates firm behavior within geopolitics, linking corporate strategy to national rivalry (Ma & Liu, 2025). It demonstrates how firms reshape global structures via trajectory selection and standards-setting (Huo et al., 2025), which more directly addresses the macro-level implications of firm behavior, yet remains primarily descriptive, lacking systematic modeling of causal mechanisms.

Despite these advances, the literature suffers from analytical fragmentation: micro-level studies struggle to scale upward, while macro-level analyses lack traceable foundations. Theoretical integration is needed to explain how firm-level capabilities embed into national systems through specific causal pathways to determine technological sovereignty and national security outcomes.

3. Theoretical Conceptualization and Analytical Framework

This section establishes a mechanism-oriented, micro-macro analytical framework to explain the transformation of firm-level technological capabilities into national security outcomes. Departing from macro-strategic narratives or simple variable correlations, this study posits that firms trigger identifiable mechanisms through three capability dimensions—innovation provision, dependency structuring, and rule formation. These dimensions systematically transmit micro-level technological activities into macro-level security effects.

Methodologically, the impact of firm behavior on national security is defined by path dependence and contextual variation, eluding explanation through linear variables. A mechanism-based analysis is thus better suited to uncovering the generative processes of these effects, moving beyond descriptive "what happened" accounts to explanatory "how" and "why" logic.

3.1 Theoretical Conceptualization of Firm-Embedded Technological Capability

Firm-Embedded Technological Capability is conceptualized as a composite system forged through indigenous research and development, data accumulation, and standards participation. This system uniquely integrates endogenous innovativeness with exogenous embeddedness. Unlike traditional theories of firm capability, this concept emphasizes two interrelated dimensions: first, the degree of firms' autonomous control over core technologies; and second, the embedded and dependent relationships between firms and the international technological ecosystem. While the former dictates the capacity to provide technological alternatives, the latter determines resilience against external shocks and exposure to systemic risks.

More specifically, the capability consists of three analytically distinct components. First, technological innovation capability refers to the capacity for full-stack, systemic breakthroughs and iterative advancement, rather than isolated "point" innovations. Its essence is the power to autonomously define technological trajectories. At the firm level, this manifests in strategic patenting, vertical integration of hardware/software, and full-chain R&D-to-production control; at the national level, it serves as the foundational pillar of sovereignty.

Second, data governance capability. In the AI-driven economy, data is a strategic resource with explicit security attributes. This capability encompasses both the scale of data and the firm's mastery of the entire data lifecycle—from collection and annotation to training and circulation. The distribution of this capability directly dictates national effectiveness and risk exposure in algorithmic security, privacy, and data sovereignty. Third, standards competition capability refers to firms' ability to transform technological trajectories into global industry norms through standard-setting and rule negotiation. It involves institutionalizing technological advantages, thereby shaping ecosystem structures beyond mere market competition. Here, firms act not only as technology producers but as architects of governance structures.

These components are mutually constitutive and progressive: innovation capability provides the foundation, data governance serves as the strategic asset, and standards competition represents the institutional consolidation of the previous two. Collectively, they form the micro-level foundation upon which national technological sovereignty is realized.

3.2 Theoretical Conceptualization of the Three Core Mechanisms

Building upon the foregoing capability framework, this article proposes three core mechanisms to explain how Firm-Embedded Technological Capability connects to and reshapes the foundations of national security.

3.2.1 Capability Effect: Direct Support for Strategic Autonomy

The Capability Effect describes how firms' independent, controllable and evolving innovation capabilities in core technologies directly affect a country's strategic autonomy and operational capacity, and further shape national security performance (Wang & Han, 2024). The underlying premise is that "capability itself constitutes security". By achieving breakthroughs in core algorithms and systems integration, firms provide the state with independent technological options, expanding its strategic maneuverability against blockades or supply disruptions (Roy et al., 2021). Conversely, fragmented or path-dependent capabilities undermine national autonomy. Unlike other mechanisms, the Capability Effect operates through the direct provision of technological assets, bypassing the mediation of institutional or market structures.

3.2.2 Dependency Effect: Structural Risks and Vulnerabilities

Unlike Capability Effect, Dependency Effect focuses on how a firm's internal and external structural dependencies amplify or mitigate national vulnerabilities. Embedded in global supply chains and open-source ecosystems (Tian et al., 2025), firms often develop asymmetric dependencies on critical hardware or data services. In geopolitical crises, these firm-level dependencies transform into national structural risks (He et al., 2025c). Conversely, strategies such as supply chain diversification and indigenous substitution foster technological redundancy, distributing risk and absorbing shocks (Lund et al., 2020). The essence of this effect lies in the nodes and pathways of risk transmission, making its impact highly context-dependent.

3.2.3 Rule Effect: Institutionalizing Technological Trajectories

Rule Effect refers to the process through which firms transform their technological trajectories into global norms or rule. .By leading standard-setting, firms enhance a state's agenda-setting capacity and institutional power. The central mechanism underlying Rule Effect is the "first-mover lock-in effect": once a trajectory becomes institutionalized as an industry standard, competitors must adapt, reinforcing the leader's structural advantage (Liu & Li, 2022). The extent of firms' participation in standards-setting processes directly affects a state's discursive authority and institutional influence within global technological governance. Unlike Capability Effect, Rule Effect depends less on intrinsic technical sophistication and more on broad adoption and institutionalization, thereby amplifying technological advantages and transforming them into institutional resources within international competition.

3.2.4 Interactions Among the Mechanisms: A Logic of Progression and Mutual Constitution

The three mechanisms share progressive and mutually constitutive relationships. Capability Effect lays the foundation, determining whether firms can deliver effective technological provision. Dependency Effect functions as a "stress test" for firms' capability systems by exposing critical dependencies and vulnerable linkages, thereby driving processes of adjustment and reinforcement. Rule Effect, in turn, institutionalizes technological advantages and converts them into more stable structural power. Meanwhile, rule institutionalization may constrain the evolution of technological trajectories to a certain degree, generating feedback effects on innovation. The dynamic interaction of the three mechanisms collectively shapes the inherent logic whereby firm-level technological capabilities translate into national security resources.

3.3 A Multidimensional Analytical Framework for National Security

To move beyond a reductionist view of national security as a purely technical or military concern, this study adopts a four-dimensional approach encompassing political, economic, societal, and international domains. This taxonomy captures how firm-level capabilities ripple through different sectors via distinct causal pathways, mitigating the theoretical blind spots inherent in single-dimensional analyses.

Political security centers on sovereignty, institutional stability, and strategic autonomy (Yang, 2018). Through Capability Effect and Dependency Effect, firm-level technological capabilities influence the controllability of critical technologies and the depth of external reliance; these factors, in turn, define a state's policy maneuverability and strategic resilience under external pressure.

Economic security emphasizes the stability of the national economic system, industrial competitiveness, and supply chain resilience (State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, 2023). Firm-level technological capabilities reshape a state's structural position within the global economy by influencing industrial value chain positioning, market structures, and control over standards-setting processes. In this context, Capability Effect drives industrial upgrading into high-value segments, while the Dependency Effect risks amplifying systemic vulnerabilities during external shocks.

Societal security addresses social order, public safety, data governance, and technological ethics (Liu, 2012). As data and algorithmic systems become increasingly embedded in societal operations, firm-level technological capabilities can enhance governance efficiency yet simultaneously introduce risks—such as algorithmic bias or data misuse (Zou et al., 2021). In this dimension, the interaction between Capability Effect and Dependency Effect is particularly pronounced.

International security involves states' positions within the international system, discursive authority, and rule-shaping capacity. Firm-level technological capabilities primarily exert influence through Rule Effect, as firms' participation in international standards-setting and rule negotiation processes directly affects states' institutional power and agenda-setting capacity within global technological governance (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

3.4 Operationalization and Scope of the Analytical Framework

To transform the foregoing theoretical framework into an operational analytical tool, the subsequent case analysis in this study follows the logic outlined below. First, it identifies firms' specific manifestations and evolutionary characteristics across the three dimensions of technological innovation capability, data governance capability, and standards competition capability. Second, it analyzes how these capability dimensions generate observable effects across different security domains through the three mechanisms of Capability Effect, Dependency Effect, and Rule Effect. Finally, it identifies the potential tensions between firms' developmental logics and national security objectives, as well as the mechanisms through which such tensions evolve and are mediated under specific contextual conditions.

Crucially, the framework remains agnostic as to whether firm capabilities bolster or undermine security. By explicitly accounting for negative externalities, it creates analytical space to examine misalignments between corporate growth and state imperatives. As profit-driven entities, firms may select technological trajectories that diverge from national interests—a tension that serves as a vital entry point for understanding the modern politics of technology.

In terms of applicability, although this framework originates from the frontier domain of embodied intelligence—which exhibits significant security spillover effects—its analytical logic, grounded in the mechanistic linkage between firm-level behavior and macro-level national outcomes, possesses a degree of transferability. With contextual adaptation, it is applicable to other strategic sectors, including semiconductors, quantum computing, and aerospace. Nevertheless, its boundary conditions and universal applicability warrant further validation through cross-sectoral and cross-national comparative research.

4. Methodological Design

4.1 Method Selection

This study employs a single-case design integrated with process tracing to test how firm-level capabilities influence national security. Given the deep contextuality and procedural nature of the research problem, its causal pathways elude detection via cross-sectional data. Accordingly, a qualitative research approach oriented toward mechanism identification is necessary.

4.1.1 Single-Case Study

Single-case studies are uniquely suited for uncovering complex mechanisms, identifying intervening processes, and testing theoretical models in specific contexts (Birkinshaw et al., 2011). Compared with multiple-case research, its primary advantage lies in the ability to longitudinally trace the evolution of key variables, enhancing the explanatory depth of mechanism-based analysis (Yin, 2014). This study selects Unitree as a critical case. If the mechanisms proposed in this article are supported or refined through this case, the findings may provide broader theoretical insights into the nexus between corporate capability and national security in the AI domain.

4.1.2 Process Tracing

Within this framework, process tracing is utilized to systematically examine causal mechanisms (Liang, 2025). This method validates the existence and operational pathways of mechanisms by identifying a sequence of intermediate steps linking causes and outcomes (Bennett, 2010; Beach & Pedersen, 2020), which is applied in two capacities. First, it is adopted for mechanism testing by tracing the evolution of Unitree's core technological capabilities across developmental stages. It examines how factors including rising localization of core components, expanding data ecosystems, and deeper engagement in standard-setting shape national security-related outcomes via the Capability Effect, Dependency Effect, and Rule Effect (see Figure 1). Second, it is used to construct an evidence chain by integrating multiple data sources, thereby establishing a continuous logical linkage connecting firm-level technological capabilities, causal mechanisms, and eventual national security impacts.

Index	Product	Year	Technical Characteristics	Image	Index	Product	Year	Technical Characteristics	Image
1	Xdog	2013	Prototype quadruped robot featuring a pioneering brushless motor–based actuation solution		9	FirefightingB1	2021	Equipped with 360-degree cameras for real-time fire reconnaissance, LiDAR for environmental mapping, and infrared sensors for detecting trapped individuals	
2	Laikago	2017	First-generation commercial quadruped robot developed by Unitree Robotics		10	B2	2022	The fastest industrial-grade quadruped robot, capable of running at 6 m/s with a maximum joint torque of 360 N・m	
3	Laikago Pro	2018	Upgraded version of the first-generation Laikago platform with enhanced performance and stability		11	B2-W	2023	A wheel–leg hybrid quadruped robot featuring transformable locomotion to overcome endurance limitations	
4	AlienGo	2018	A large-scale and heavyweight quadruped robot, notable for achieving dynamic backflip maneuvers		12	Go2	2023	Equipped with a 4D ultra-wide-angle LiDAR system and a peak joint torque of 45 N・m	
5	A1	2020	A compact quadruped robot recognized for high speed and stability, capable of reaching 3.3 m/s, with human-following and autonomous obstacle-avoidance functions		13	Go2-W	2023	A wheel–leg hybrid variant of Go2 featuring extended battery life and enhanced all-terrain mobility	
6	Go1	2021	The world' s first consumer-grade companion quadruped robot, equipped with a 16-core CPU+GPU AI system and a maximum speed of 4.7 m/s		14	H1、H1-2	2023	Full-size electrically actuated humanoid robots capable of achieving a standing backflip, with a walking speed of 3.3 m/s and a maximum joint torque of 360 N・m	
7	B1	2021	An industrial-grade quadruped robot designed to operate in complex terrains and harsh environmental conditions						
8	InspectionB1	2021	An industrial inspection quadruped robot offering intelligent solutions for public safety and firefighting, with a top speed of 6 m/s		15	G1	2024	A humanoid robot exhibiting human-level agility, with a maximum joint torque of 120 N・m and powered by the unified large-scale robot model, UnifoLM	

Figure 1: Illustration of Unitree Robotics' Product Iteration

Source: Compiled by the author

4.2 Case Selection

Unitree Robotics is selected as the focal case, fulfilling the criteria of representativeness, data availability, and theoretical relevance (Gioia et al., 2013).

First, in terms of representativeness, Unitree Robotics is a benchmark firm in China's AI hardware sector, particularly in quadruped robotics and embodied intelligence (Xu, 2025). The company has achieved significant technological breakthroughs in motion control algorithms, autonomous perception systems, and full-system integration, and competes directly in international markets with firms such as Boston Dynamics (Chen et al., 2025). As embodied intelligence emerges as a frontier of Sino-US-EU strategic rivalry, Unitree's trajectory mirrors the micro-level dynamics of national technological sovereignty (Beijing Frontier Future Technology Industry Development Research Institute, 2025). Second, the firm offers high data transparency. Comprehensive records of financing, product iterations, and patent portfolios—supplemented by policy documents and industry analyses—enable robust cross-validation across multiple data streams. Finally, Unitree demonstrates strong theoretical fit with the proposed mechanisms. Its full-stack R&D illustrates Capability Effect; its residual reliance on critical external components provides an empirical site for Dependency Effect; and its participation in standard-setting offers a window into Rule Effect. These interactions are empirically observable across all four security dimensions, making Unitree an ideal case to test the framework's validity.

4.3 Data Sources

The data of this study are mainly drawn from four categories. First, 65 policy documents are collected from official institutions including the State Council, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and the Ministry of Science and Technology. Spanning 2015–2025, these documents cover strategic plans, industrial policies and financial support concerning artificial intelligence, embodied intelligence and technological autonomy. Second, 45 corporate documents are obtained from Unitree Robotics' official website, financing announcements and public reports, covering its technological development trajectory, financing structure, international cooperation and talent composition. Third, 35 media and interview materials are gathered from mainstream domestic media, technology outlets and international news sources, to analyze the narratives behind state support legitimacy and the firm's positioning in international competition. Fourth, 117 academic and industrial studies are reviewed to underpin theoretical analysis and provide industry background context.

4.4 Analytical Procedures and Coding Strategy

Building on the above, this study adopts a layered coding approach to process multi-source data systematically. Specifically, open coding is first used to extract key events, data points and statements from raw materials. Second, axial coding categorizes the data into three core dimensions of firms' embedded technological capabilities: technological innovation capability, data governance capability, and standard competition capability. Third, selective coding maps these dimensions to the three mechanisms: capability effect, dependency effect, and rule effect. Finally, this study further identifies the specific manifestations and potential risks of each mechanism across political, economic, social and international security dimensions. The coding framework is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of the Coding Framework

Coding Level	Coding Type	Description	Corresponding Model Element
Level 1	Open Coding	Extraction of specific events, data, and statements from policy documents, corporate materials, media sources, and academic studies	Raw empirical materials
Level 2	Core Element Coding	Aggregation of Level 1 codes into three components of Firm-Embedded Technological Capability (FETC): Technological Innovation Capability (T-Cap), Data Governance Capability (D-Cap), and Standard Competition Capability (S-Cap)	Structure of corporate embedded technological capabilities
Level 3	Mechanism Mapping Coding	Mapping Level 2 codes onto the three mechanisms: Capacity Effect (CE), Dependency Effect (DE), and Rule Effect (RE)	Theoretical mechanism
Level 4	Security Dimensions and Potential Risks	Identification of the specific impacts and potential risks of each mechanism across the four dimensions of political, economic, social, and international security(T1–T9)[1]	Multidimensional Impacts on National Security

Source: Compiled by the author

Within the security domain, the four core dimensions—political, economic, social, and international security—are further divided into nine sub-dimensions: Supply Chain Resilience (SCR), Technological Sovereignty (TS), National Narrative (NN), Public Service Resilience (PSR), Data Security and Governance (DSG), Military Application Risk (MAR), International Discourse Power (IDP), Industrial Competitiveness (IC), and Asymmetric Dependence (AD). Accordingly, this study focuses on potential risks (T) stemming from tensions between corporate commercial logic and national security goals, and identifies nine key risk points. These include the tension between commercial iteration speed and national-level reliability requirements; the conflict between international open-source norms and core technology protection; trade-offs between cross-border commercial data

[1] T1: Commercial iteration speed vs. military/national-grade reliability requirements; T2: International open-source sharing logic vs. core technology protection and autonomy; T3: Corporate entertainment-oriented promotion (e.g., Spring Festival Gala) vs. serious national technological image; T4: Embodied intelligence's generalized environmental data needs vs. personal privacy and geospatial information security boundaries; T5: Cross-border flow/cooperation of commercial data vs. national data sovereignty and security regulation; T6: Global commercial exports vs. sensitive technology diffusion and dual-use (military) risks; T7: De facto corporate standard formation vs. exclusion or politicization by international standards organizations; T8: Low-price strategies for market share vs. long-term R&D investment and profit protection; T9: Deep integration into global markets vs. international geopolitical sanctions and decoupling risks

flows and national data sovereignty; and risks arising from deep global market integration amid geopolitical decoupling. Table 2 presents an example of coding correspondence.

Table 2: Data Coding Mapping (Excerpt)

Index	Original Material Type	Core Content Summary	FETC Core Element	Mechanism	Security Sub-dimension	Potential Risk
1	Website Updates	Unitree released the H1 humanoid robot, highlighting self-developed high-performance joint motors.	T-Cap	CE	SCR	T1
2	Media Interview	Founder discusses collaboration with international AI giants on embodied intelligence data.	D-Cap	CE	DSG	T5
3	Policy Document	Made in China 2025 emphasizes independent innovation capability.	T-Cap	CE	TS	–
4	International Commentary	Kharon report points to potential connections between Unitree and the PLA.	S-Cap	DE	MAR	T6
5	Academic Research	Influence of open-source robotics communities on technology dissemination and talent development.	T-Cap	RE	TS	T2
6	Early Development	Pricing strategy of Unitree's early products in the international market.	S-Cap	DE	IC	T8
7	Core Patents	Authorization of Unitree's patented electric-drive leg joint technology.	T-Cap	CE	TS	–
8	Local Policy	Hangzhou municipal government explicitly supports Unitree as a benchmark enterprise.	S-Cap	RE	NN	–

Source: Compiled by the author

4.5 Reliability and Validity Analysis

To ensure the reliability and explanatory validity of the findings, this study implements procedural controls from both reliability and validity perspectives.

In terms of reliability, multi-source data triangulation and temporal tracking are used to reduce single-source bias and the risk of spurious or idiosyncratic interpretations. Specifically, by integrating hierarchical coding with process tracing, the study repeatedly compares the manifestation of the same phenomenon across different data sources, ensuring consistency and traceability in the abstraction from empirical materials to theoretical constructs. In terms of validity, the case is cross-validated within the three-mechanism framework by comparing the differential effects of each mechanism across various security dimensions, thereby mitigating bias from a single explanatory pathway. Meanwhile, key policy documents and major international events are introduced as contextual references to conduct external consistency checks on the analytical results. In addition, counterfactual reasoning is used to explore how firms' developmental trajectories and their security implications might vary under different institutional environments or external constraints, strengthening the robustness of causal inference.

5. Case Analysis: The National Security Effects of Unitree's Firm-Embedded Technological Capability

The Multidimensional Impact Model of Firm-Embedded Technological Capability on National Security posits that firms' technological capabilities generate compound effects across political, economic, societal, and international security dimensions via three mechanisms: Capability Effect, Dependency Effect, and Rule Effect. To evaluate this framework's explanatory power, this study utilizes Unitree to trace how corporate practices embed into national security structures. The analysis reveals that corporate capabilities do not yield security dividends linearly; instead, they redefine national resilience through a dynamic interplay between technological autonomy, structural dependencies, and rule formation.

To ensure analytical rigor, case materials were systematically coded, and the key evidence was consolidated in Appendix. The following sections utilize this evidence to examine each mechanism's operation and its subsequent security implications.

5.1 Capability Effect: The Direct Empowerment of National Strategic Capacity through Technological Autonomy

The Capability Effect centers on how a firm's autonomous and controllable innovation directly empowers national strategic capacity. In Unitree's case, this mechanism translates micro-level R&D activities into a macro-level foundation for technological sovereignty.

From a political security perspective, the autonomy embedded in firm-level capabilities is intrinsically linked to a state's strategic autonomy. This relationship is constitutive: by internalizing core technological breakthroughs, firms provide the state with "technological exit options"—insulating policy flexibility from external blockades or institutional exclusion. Unitree's full-stack strategy serves as a micro-level anchor for national sovereignty in embodied intelligence. Data indicate that the localization rate of Unitree's joint motors, reducers, and controllers now exceeds 90%. Notably, its H1 humanoid robot has reached a peak torque of 360 Nm, effectively disrupting the long-standing dominance of Japanese and German firms (Unitree, 2023). This vertical integration provides the state with a scalable alternative in critical sectors, fortifying strategic resilience against external restrictions (Jia et al., 2025). Such capability functions as a strategic security asset: it guarantees "availability at critical moments" (Yin et al., 2026)—the ability to sustain critical industrial operations without reliance on external actors—thereby fundamentally reinforcing national strategic autonomy.

Within the economic security dimension, firm-level capability reshapes a state's structural position in global competition. While political security concerns the attainability of autonomy, economic security focuses on its sustainability through industrial competitiveness. Here, the Capability Effect operates through a material logic: optimizing industrial cost structures and value chain distribution. Unitree has upended the global pricing architecture of quadruped robotics by leveraging cost-performance synergies. According to Gaogong Intelligent Industry Research Institute data, Unitree captured 69.75% of the global market in 2024, with 23,700 units sold across 100 countries (GGII, n.d.). This technology-driven dominance acts as a strategic buffer; a state bolstered by such global leaders is inherently more resilient to external economic shocks. By internalizing the most cost-intensive segments—including LiDAR and reducers—Unitree has enabled cost reductions that outpace the decline in end-product prices. This vertical integration further generates systemic spillovers: as a domestic cluster of upstream suppliers emerges around Unitree's ecosystem, the resulting industrial density enhances the supply chain resilience of the entire national economy.

In terms of societal security, the Capability Effect manifests through the concretion of concrete application scenarios. Once a firm's technological threshold is crossed, its capability functions as a proactive security asset. Powered by self-developed 4D LiDAR and motion control algorithms, Unitree robots are deployed in high-risk environments—including power inspection, firefighting, and port automation—where complex variables and human risk are structural constants. For instance, the deployment of Unitree-based platforms at Ningbo Port yielded a 30% efficiency gain while significantly mitigating manual safety hazards. This empirical evidence underscores that a firm's contribution to public security is a verifiable outcome rather than an abstract potential. By embedding their capabilities into critical infrastructure, firms evolve from mere vendors into co-constructors of societal security. This organic transformation translates technological mastery directly into societal resilience, bypassing the need for external institutional mediation.

Within international security, technological breakthroughs contributes to a state's asymmetric leverage. The logic is direct: the presence of a global leader like Unitree shifts the state into a superior structural position within the international order. As other states and organizations draft governance frameworks for embodied intelligence, the technological practices established by Chinese firms have become an unavoidable reference point. This "reference effect" constitutes a form of international influence that transcends traditional institutional constraints and dependency structures. Unitree's market and technical leadership provides the state with the material basis for discursive power, ensuring that national standards are not merely participants in, but architects of, global technological rules.

However, the realization of the Capability Effect is non-linear and carries significant costs. Evidence suggests that Unitree's residual reliance on external chips (e.g., Horizon J5) and simulation software (e.g., MathWorks' Simulink) creates "hidden chokepoint" risks. Such dependencies lead to extreme computational inefficiency, where a single robot's demand can equal the resource allocation of ten servers, severely throttling algorithmic iteration. Consequently, robots like the Unitree Go2 still face critical bottlenecks in foundational industrial software and high-performance computing. This highlights that technological sovereignty is a systemic undertaking; without the simultaneous localization of hardware and software ecosystems, isolated breakthroughs remain vulnerable to broader structures of external dependency.

5.2 Dependency Effect: The Dialectical Unity of Technological Embeddedness and Security Vulnerability

While the Capability Effect underscores the security dividends of autonomy, the Dependency Effect highlights how structural linkages formed during development can paradoxically amplify national risks. In globalized ecosystems, firms act as conduits for risk transmission through supply chain embeddedness, cross-border data flows, and reliance on external infrastructure.

Politically, external dependence in critical sectors evolves into structural constraints on strategic autonomy. Unitree's technological architecture exhibits a "dual structure": while hardware components (motors, reducers, controllers) are largely localized, the foundational "brain"—including high-performance chips and industrial simulation software—remains externally sourced (Integrity Tech Group, 2025). This asymmetric dependence allows external actors to exert systemic pressure through a few critical chokepoints, potentially paralyzing national strategic decision-making in the embodied intelligence domain. This structure challenges the binary view of "autonomous controllability". Technological sovereignty is not a zero-sum condition but a continuum of autonomy (Yang et al., 2025). Autonomy in specific segments is a necessary but insufficient condition for security; as long as bottleneck technologies remain external, strategic sovereignty remains fragile. Furthermore, Unitree's compliance with extraterritorial frameworks (e.g., GDPR, EU AI Act) transcends mere corporate cost—it functions as an institutional constraint on national data sovereignty, coupling domestic technological systems with external governance environments.

Economically, dependency structures dictate supply chain resilience and industrial competitiveness. Unitree exemplifies the tension between these forces: while localizing hardware boosts autonomy, the persistent reliance on external chips creates "substitutive vulnerability." In this non-linear process, the advancement of partial autonomy may concentrate previously dispersed risks into a few critical nodes, generating new forms of systemic risk exposure. Within Global Value Chains, this reflects a hierarchical segmentation: while China holds approximately 38% of the downstream market, it faces acute upstream dependence in foundational materials and components (Li & Shi, 2022). This "downstream strength, upstream weakness" leaves the state vulnerable to cascading shocks. Beyond supply chains, dependence triggers a "path-locking" effect: long-term adaptation to external software ecosystems (e.g., Simulink) creates organizational routines that inhibit indigenous innovation, structurally constraining long-term industrial competitiveness. The computational demand of a single robot, for instance, is estimated to be equivalent to that of approximately ten servers, raising the technological adoption threshold for the industry as a whole. Effective governance requires a shift from compliance-based defense to resilience-oriented mechanisms grounded in dynamic adaptation (Cheng & Chen, 2025). Managing dependency must escalate from a corporate operational issue to a national strategic priority. This necessitates a comprehensive monitoring and early-warning system across the entire technological chain, ensuring that the state can respond to "chokepoint" risks with systemic agility.

In the realm of societal security, the centralization of data resources, coupled with dependencies embedded in governance processes, creates a dual-layered risk exposure. Through its robotic systems, Unitree has established an intensive data-centric architecture; a single G1 robot reportedly generates approximately 2 TB of environmental perception and motion data daily. While this data-control capacity optimizes operational stability, it also implies that any vulnerability along the governance chain can escalate into a systemic public security incident. The March 2025 Go1 device key leakage serves as a critical empirical case: despite the relative autonomy of Unitree’s core algorithms and hardware, security flaws in third-party cloud services facilitated unauthorized access to device control. This incident underscores a pivotal reality in interconnected ecosystems—the "weakest link" in security governance often resides beyond the firm’s direct jurisdictional perimeter (Wang, 2024).

Regarding international security, the Dependency Effect extends into the spheres of institutional and regulatory frameworks. Unitree’s expansion into European and North American markets necessitates rigorous alignment with extraterritorial mandates like the GDPR. Such data-localization requirements have reportedly increased the firm’s IT infrastructure expenditures by 20–30%. These compliance burdens and technical adaptations, dictated by external institutional environments, do more than just increase operational overhead; they objectively constrain the state’s strategic maneuverability within global data governance competition. In effect, while global market integration yields economic dividends, it simultaneously creates conduits through which external institutional power may penetrate and reshape domestic governance structures.

In summary, the Dependency Effect reveals a critical theoretical proposition: technological autonomy does not necessarily translate into security autonomy. The deeper firms become embedded within global technological networks, the more complex the dependency structures they confront. Consequently, firms may simultaneously stabilize and destabilize national security structures. This finding provides an important supplement to traditional security paradigms centered on “autonomy and controllability”.

5.3 Rule Effect: The Institutionalization of Technological Advantage and State power

The Rule Effect denotes the process by which firms institutionalize their technological trajectories into industry norms or international regulations. By engaging in standard-setting and institutional practices, firms bolster the state’s agenda-setting capacity and structural power within the international system. This mechanism serves as a vital bridge, translating micro-level innovation into the architecture of macro-level institutional order.

Politically, a firm's capacity to compete in standard-setting directly shapes the state's discursive authority, agenda-setting capacity, and institutional leverage. In contemporary strategic competition, standards have evolved from technical coordination tools into primary arenas for great-power rivalry. A salient trend is the "over-securitization" of digital standards, particularly in U.S. policy, where technical norms are increasingly framed as frontline instruments to constrain strategic competitors (Xing & Yang, 2026). This discursive construction of technological issues as "existential threats" reflects a political response to the relative shifting of global power dynamics. Against this backdrop, firms like Unitree—possessing substantive technical advantages—function as strategic assets for safeguarding technological sovereignty. When domestic firms propose competitive solutions adopted by international bodies such as the ISO/IEC or ITU, they provide the state with tangible leverage in regulatory competition (Zhang, 2025). International standard-setting is increasingly characterized by a competition among divergent institutional logics. Currently, a tripartite divergence has emerged: the U.S. model emphasizes market-led self-regulation; the EU model prioritizes rights protection and harmonized frameworks; and the Chinese model favors state-guided risk governance. In this context, standards act as carriers of specific governance philosophies (Guest & Wei, 2025). The technological paradigm embodied by Unitree—defined by high performance and cost accessibility—offers a pragmatic reference for China's participation in global robotics governance. This strengthens the state's bargaining power by providing a "proven path" that other actors can adopt. However, the

Rule Effect faces endogenous limitations. First, its sustainability is contingent on continuous technological leadership; once iteration slows, standards risk losing their diffusion potential or becoming targets for external containment. Second, the evaluation of standards is undergoing a "de-technologization" process—technical superiority alone no longer guarantees dominance, as outcomes are increasingly dictated by coalition-building and "softer" forms of institutional power. In public security governance, the Rule Effect is reflected in how firm-led standards reinforce national security infrastructure. In frontier domains like embodied intelligence, technical protocols developed by industry leaders—such as safety testing and risk assessment frameworks—are increasingly integrated into the national public security architecture, as underscored by China's Guiding Opinions on Implementing the Foundational Public Security Standardization Initiative. Unitree's collision-testing procedures and safety redundancy designs provide the state with ready-to-adopt technical specifications. This practice-driven rule provision significantly reduces administrative friction in governing emerging technologies while enhancing the systemic responsiveness and flexibility of the national regulatory framework.

In economic terms, a firm's capacity to shape rules exerts structural influence on national interests by redefining competition norms, market access, and value-chain distribution. In the digital era, control over standard-setting authority increasingly shapes the distribution of gains within global value chains (GVCs). Unitree's trajectory exemplifies the transition from technological advantage to rule-shaping influence. The Mobile Robot Collision Testing Standard led by Unitree has been adopted as a benchmark in the "robot safety certification credit" market. This "monetization of standards"—reminiscent of carbon credit systems—reconfigures the logic of industrial valuation and market competition. This process reflects the "first-mover lock-in effect." Once a technological trajectory is institutionalized, competitors are compelled to adapt, thereby reinforcing the structural advantages of the pioneer. Unitree pioneered this paradigm by substantially modifying open-source algorithms originally developed by Boston Dynamics. The result reduces costs by 40% while maintaining approximately 90% of motion performance, redefining global expectations of "safe, usable, and affordable" robotics. Once this trajectory evolves into a de facto standard, its influence transcends individual commercial interests and develops into a structural advantage for the state in global robotics competition. The struggle over pricing power and Standard-Essential Patent (SEP) licensing further underscores the Rule Effect's implications. Developed economies have historically utilized SEP regimes to lock developing nations into low-value segments, undermining their core competitiveness and supply-chain security. Although the embodied intelligence sector has yet to establish a rigid SEP regime like telecommunications, Unitree's estimated 60–70% global market share has positioned its technological paradigm as a practical reference point in international negotiations. This represents a bottom-up pathway for rule construction. This parallels China's integrated control in rare earths—spanning extraction to standard-setting (Woods, 2025)—with a parallel logic emerging in robotics: firms act as primary drivers, while their standards serve as micro-level carriers of national industrial competitiveness. From a governance perspective, the institutionalization of the Rule Effect involves a converging relationship between technical standards and formal law. Standards are increasingly utilized as agile regulatory instruments that complement rigid legal frameworks. The EU AI Act's "harmonized standards" mechanism illustrates this convergence, where compliance with technical norms serves as evidence of fulfilling mandatory legal requirements. This institutional innovation demonstrates that firm-led standards can evolve into integral components of national governance. For China, the strategic imperative lies in utilizing policy instruments, such as the National New-Generation AI Standards System, to transform firm-level technical expertise into national industrial governance resources. This evolution enables the Rule Effect to transcend corporate practice and evolve into a component of national security strategy. From a societal security perspective, the Rule Effect manifests as a stabilizing force that shapes public expectations regarding technological risk. As robotic systems permeate public spaces, safety transcends mere product performance, becoming a primary determinant of collective societal perception. Unitree's standardized collision-testing procedures and safety redundancy designs provide clear, verifiable boundaries for technological risk. This transition—moving from abstract technological uncertainty to manageable, institutionalized risk—is pivotal. By providing these practice-driven rules, firms significantly reduce administrative friction in frontier technology governance, enhancing the system's overall responsiveness and flexibility.

In the domain of international security, the strategic weight of the Rule Effect is particularly pronounced. When a technological trajectory—defined by specific performance, cost, and application metrics—achieves transnational dominance, its underlying security logic acquires the necessary conditions for international institutionalization.

With an estimated 60-70% global market share, Unitree's technological paradigm has evolved into a de facto reference point for international comparisons and rule negotiations. This status indirectly bolsters the state's discursive authority and bargaining leverage within global governance systems. However, the sustainability of this influence is fragile, contingent upon continuous technological leadership and a relatively open international environment. Should technological iteration stagnate or geopolitical volatility intensify, these standards risk losing their diffusion potential, potentially devolving into instruments used by external actors for technological containment.

5.4 Interactions Among Mechanisms and the Compound Effects of Multidimensional Security

In the Unitree case, the Capability, Dependency, and Rule Effects do not operate as discrete silos; instead, they form a web of reciprocal reinforcement. The Capability Effect serves as both the material substratum and the source of legitimacy for the other two mechanisms. Absent substantive technological mastery, a firm can neither anchor meaningful dependency structures nor exert rule-shaping influence. The Dependency Effect functions as a procedural "stress test" for the Capability Effect, exposing latent vulnerabilities and charting the course for iterative enhancement. Simultaneously, the Rule Effect acts as the institutionalized expression of technological prowess, allowing localized advantages to crystallize into structural power at the industrial and national tiers. Crucially, however, a "rule-heavy" trajectory may trigger institutional ossification, potentially stifling radical innovation and eroding market adaptability.

From a multidimensional security perspective, these mechanisms frequently trigger divergent outcomes across different domains. While the Capability Effect fortifies political sovereignty and bolsters societal resilience through diffusion, its impact on international security remains deeply ambivalent. It enhances a state's bargaining leverage but simultaneously provokes strategic anxiety and preemptive countermeasures from geopolitical rivals, potentially fueling a security dilemma in the technological sphere. Similarly, while the Dependency Effect unveils economic vulnerabilities, the resulting governance imperatives may paradoxically catalyze the construction of resilient institutional arrangements. Collectively, these dynamics indicate that the nexus between firm-embedded capability and national security is not a linear causal chain. It is, instead, a complex adaptive system—dynamic, multidimensional, and fundamentally contingent on the broader geopolitical and socioeconomic context.

6. **Conclusion**

Against the backdrop of profound transformations in the relationship between national technological sovereignty and national security in the age of artificial intelligence, this study addresses the central question of how firms become the micro-foundations of national technological sovereignty. Building upon this inquiry, the article develops a multidimensional analytical model explaining how Firm-Embedded Technological Capability influences national security. Through an in-depth case study and process tracing of Unitree, the study systematically examines the theoretical proposition that firms' technological capabilities generate compound effects across political, economic, social, and international security dimensions through three interconnected mechanisms: the Capability Effect, Dependency Effect, and Rule Effect. The study makes systematic contributions at three levels: theoretical construction, empirical findings, and policy implications.

6.1 Theoretical Contribution: Beyond State-Centric Approaches to Technological Sovereignty

The primary contribution of this research is its theoretical extension and paradigmatic revision of technological sovereignty studies. Whether focusing on the rule-shaping approach represented by the European Union, the technology leadership model represented by the United States, or the autonomy-and-controllability pathway represented by China, existing studies have generally treated the state as a singular and rational technological actor, while comparatively neglecting the agency of firms in technological innovation, capability accumulation, and trajectory selection. Even when firms are considered, they are often narrowly conceptualized as passive implementers of state policy.

By refocusing the analytical lens on the firm-level micro-foundations, this study demonstrates that technological sovereignty is not a static attribute of the state, but a dynamic emergence—continuously generated and diffused through corporate capability structures. Specifically, the Capability Effect illustrates how breakthroughs in core algorithms, hardware, and system integration coalesce into the material bedrock of national strategic autonomy. The Dependency Effect unmasks how the asymmetric linkages inherent in global networks can metastasize into national security risks. Simultaneously, the Rule Effect reveals firms' capacity to institutionalize their technological trajectories into industry norms, thereby bolstering the state's rule-based power and structural leverage within the international system.

This micro–macro framework transcends the state-centricity that has long constrained technological sovereignty discourse, addressing the conspicuous underrepresentation of corporate agency in international political economy and security studies. We contend that in the AI era, firms are no longer mere market competitors; they have become constitutive forces within the national security architecture. This shift necessitates a fundamental rethinking of the interplay between states, markets, security, and the logic of innovation.

6.2 Empirical Findings: The Multidimensional Security Effects of Firm-Embedded Technological Capability

Empirically, this research validates and recalibrates the proposed framework through a rigorous analysis of Unitree as a critical case. The findings culminate in three core propositions that redefine our understanding of firm-level security impacts.

First, the impact of firms' technological capabilities on national security is both non-linear and context-dependent. The Capability Effect is not an automatic byproduct of innovation; its security dividends hinge on the structural integrity and internal coherence of the technological ecosystem. Unitree's trajectory reveals that localized breakthroughs—if divorced from an autonomous substrate of foundational software and hardware—remain shackled by "hidden bottlenecks" that dilute their strategic utility. This finding suggests that the micro-foundations of technological sovereignty are highly systemic in nature, such that external dependence at any critical node may become a structural vulnerability within the broader security architecture.

Second, the Dependency Effect operates through a dialectical duality in which resilience and vulnerability are mutually constituted. Although firms may strengthen system resilience through data centralization and ecosystem integration, these processes simultaneously generate new risks in data governance and computational infrastructure. Moreover, while integration into international markets creates economic gains, it can also open channels through which external institutional power penetrates domestic governance structures, constraining the state's strategic flexibility in international security affairs. This finding challenges the assumption that technological autonomy necessarily produces security autonomy.

Third, the Rule Effect functions as the primary mechanism through which corporate technological superiority is transformed into national institutional power. Once firms' technological trajectories achieve broad market adoption in performance, cost efficiency, and applicability, the technological logics and security norms embedded within them acquire the basis for institutionalization. Firm-led standard-setting not only reshapes industrial competition, but also provides states with institutional leverage in international technology governance. Yet the durability of such rule-shaping influence depends on the continued maintenance of technological leadership and on an international institutional environment that remains open enough to sustain it. Together, these factors define the endogenous limits of the Rule Effect.

6.3 Policy Implications: Firm-Embedded Technological Capability as a Strategic Lever for Governance

The findings offer critical signposts for contemporary policy, particularly as China navigates the dual pressures of accelerated technological catch-up and intensifying strategic rivalry. The analysis yields strategic imperatives at three distinct levels of governance.

First, firms' technological development should be embedded within the national security governance framework rather than treated merely as a subset of industrial or science and technology policy. Alongside support for the autonomous development of critical technologies, the state should establish systematic assessment mechanisms targeting firms' technological capability structures, critical dependency nodes, and participation in rule-making processes. Security governance must therefore move beyond traditional concerns with products, projects, and institutions to include firms' technological trajectories, supply-chain configurations, and data governance practices.

Second, the governance of dependency structures and data should become a central component of technological sovereignty strategies. The study shows that even when substantial localization of core hardware has been achieved, firms may remain externally dependent on computing infrastructure, industrial software, and data governance systems, all of which can generate systemic security risks. Accordingly, alongside breakthroughs in "hard technologies" such as semiconductors and foundational software, policymakers should strengthen governance over "soft" dependency structures, including open-source ecosystems, cloud services, and cross-border data flows, thereby building a resilience-oriented framework across the technological value chain.

Third, states should encourage technologically advanced firms to participate in international standard-setting and rule negotiations so that firm-level technological leadership can be converted into national institutional influence. Because the Rule Effect depends heavily on first-mover advantages and market acceptance, states should support firms through institutional backing, strategic resource allocation, and international cooperation networks, facilitating the incorporation of firms' technological trajectories into international normative systems. At the same time, policymakers should remain alert to the lock-in effects that institutionalized regulation may impose on innovation and seek a balance between institutionalization and flexibility. More broadly, this study suggests that reliance on macro-level technology strategies or industrial policies alone is increasingly insufficient to address the security challenges of technological competition in the AI era. The identification, assessment, and strategic guidance of key firms' technological capability structures—and their alignment with national security objectives—are becoming a new frontier of state governance capacity.

6.4 Research Limitations and Future Directions

The conclusions of this study should be understood in light of several limitations, which also suggest directions for future research.

First, the external generalizability of the case remains limited. This study adopts a single-case design and process-tracing methodology, both of which are effective for mechanism identification and causal inference. However, as a leading firm in embodied intelligence, Unitree exhibits distinctive developmental trajectories, technological choices, and institutional conditions. Whether the analytical framework proposed here can be extended to other sectors—such as semiconductors, quantum computing, or biotechnology—or to firms in different national contexts requires further comparative research.

Second, the quantitative validation of mechanism intensity remains underdeveloped. This study relies primarily on qualitative evidence to demonstrate the existence and operation of the proposed mechanisms. The relative strength, threshold conditions, and interaction effects of the Capability Effect, Dependency Effect, and Rule Effect across different security dimensions have not yet been systematically measured. Future research may construct indicator systems and employ large-scale datasets or mixed-method approaches to test and refine the theoretical propositions advanced here.

Third, the moderating role of institutional environments requires further theoretical elaboration. The case analysis suggests that industrial policy, legal regulation, open-source ecosystems, and international institutional environments significantly shape both the direction and magnitude of firms' technological capabilities' security effects. Yet, due to constraints of scope and methodology, this study does not fully examine the mechanisms through which these institutional factors operate. Future research may investigate how the relative importance of the three mechanisms varies across institutional contexts and how states can design institutional arrangements that maximize the positive security spillovers generated by firms' technological capabilities.

Fourth, the rapid evolution of technology gives the study's conclusions a transitional character. Artificial intelligence and embodied intelligence technologies continue to evolve rapidly, while firms' technological capability structures, dependency configurations, and rule-shaping influence remain in flux. As a result, the conclusions presented here primarily reflect the current techno-institutional configuration. Future studies may adopt longitudinal designs to trace how the three mechanisms evolve across different stages of firm development, thereby constructing more temporally sensitive theoretical models.

In sum, this study seeks to build a theoretical bridge between technological sovereignty research and national security theory by taking firms as the analytical point of departure. The robustness of this bridge—and its capacity to support broader theoretical development and empirical validation—depends on continued scholarly inquiry. Nevertheless, the study advances a fundamental proposition: in the age of artificial intelligence, any attempt to understand the formation of national technological sovereignty must engage seriously with firms' micro-foundations. Firms are no longer merely carriers of national technological capability; they are increasingly the key arenas in which technological sovereignty is produced, sustained, and contested.

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Appendix

Table. Representative Events Illustrating the National Security Impacts of Unitree's Firm-Embedded Technological Capability

Core Dimension	Mechanism	Security Sub-dimension	Potential Risks	Supporting Evidence
Technological Innovation Capability	Capability Effect	Economic Security (Supply Chain Resilience)	Commercialization Speed vs. Military-Grade Reliability Requirements	Unitree reports that approximately 80% of its motors and reducers are self-developed; "Made in China 2025" emphasizes indigenous innovation;the "Guiding Opinions on Accelerating the Transformation and Upgrading of Traditional Manufacturing Industries" advocate industrial upgrading through technological innovation.
	Capability Effect	Political Security (Technological Sovereignty)	International Open-Source Collaboration vs. Core Technology Protection	Unitree promotes open-source educational initiatives; the "14th Five-Year Plan" encourages the development of open-source communities; the "Implementation Plan for the 'Robot+' Application Initiative" promotes the practical application of robotics technologies.
	Rule Effect	Political Security (National Narrative)	Commercial Entertainment Orientation vs. Serious Technological Image	Unitree's H1 and Go2 robots appeared at the Spring Festival Gala; the Hangzhou municipal government officially identified Unitree as a benchmark enterprise for policy support; the "Guiding Opinions on Accelerating Scenario Innovation to Promote High-Quality Economic Development through Advanced Artificial Intelligence Applications" encourage AI-driven innovation.
Data Control Capability	Capability Effect	Societal Security (Public Service Resilience)	Boundaries of Data Collection vs. the Generalization Requirements of Embodied Intelligence	The Go2 and H1 are positioned as new forms of embodied intelligence; Unitree robots have been deployed in power inspection and firefighting reconnaissance; the "Three-Year Action Plan for Data Elements X" promotes the strategic utilization of data resources.
	Rule Effect	Societal Security (Data Security and Governance)	Commercial Data Accumulation vs. State Data Security Regulation	Unitree has engaged in cooperation with Google and NVIDIA; the "Interim Measures for the Administration of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services" establish regulatory requirements for generative AI; the "Ethical Norms for the New Generation of Artificial Intelligence" provide governance principles for AI development.
	Dependency Effect	International Security (Risks of Military Applications)	Commercial Export Expansion vs. Sensitive Technology Diffusion	A Kharon report alleged links between Unitree and the PLA; the United States initiated a Section 232 investigation; the "Guidelines for the Innovative Development of Humanoid Robots" emphasize the establishment of secure and reliable industrial supply chains.
Standard-Setting Capability	Rule Effect	International Security (International Discursive Power)	Formation of De Facto Standards vs. Exclusion from International Standard-	Unitree reportedly holds a 60–70% share of the global quadruped robotics market; the United Nations adopted resolutions on AI governance; the "Guidelines for Building a Comprehensive Standardization System for the National Artificial Intelligence Industry" promote AI standardization strategies.

			Setting Organizations	
	Rule Effect	Economic Security (Industrial Competitiveness)	Low-Price Strategy vs. Long-Term Profitability and R&D Investment	Wang Xingxing suggested that “robot taxes” may become feasible in the future; Unitree has initiated IPO listing guidance procedures.
	Dependency Effect	International Security (Asymmetric Dependence)	International Market Penetration vs. Risks of International Sanctions	Unitree products have been exported to dozens of countries worldwide; international media outlets have highlighted their potential military applications; “Made in China 2025” emphasizes global industrial expansion strategies.

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Geoeconomics for the Sake of Geopolitics: U.S. Trade Policy Towards China Since 2017

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Abstract
Geoeconomics involves using economic power for geopolitical purposes, treating the "logic of conflict in the language of commerce" to achieve security or strategic objectives. It has become a dominant "war by other means" for the U.S. to achieve geopolitical goals since 2017. Therefore, this article aims to examine the reality of U.S. trade policy towards China since President Trump's first term from the perspective of geoeconomics. It reviews the resurgence of the geoeconomic narrative, analyzes how geoeconomic instruments manifest in U.S. trade policies towards China, and conceptualizes U.S. geoeconomic strategy through a three-layered concentric circle framework. It argues that weaponizing interdependence, dismantling multilateral trade mechanisms like the WTO, and doubling down on a "small yard, high fence: strategy will fragment global supply chains, erode economic efficiency, and destabilize the international economic order. Ultimately, this approach will boomerang on its initiator, severely compromising the economic well-being of the American public.

Keywords: Geoeconomics, Geopolitics, Trade Policy, Weaponized Interdependence, Tariff

1. Introduction

Since 2017, the United States' trade policy towards China has structurally shifted from the eras of engagement and enlargement to pure geoeconomics, weaponizing tariffs, investment, export controls and technology vectors to achieve geopolitical goals. Rather than treating commerce and security as separate domains, from Trump first administration on, the U.S. has securitized trade policies subordinating economic and trade relations to zero-sum strategic imperatives to blunt China's rise. Weaponizing geoeconomic tools is not new. The 1971 Nixon Shock was a seminal geoeconomic event where the U.S. unilaterally ended the dollar's convertibility to gold, dismantling the Bretton Woods system to fix trade imbalances and prevent inflation. By imposing a 10% import surcharge and abandoning gold, Nixon used economic tools to force allies into currency revaluation to meet domestic policy needs of creating more and better jobs and stopping the rise in the cost of living. (Office of the Historian) The Plaza Accord of September 22, 1985, is another example, where the United States used its political and economic influence to orchestrate a coordinated devaluation of the U.S. dollar against the Japanese yen and German deutschmark aiming to correct massive trade imbalances on the U.S. side.(Frankel, 2015) The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy, the 2022 National Defense Strategy and the "New Washington Consensus" have marked the return of geoeconomics and the U.S. has entered a posture not of leading global economic and trade order, but of disrupting it in defense of its geopolitical goals. This article reviews the return of geoeconomic narratives, traces how the U.S. has weaponized its trade policies towards China and employs a three-layered concentric circle diagram to examine the reality of U.S. trade policy towards China.

2. The Return of Geoeconomics

As an emerging field, geoeconomics encompasses a significant number of contested visions, which result from the fact that the concept and research field are still under construction. (Bruna Coelho Jaeger and Pedro Vinicius Pereira Brites, 2025; Cathrin Mohr and Christoph Trebesch, 2025) Defining geoeconomics is not easy because the field is crowded with contending authorities from different research backgrounds like international relations, international economics and geographical economics. (Sparke, 2024) In the meanwhile, scholars from different theoretical standpoints also interpret it from different perspectives.

Realists in international relations view geoeconomics as a form of state-centric rivalry where states leverage economic power rather than military force to maximize security and influence, often through coercive measures. Liberals in international relations focus on the role of economic interdependence. While liberal tradition often emphasizes cooperation, geoeconomic realism highlights how this interdependence can be used as a tool for competition and coercion. Network theory emphasizes how the architecture of global economic networks allows central actors to use “chokepoint” effects to sanction or compel behavior. Critical geographers challenge the separation of geopolitics and geoeconomics, analyzing how knowledge-intensive capitalism and space affect the global economy. (Scholvin and Wigell, 2018; Moisio, 2019; Csurgai, 2017; Sparke, 2024)

Notwithstanding the differences, the consensus about geoeconomics is that it is the use of economic instruments, such as trade policy, investment, sanctions, and technology transfers, by states to promote national interests, project power, and achieve geopolitical goals. It represents the intersection of economics and geopolitics, described as “the logic of war in the grammar of commerce” by Edward Luttwak in the name of Clausewitz. He assessed the United States’ position when Japan constituted its economic and trade threat at the global level. He also introduced the logic of military competition into the sphere of international trade and identified the advent of geoeconomics as a new perspective for understanding international disputes in the post-cold war era. (Luttwak, 1990, p19-20)

Attempting to build a persuasive case for why the United States should make much more vigorous use of its economic and financial muscle to advance its geopolitical interests, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Senior Fellows Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris argued in their book, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft,* “the American foreign policy establishment has long since forgotten that the U.S. was once an avid and successful practitioner of geoeconomics.” “Despite having the most powerful economy on earth, the United States too often reaches for the gun instead of the purse.” (2016, p225; p1) In the book, they examined thoroughly the geoeconomic instruments available to states, including trade policy, investment policy, economic sanctions, cyber, foreign aid, monetary policy, and energy and commodity policies. They also discussed the interrelations among them—noting where synergies can be found and where tensions may lie. They contended that the United States must strategically integrate economic and financial instruments into its foreign policy or risk losing ground as a world power.

Actually, *War by Other Means* is just one example of a “larger geoeconomic narrative” being created among the prevailing neoliberal economic views of market integration and free trade despite the fact that the U.S. is still collecting dividends. For example, in *No Trade Is Free*, Robert Lighthizer demonstrates how contemporary trade structures, exemplified by the World Trade Organization (WTO), have actively hampered the ability of the United States to create economic strategies that are in sync with its own economic interests. (2023) The return to geoeconomic narratives also include the reviving of mercantilist tradition and the Trump corollary to Monroe Doctrine.

3. Geoeconomics for the Sake of Geopolitics

Obviously, for the U.S., geoeconomics is the continuation of geopolitics by other means and China is the main target of its geoeconomic strategies. US trade policy towards China has evolved into a “geoeconomic” strategy—

using economic tools to achieve national security goals—characterized by tariffs, export controls, and investment restrictions. This shift involves initially decoupling, then de-risking, targeting sectors like AI, semiconductors, and green technology. The geoeconomic means are represented by the protective, securitization of trade as well as unilateral and transaction-based China trade policies of the Trump first and second administration also Biden administration in between, which could be listed as follows:

1) Since 2016, Washington has disengaged from the WTO's appellate body, the organization's dispute settlement mechanism, and blocked the appointment of new members since 2019. Currently, the Appellate Body is unable to review appeals given its ongoing vacancies. The term of the last sitting Appellate Body member expired on 30 November 2020. The U.S. continues to use its veto power to block the appointment of new judges. As of October 2025, the U.S. had blocked the selection process for the 91st time. (Reuters, 2025) In early 2025, the Trump administration suspended U.S. financial contributions to the WTO, citing dissatisfaction with the pace of reform and the perceived "anti-American bias" of the organization (Le Poidevin, 2026). Therefore, it explains that the trade policies the Trump administration and Biden administration were/are pursuing constitutes a violation to fundamental commitments in the WTO Agreement, as well as its spirit. The US committed to honor thousands of binding tariffs, negotiated with the rest of the WTO membership, as part of its acceptance of the WTO Agreement. The US is disregarding these obligations by violating the core prohibition to unilaterally increase duties that have been capped (Art. II GATT). Also, the U.S. violated/is violating the Most-Favored Nation (MFN) non-discrimination clause (Art. I GATT) by not being applied to all WTO members. (Horn and Mavroidis, 2025)
2) US President Donald Trump's first term initiated to retreat from multilateral free trade and use trade policies as geoeconomic weapons to reset the trade balance of the US with the rest of the world and especially China. Employing Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, the Trump administration began by imposing tariffs of 25 percent on products covering roughly $34 billion of US imports from China in July 2018 (List 1) and on $16 billion of imports in August (List 2). The trade war continued with Trump imposing 10 percent tariffs on an additional $200 billion of imports in September 2018 (List 3), increasing the rate of those duties to 25 percent in June 2019. In September 2019, Trump hit another $102 billion of imports (List 4A) with 15 percent tariffs, subsequently reducing them to 7.5 percent upon implementation of the US-China Phase One agreement in February 2020. (Bown, 2020)

   These tariffs are obviously inconsistent with GATT Article I (most-favored nation); Article II (tariff bindings); Article XI (when turned into quotas); and Article XIX and the WTO Safeguards Agreement. A WTO Panel ruled that the section 301 tariffs levied on imports from China violated GATT Articles I and II." Article 16.4 of the WTO Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) provides that the report of a WTO dispute settlement panel may not be considered by the DSB "until after completion of the appeal." The U.S. appealed the adverse ruling in the China Tariffs case, effectively blocking any DSB action. Because the Appellate Body has not been allowed to function since December 2019, because of the U.S. boycott, the appeal in the China Tariffs case cannot be heard. Thus, the ruling is in this case is non-binding. (Schoenbaum, 2023, p108-109)
3) The expansion of the use of Sections 301of the Trade Act of 1974 and 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 as well as the extensive use of IEEPA (emergency national security threats) authorities; They have thus become geoeconomic weapons.

   During the Trump first administration, the USTR made unprecedented use of the legal authority in the United States known as section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974. From 2001 to 2017, only four section 301 investigations were undertaken, all in full compliance with WTO norms. President Trump's USTR, however violated WTO rules, launched six section 301 investigations (including against China)

   While previous presidents invoked Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 rarely and selectively, the first Trump administration set an important precedent by invoking Section 232 to impose 25 percent tariffs on steel and 10 percent on aluminum imports.
4) During the first Trump administration, U.S. export controls on China underwent a significant transformation, shifting from a focus on traditional, military-specific items to a broader, "whole-of-government" approach aimed at curbing China's technological advancement in key areas like artificial intelligence and semiconductors. (Sutter, 2025)

   This period marked a transition towards using export controls as a geoeconomic tool in a broader technology war rather than just for security compliance. (Barkin 2020) Trump called it "decoupling." But PIIE economist

Chad Bown believed that "Trump has it wrong. His decoupling policy here could mean losses of billions of dollars of American sales not only to China but to other countries as well. And the unilateral nature of his policy could open new areas of conflict with the very same allies that are essential to mitigating the national security threat." (Bown, 2020)

In 2019, the Department of Commerce added Huawei and its affiliates to the Entity List, banning U.S. firms from selling components or software to the company.

The administration broke the tradition of the modern use of the FDPR in 2020 to target Huawei globally. The Foreign Direct Product Rule (FDPR) is a U.S. export control regulation that extends American legal jurisdiction to foreign-made items produced outside the U.S. This rule weaponized FDPR and imposed long armed control on items made entirely outside the U.S. if they were produced using certain U.S. technology or software.

The administration added SMIC (Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation) to the Entity List in 2020 to restrict its access to U.S. semiconductor manufacturing equipment.

The Export Control Reform Act of 2018 (ECRA) was signed into law, providing the executive branch with expanded permanent authority to control "emerging and foundational technologies" critical to national security. (Gertz and Krueger, 2025;)

5) Biden had ignored the pleas of industry groups to end the China tariffs. President Joe Biden had not only left Trump's China tariffs mostly in place, but also more targeted and focused on blunting China's development in high-technology sectors, even if the first Trump administration's export controls on semiconductors and equipment hurt the US technology sector and its relations with allies. The Biden administration combined the CHIPS and Science Act, passed in August 2022, with stringent export controls on China. In the meanwhile, the CHIPS act subsidizes U.S. domestic semiconductor manufacturing and encourages allies' investment in these sectors.

   On October 7, 2022, the U.S. Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry Security (BIS) released new export control regulations that intensify and complicate U.S. and non-U.S. companies' international trade control challenges with respect to China. The New Regulations, among other things, imposed restrictions on advanced computing integrated circuits (ICs), computer commodities that contain such ICs and certain semiconductor manufacturing items, and expanded controls on transactions involving items for supercomputer and semiconductor manufacturing end uses.

   On October 17, 2023, the U.S. Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry Security (BIS) issued revised export control regulations intended to impede China's efforts to obtain and produce advanced semiconductors.

   On May 14, 2024, President Biden directed U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai to impose a set of staged tariff increases on about $18 billion worth of imports from China in an array of strategic sectors: steel and aluminum, semiconductors, electric vehicles (EVs), batteries, critical minerals, solar cells, ship-to-shore cranes, and medical products. (USTR trade release)

6) In his second term, President Trump declared a national emergency and repeatedly imposed tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) at levels not seen since the 1930s. It was invoked as a geoeconomic statecraft to manage trade relationship, revitalize U.S. manufacturing and generate revenue. Within hours of the Supreme Court's decision to remove IEEPA as an open-ended authority for adjusting tariffs, the president announced a two-stage plan to maintain the tariff regime under different statutory authorities: invoking Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to impose temporary tariffs of up to 15% for 150 days, while launching a series of investigations under Section 301 of the same statute that could support more sustained tariff actions. The 301 investigations launched against 16 countries including China, the European Union, Japan, Mexico, India, Switzerland, Norway, and others.

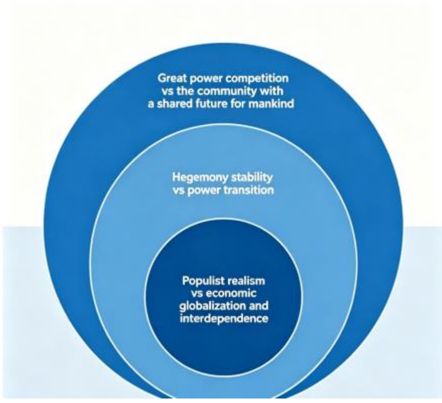
   Moreover, the second Trump administration has intensified and expanded export controls on China, transforming them into a flexible, often revenue-generating tool and economic negotiation weapon rather than just a narrow national security measure. (Gertz and Krueger, 2025)

   The administration has targeted semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and related manufacturing equipment, following on from, and expanding upon Biden-era rules.

   The U.S. dramatically expanded the number of firms subject to export controls, targeting subsidiaries and affiliates of already blacklisted companies to close loopholes.

4. A Geoeconomic Interpretation

Evidently, the Trump and Biden administrations are the classic geoeconomic cases of how to weaponize trade to achieve geopolitical ends. On the basis of the above review and analysis, this research builds up an analytical framework from the interdisciplinary perspectives of geostrategy, geo-economic power theory, power transition theory and hegemonic stability theory to interpret American geostrategic strategies against China and its impact on global economy order.



Inspired by the ecological system approach developed by psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner to explain human development through nested environmental layers, this research uses a three-layered concentric circle diagram to examine the reality of U.S. trade policy towards China from the perspective of geoeconomics. (Özdoğru, A., 2011) From the mesosystem, to exosystem and macrosystem, this diagram analyzes how nested trade and economic environmental layers interact and influence each other.

The diagram maps how the U.S. has reframed its trade policy towards China over the past decade and how it is actually counterproductive against the backgrounds of reversing the fruits of more than three decades of economic globalization, the rise of China and also the middle powers, as well as China's alternative means to frame greater power competition, the community with a shared future for mankind.

4.1. Populist realism vs economic globalization and interdependence

Populist realism, often described as a blend of "America First" nationalism and transactional pragmatism, became a defining framework of the Trump presidency and has re-emerged as a core component of his subsequent policy moves. It represents a shift from traditional ideological, value-based foreign policy toward a focus on immediate national interests and domestic political signaling.

President Trump's China trade policy narratives are crafted for American domestic consumption, particularly his political base. Narratives like "America First," "The Chinese will eat your dinner," and characterizations of China as "economic predator" resonated with MAGA voters who felt that previous administrations had prioritized international relationships over American interests. The rhetoric also "tapped into an "us vs. them" populist narrative that blamed global elites and foreign competitors for the hardships faced by American workers. "The language was stark, with China portrayed not as a trade partner but as a threat to American sovereignty." (Skonieczny and Sherel, 2024; Homolar and Ruiz, 2025)

During Biden presidency, Trump first term trade war with China not only persisted but upgraded and more targeted. His National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and USTR Katherine Tai framed US-China relations in terms of protecting American industries and workers from China's expansionist ambitions. (USTR news release, 2022) In her article published in *International Affairs*, Amy Skonieczny of San Francisco State University "identified a narrative coherence between Trump's nationalist–populist discourse and the trade rhetoric of the Biden administration, revealing a legacy of narrative expectation that constrains policy choices." (2024)

Therefore, since 2017, American trade policies towards China have prioritized American manufacturing and jobs through aggressive, unilateral actions, such as tariffs and strict export controls rather than relying on multilateral organizations like the WTO.

When bilateral trade relationship is framed in a populist lens, securitization of trade has become the most likely policy choice. Thus, international trade is framed not as a mutually beneficial win-win situation, but as a zero-sum game where China has exploited globalist elites to the detriment of American workers. By 2026, U.S. trade policy towards China has matured into a bipartisan position, shifting toward protectionism and economic decoupling or derisking which marks the end of the liberal, free-trade era.

However, the global economy has irreversibly entered the stage of interdependence and integration. Weaponizing trade policies and adopting "America First" trade agenda represents a fundamental shift from traditional multilateralism toward a system of unilateral action and reciprocity-based bilateralism. The trade agenda aims to reduce trade deficits and bolster national security, but it has profoundly reshaped global economic interdependence by introducing new costs and uncertainties into global supply chains.

The policy has triggered global supply chain fragmentation. And it does not meet domestic policy goals either. The U.S. trade deficit for goods hit a record in 2025 and reached $901.5 billion despite Trump's claim his signature tariffs would reduce it. As for Trump's reindustrialization goals, the U.S. manufacturing sector has lost around 72,000 jobs since Trump announced his so-called Liberation Day tariffs last April. (CFR Daily News Brief, 2026; BEA news release, 2026)

The trade deficit with China was overtaken by the deficit with the European Union for the first time on record in 2025. U.S. deficits with Vietnam and Mexico reached all-time highs as firms rerouted supply chains to bypass U.S. tariffs. (CFR Daily News Brief 2026; BEA news release, 2026)

Besides, institutional double standards generated by whimsical tariff policies and export controls have also caused problems of credibility gap. China and other nations around the world increasingly view these unilateral measures as a way for the U.S. to protect their interests while preaching liberal principles like free trade and human rights to others.

This has also led to hedging fatigue, where other nations must navigate complex bilateral deals without the stability of a global arbiter like the World Trade Organization.

Alternative trade blocs are developing. In response to U.S. protectionism, other major economies are forming alternative trade coalitions that explicitly exclude the United States. For example, The European Union has proposed linking with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership to create an alternative economic powerhouse. The BRICS bloc has expanded to include new members like Indonesia and Vietnam, dabbing parallel financial systems to reduce dollar dependence.

4.2. Hegemony stability vs power transition

The tension between hegemonic stability theory (HST) and power transition theory (PTT) explains why U.S. trade policy towards China has shifted to become geoeconomic weapons. Both theories form the backbone to discuss international order.

Power transition theory (PTT) was proposed by A.F.K. Organski in his 1958 book *World Politics*. PTT holds that a nation that achieves hegemony will ultimately be challenged by a rising nation dissatisfied with the status quo.

Although the ideas originated with Charles Kindleberger's research on the Great Depression, Robert Keohane coined the term Hegemonic Stability Theory in 1980. He synthesized and formalized the realist argument that a stable, open international economic order requires a single dominant power to establish and enforce the rules. HST argues that the international system, including treaties and trade, enjoys more stability when a single nation-state is the dominant player. From a neoliberal perspective, Robert Keohane observed in his 1984 book, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, that "International regimes are easier to maintain than to create... Once a regime is established, the costs of its maintenance are likely to be lower than the costs of its creation." (p100)

In view of this, PTT and HST reveals why in his first term, Trump launched trade war against China and in his Second term why his administration has escalated tariff and export control policies. These policies are also clear manifest of weaponizing trade policies for geopolitical ends. Trade measures like the CHIPS and Science Act are forms of geoeconomic tools. The goal is to slow down China's growth in strategic sectors such as AI, quantum computing, semiconductors. Decoupling or de-risking represents the strategy of prioritizing security over profit to maintain a structural lead in the hierarchy of power.

From PTT standpoint, A.F.K. Organski once said "the greatest danger to peace and stability lies not in a massive gap between powers, but in the period when a dissatisfied challenger approaches the strength of the dominant state." (1958, p326) In this vein, it seems that "if history repeats itself, PTT and HST would expect that China is likely to be a powerful and dissatisfied revisionist power. (Younn Shwe Sin Htay, 2021, p4) From a pessimistic and realist take on HST, Robert Gilpin argued, in *War and Change in World Politics* (1981), that "as the relative power of a hegemon declines, the incentives for a rising challenger to change the system increase, leading to systemic instability and potential conflict." (p187) He also contended that "The costs of maintaining the status quo tend to rise faster than the capacity of the hegemon to support it." (p. 156)

However, reality of the U.S. trade policies towards China unfolds a quite different scenario. As a rising power, China is acting as a **system stabilizer**, while the U.S. is challenging the status quo, withdrawing from multilateral organizations and almost starving WTO to death. Trump administration's America First rhetoric and conviction that the liberal order's rules and institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, have militated against US interests proves that the United States are not satisfied with the Status quo. US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, also asserted at his Senate confirmation hearing that "it is an order that has perished." It is obvious that the United States are challenging and undermining the current multilateral system rather than a rising China. The declining hegemon believes the current world order does not serve its own economic and national security interests so it deconstructs the system to create a new order which governments from Trump to Biden believe will eliminate all the ills of their domestic systemic problems like mounting national debt, political and culture polarization, the conflicts between social elites and MAGA Americans.

During President Trump's second term (2025–2026), the United States enacted an unprecedented scale of disengagement from multilateral organizations. On January 7, 2026, President Trump signed a Presidential Memorandum directing the withdrawal of the U.S. from 66 international organizations, conventions, and treaties, labeling them "anti-American, useless, or wasteful". (White House Fact Sheet) While the U.S. has accelerated its withdrawal from global institutions, China has acted as the primary defender of the multilateral system and advocated for "staying true to multilateralism". (Wang Yi, 2025) This involves both fortifying existing UN-centered frameworks and helping to fill the vacuum left by the U.S. Contrary to the expected scenarios of HST and PTT, China is attempting to step into the role of a system stabilizer by providing the public goods that the U.S. is no longer willing to provide instead of challenging the current system. China supports a "member-driven" reform work plan for the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14), advocating for "agile decision-making" and flexible plurilateral initiatives. As the rotating president of APEC 2026, China is pushing for the "Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific," acting as a stabilizing force amid global trade fragmentation. (WTO, 2026)

4.3. Great power competition vs the community with a shared future for mankind

Great Power Competition (GPC) is defined as a structural geostrategic framework where the world's most capable states intensively vie for relative status, influence, and the power to shape global rules. In late 2017 when the United States published its National Security Strategy and declared a formal end to the 25-year era of United

States-led globalization and active American democratization initiatives, it acknowledged the world that great power competition began. (Campbell and Sullivan, 2019; Lynch, 2020; Lynch, 2024)

Driven primarily by GPC, the United States is redefining national security and conceptualizing it as threats to a fusion of interrelated spheres of national strength including economic and technological power. This is exemplified in a dramatic expansion in U.S. investment and trade measures based upon the retention of superiority in an array of power spheres and denying China access to critical technologies.

Consequently, great power competition has ushered in the return of geoeconomics, where the US trade policy towards China is defined by strategic rivalry, economic decoupling/derisking, and technology controls. American trade policy aims to secure critical supply chains and protect technological superiority through export control, industrial policy and investment restrictions. More importantly, it wants to delay, blunt or contain China's development.

Thus, from the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy, the 2022 National Defense Strategy and the "New Washington Consensus"[i], trade policies are increasingly weaponized to secure American technological, military, and economic superiority over China.

While academia and politician in the United States expressed disappointment that economic integration didn't change China according to Americans' imagination and the development tracks that they prescribed for China, the accession to WTO and China's phenomenal economic development has integrated China into the world economy, which the United States also weaponized. Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman explained the rise of weaponized interdependence as the ability of powerful actors, namely the United States, to use their control of crucial nodes and chokepoints in a globalized economy to coerce and weaken their rivals.

"For much of this century, the United States has had an unrivaled ability to exploit weaponized interdependence, due to its dominance of the international financial system and much of the infrastructure that underpins the internet." Consider the Science and Chips Act and American BIS' continuous entity list[ii]. The U.S. has leveraged geoeconomics tools that underpinned the semiconductor export controls to contain or blunt China's development and long armed its trade partners and allies to take action as well. (Farrell and Newman, 2019, 2025)

In the tariff war launched by President Trump in the past year, however, China has unfolded powerful rare earth export controls of its own and demonstrated that weaponized interdependence can be a boomerang on the initiator. In addition, the boomerang effect also means that China will be motivated to develop alternative innovation both in terms of technology and system. Weaponized interdependence can also lead to route avoidance of middle powers, and long-term erosion of the initiator's own power.

In contrast, a community with shared future for mankind envisions a new type of international relations characterized by shared prosperity, sustainability, and collaboration, effectively promoting a shift away from traditional power politics towards creating a better future for all.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the primary practical platform for implementing the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. It acts as a concrete roadmap for promoting global development, prosperity, and shared governance. It injects renewed vigor into multilateralism when it is facing great challenges. It aims to build a new model of economic and cultural cooperation that transcends traditional "zero-sum" geopolitical thinking. Beyond expanding trade relations, the BRI also promotes people-to-people exchanges, infrastructure improvement, and green development. (Xinhua, 2024)

In just over a decade, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become one of the world's largest and most comprehensive international cooperation platforms. It has revitalized ancient trade routes with new energy, introducing fresh opportunities and vitality to global trade and economic collaboration. "BRI projects have improved infrastructure development and connectivity, created tens of thousands of jobs," said Thong Mengdavid, a lecturer at the Institute for International Studies and Public Policy of the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

"Through its focus on strategic alignment and complementary strengths, the BRI promotes a shared vision of peaceful development, win-win cooperation and mutual prosperity," the Cambodian scholar pointed out. (Xinhua, 2026)The following are but a few examples of the numerous benefits and opportunities the BRI has delivered to its trading partners.

Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Judith Suminwa Tuluka has praised infrastructure cooperation between the DRC and China, saying it has continued to drive the African country's economic and social development by improving domestic transportation and strengthening regional connectivity. (Xinhua, 2026, DR Congo PM)

Ecological rehabilitation is also a major focus of BRI. SZC, jointly formed by China's Zijin Mining Group Co., Ltd. and the Serbian government in 2018, has pushed for the copper mines' green transition by upgrading the facilities, strengthening technical management, and introducing green mining concepts and rehabilitation technologies. By adhering to the sustainable concept of "mining with environmental care" over the past eight years, the Chinese enterprise has effectively improved the environmental quality of the Bor mining area. Sasa Maksimovski, head of SZC's ecology department, told Xinhua that over the past seven years, the company has completed about 4.3 million square meters of landscaping and planted around 1.3 million saplings. "You can see these projects with your own eyes on site; it is already a sea of green," he said. (Xinhua, 2026, China's green transition)

The Luban Workshop, a project named after an ancient Chinese master craftsman to provide vocational skills training for local people, has been established in 30 countries, training thousands of skilled professionals. Since the first Luban Workshop was launched in Thailand in 2016, more than 30 have been set up across Asia, Europe, and Africa, offering education to nearly 10,000 students and vocational training to over 31,000 participants. (Xinhua, 2026 How vocational)

5. Conclusion

Examining U.S. trade policy towards China since Trump first administration shows that geoeconomics is simply "other means for war", which is typically the use of economic instruments such as sanctions, investment barriers, expert control, and trade policies to achieve geopolitical goals. Analyzing U.S. trade policy towards China through the framework of a three-layered concentric circle reveals that weaponizing interdependence, deconstructing multilateral trade mechanism like WTO and "double down on the small yard, high fence" (Sullivan, 2026) will fragment supply chains, reduce global economic efficiency, upset global economic order. Unfortunately, it will also boomerang on the initiator, greatly compromising the well-being of American people. Whereas, as an important channel for implementing the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which promotes people-to-people exchanges, infrastructure improvement, and green development, has yielded rich harvest for its trade partners.

In the historic meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump, the two heads of state agreed on a new vision of building a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability. This framework is expected to provide strategic guidance for China-US relations over the next three years and beyond. Against this background, U.S. trade policies towards China need to transcend the geopolitical strategies of outcompeting China and reframe the bilateral trade relations in the framework of managing competition and expanding cooperative opportunities.

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[i] Jake Sullivan, "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Renewing American Economic Leadership at the Brookings Institution" (speech, Washington, DC, April 27, 2023), The White House.

[ii] The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) Entity List is a U.S. trade restriction list (15 CFR §744) identifying foreign persons, businesses, and organizations deemed contrary to U.S. national security or foreign policy interests. It mandates licenses for exporting, re-exporting, or transferring items (specifically technology and software) to listed parties, often with a "presumption of denial".

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Beyond Tax Avoidance and Evasion: Conceptualizing Import Tax Circumvention in Indonesia

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Abstract
Tax irregularities in Indonesia's import sector recur in varied forms, from value manipulation and tariff misclassification to customs administrative engineering. The classical dichotomy between tax avoidance and tax evasion, however, is insufficient to explain the gray-zone practices that operate within self-assessment-based customs governance. This article proposes the concept of *import tax circumvention* as an analytical category for reading fiscal maneuvering that moves along a spectrum between formal tax planning and unlawful customs manipulation. The study adopts an abductive conceptual approach supported by illustrative empirical material from four semi-structured interviews with executive-level officers of the Indonesian Directorate General of Customs and Excise and senior managers of an Indonesian importing firm, conducted in Greater Jakarta between November 2025 and March 2026. The article shows that the configuration of self-assessment, risk management, multi-actor networks, and administrative discretion at four critical decision points generates spaces of deviation that are systemic and resistant to a binary legal–illegal reading. To capture this complexity, the article formulates four conceptual dimensions of import tax circumvention: *maneuver character, regulatory space, operational mode,* and *actor configuration*. Practices that share the same fiscal motive may occupy different positions within the spectrum. The conceptual contribution extends scholarship in tax governance and economic criminology by treating import tax deviation as a problem of governance, opportunity structure, and institutional relations rather than as individual transgression alone. The article also outlines practical implications for fiscal oversight in modern customs systems.

Keywords: Import Tax Circumvention, Tax Avoidance, Tax Evasion, Customs Fraud, Economic Criminology

1. Introduction

1.1. Empirical Context and the Persistence of Import Tax Irregularities

The import sector plays a central role in the Indonesian economy and is, at the same time, a major source of fiscal leakage. Statistics Indonesia recorded Indonesia's import value at approximately USD 237.4 billion in 2022, with raw materials and intermediate goods accounting for 76.34 percent and capital goods for 15.31 percent (BPS, 2022). This composition is more than a statistical aggregate. Most of the flow consists of goods with complex technical specifications and wide price ranges, conditions that structurally open space for value manipulation and tariff misclassification.

Various estimates suggest that the fiscal losses involved are substantial. The Tax Justice Network (2020) estimated that Indonesia loses approximately USD 4.86 billion annually to tax avoidance, with multinational corporations operating through import channels accounting for the largest share. Nurferyanto and Takahashi (2024) document a rising trend in both the number of tax cases and the value of state losses between 2018 and 2023. Irregularities persist even as surveillance regimes and enforcement frameworks have been progressively strengthened. A pattern that recurs and continues to drain public revenue should be read as an institutional symptom rather than as a collection of isolated technical violations.

Several studies of Indonesia add important nuance. Patunru and Patunru (2018), analyzing trade data discrepancies between Indonesia and Singapore, find that import tax evasion in Indonesia occurs more substantially in import value-added tax (PPN impor) than in customs duty, and is exacerbated by non-tariff barriers that open further space for smuggling. At the operational level, Purwanto and Indrawan (2020), studying the DJBC Jakarta office, show that self-assessment, audit intensity, and information-technology utilization significantly reduce evasion, although weak law enforcement and the limited quality of public services remain persistent challenges. Together, these findings indicate that the vulnerability of the Indonesian import system cannot be captured solely by a focus on customs duty. The problem extends across the spectrum of import levies and rests on specific institutional pressure points. This is the empirical foundation from which the conceptual argument of the article departs.

1.2. The Tax Avoidance–Tax Evasion Dichotomy

In the tax policy literature, the dichotomy between *tax avoidance* and *tax evasion* serves as the dominant framework for reading deviations from tax obligations. Tax avoidance is generally understood as the legal reduction of tax liability, exploiting loopholes, ambiguities, or gray zones in regulation without formally breaching the law. Tax evasion, by contrast, refers to deliberate illegal acts of misrepresentation, concealment, or falsification of tax-related information. The two share the same underlying motive of minimizing the tax burden but are separated by what is taken to be a relatively firm legal–illegal boundary.

In the tradition of criminal law and economic criminology, Dahmardeh Ghaleno and Mahdavi (2016) position tax evasion as a *pure economic crime*, a violation that directly threatens economic security and inflicts losses on the state. They identify three layers of causation: legal, relating to the complexity and ambiguity of regulation and to inconsistent enforcement; institutional, relating to inefficiency in tax administration and corruption; and cultural, relating to weak tax culture and low state legitimacy. Their distinction sharpens the classical line between evasion and avoidance: the former is deception and false reporting; the latter is the exploitation of legal loopholes within formal corridors. What often falls outside this distinction is the practice in between, that which uses formal corridors as a vehicle of concealment. That is the focus of this article's conceptualization.

The core argument advanced here is that the avoidance–evasion dichotomy rests on the assumption of a clear separation between the regulated actor and the state, with the state positioned as the sovereign authority that determines legality and violation alike. That assumption becomes increasingly problematic in self-assessment-based customs regimes. In such systems, the state no longer fully determines the initial truth of data; it operates instead as an *ex post* verifier of data first produced by the regulated actor. As a consequence, the boundary between practices considered "legal" and "illegal" becomes considerably more fluid than the dichotomy presumes.

This fluidity is visible in concrete practices that resist clear placement into either category. Tariff engineering modifies product characteristics so that goods fall into lower tariff classifications. Undervaluation may be administratively defended through supporting documentation. Ambiguities in HS Code classification open space for differing interpretations between importer and customs authority. Such practices cannot straightforwardly be called evasion, but they do not fit conventional understandings of avoidance either.

The import context, more broadly, exhibits three distinctive features that set it apart from other tax regimes. First, the state operates principally as an *ex post* verifier of data originating with the regulated actor. Second, import practice involves a multi-actor network spanning jurisdictions, including exporters, importers, customs brokers, logistics firms, and authorities in multiple countries, which makes accountability complex and fragmented. Third, considerable administrative discretion exists at key decision points, particularly in determining goods classification, customs value, and the interpretation of trade documents. Given these features, the "gray area" of the avoidance–evasion dichotomy is not a marginal anomaly but the default condition of much import tax deviation.

1.3. Proposing the Concept of Import Tax Circumvention

This article positions *import tax circumvention* not as a replacement for the classical avoidance–evasion dichotomy but as a conceptual extension that seeks to explain the spectrum between them, a space that has remained under-addressed in both the tax policy and economic criminology literatures. The dichotomy continues to be analytically useful, but in modern customs practice, particularly under self-assessment regimes, there are forms of deviation that move within ambiguous space between formal compliance and substantive manipulation. A more pliable analytical category is therefore needed to capture them.

Import tax circumvention is defined here as a pattern of fiscal-liability reduction in import activity that is strategic, planned, and systemic, undertaken through the exploitation of regulatory gaps, the self-assessment mechanism, and the space for administrative interpretation. The practice sits on a spectrum between formal-legal tax avoidance and manipulative-illegal tax evasion. The concept thus emphasizes that fiscal deviation in customs does not always present itself as an explicit violation; it frequently operates through administrative negotiation, regulatory ambiguity, and manipulation that can be procedurally defended. Throughout the article, the term *import tax circumvention* is used in this broader spectrum sense and should be distinguished from the narrower technical usage in WTO anti-circumvention rules.

Terminologically, the original Indonesian formulation, *telikung pajak impor*, was first introduced by the first author in a master's thesis as a *terminus technicus* for naming a phenomenon in customs practice. At that stage, the term functioned as an empirical label analyzed through three theoretical lenses: criminogenic environment, corporate crime, and rational choice theory. The present article takes a further step by formalizing the term as a free-standing concept with its own analytical framework.

The article has two principal objectives. First, to map the positions of tax avoidance, tax evasion, and customs fraud within two scholarly traditions: tax studies and economic criminology. Second, to formulate *import tax circumvention* as a spectrum category structured around four conceptual dimensions that may be used to read fiscal deviation in the import context.

The contribution is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the article seeks to enrich economic criminology in Indonesia by offering a more adequate reading of contemporary fiscal deviation that is concealed, adaptive, and administrative in character. Practically, the concept may serve as an initial foundation for developing oversight and control approaches that are more responsive to the character of deviation in modern customs systems.

The scope of the article is deliberately bounded. The discussion focuses on the import sector and customs governance, with Indonesia as the empirical and conceptual anchor. Although Indonesia's institutional features (the largest economy in ASEAN, a major regional port in Tanjung Priok, and a self-assessment customs regime broadly representative of post-reform ASEAN systems) make the conceptual lens broadly portable, application of the framework to other ASEAN customs regimes or to non-import tax sectors requires further testing and contextualization.

2. Literature Review/Analytical Framework

2.1. Tax Avoidance, Tax Evasion, and Customs Fraud as Three Traditions

In the criminological tradition, tax evasion is generally placed as a form of white-collar crime as formulated by Edwin H. Sutherland (1949), namely crime committed by persons of high social status during their professional occupation. This perspective was later developed by John Braithwaite (1985), Donald R. Cressey (1953), and successive generations of researchers who highlighted the dimensions of organization, rationalization, and opportunity structure that enable deviation. Distinct from the tax policy tradition, which emphasizes the formal boundary between legal and illegal, criminology centers attention on the social processes that shape deviant behavior, including how rational calculation, competitive pressure, and neutralization techniques operate simultaneously in economic practice.

In the tax policy tradition, by contrast, tax avoidance is understood as an effort to reduce tax liability by exploiting legal loopholes that remain formally within the boundaries of legality. The literature on transfer pricing, treaty shopping, profit shifting, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) agenda illustrates how tax avoidance has grown into a complex set of practices among global corporations. Doreen McBarnet's (1992, 2006) notion of creative compliance further shows that legal compliance can be executed creatively to reduce fiscal liability without explicitly breaching the rules. In this view, aggressive tax planning is often considered formally legal yet ethically and substantively contested. Much of the tax policy literature, however, continues to read tax avoidance as a problem of legal regime and regulatory design rather than as an institutional behavior shaped by incentive structures and organizational culture.

Contemporary literature on tax evasion has begun to expand its attention to psychological and organizational dimensions, including the fraud triangle approach, moral disengagement, and cross-national studies in developing countries that highlight weak oversight capacity and high opportunities for administrative manipulation (Oseifuah, 2025; Permana & Sanjaya, 2025).

Within international customs governance, a more sector-specific category emerges in the form of customs fraud. This category partially overlaps with tax evasion but has distinct operational characteristics. Whereas corporate tax evasion is generally analyzed in the relation between firms and domestic tax authorities, customs fraud operates within international trade chains involving cross-jurisdictional documentation, maritime and air carriers, and highly diverse tariff regimes. Its main modes include undervaluation, overvaluation, misclassification, false declaration, and phantom shipping, each of which exploits a different gap in customs procedure (World Customs Organization, 2023).

Empirical studies across multiple jurisdictions show a relatively consistent pattern of association between higher import tariffs and increased import tax evasion. Research in Ethiopia found that tariff increases correlate with greater undervaluation and misclassification (Tadesse, 2022). Similar findings appear in studies of China (Fisman & Wei, 2001, 2004), Tanzania (Epaphra, 2015), Iran (Yousefi et al., 2020), and Indonesia (Patunru & Patunru, 2018), showing that as fiscal incentives rise, the propensity to adapt behavior through administrative manipulation or document engineering also rises. The pattern indicates that import tax evasion is not unique to any single jurisdiction but a recurring phenomenon within the global trade system.

As shown in Table 1, empirical studies across countries document consistent associations between high tariffs, weak administrative oversight, and increased import tax evasion. The table summarizes seven quantitative studies that serve as the secondary basis for the argument of this article, arranged chronologically by year of publication.

Table 1: Cross-country empirical comparison of import tax evasion, 2001–2023

Author (Year)	Jurisdiction & Period	Approach	Key Findings	Dominant Modes
Fisman & Wei (2001, 2004)	China–Hong Kong, early 2000s	Bilateral trade data discrepancy (trade gap)	A 1% tariff increase correlates with up to 3% increase in evasion; correlation is stronger in sectors with higher corruption	Misclassification and undervaluation
Epaphra (2015)	Tanzania, 2002–2010	Trade data discrepancy with main trading partners	High tariffs correlate positively with missing imports; evasion is sharper for consumer goods	Under invoicing and understatement of quantity
Patunru & Patunru (2018)	Indonesia vis-à-vis Singapore	Trade gap analysis	Evasion is more dominant in import VAT than in customs duty; non-tariff barriers expand smuggling space	Underreporting of transaction value and smuggling
Yousefi, Vesal, & Pilvar (2020)	Iran, 2003–2008	Trade data discrepancy with main trading partners	High tariffs correspond with broader undervaluation and misclassification	Undervaluation and misclassification
Purwanto & Indrawan (2020)	Indonesia, DJBC Jakarta, 2018–2019	Survey of DJBC officers	Self-assessment, audit, and IT significantly reduce evasion; service quality and law enforcement remain weak	Mixed (qualitative findings)
Tadesse (2022)	Ethiopia, 2014–2019	Trade gap analysis	A 1% tariff increase raises undervaluation by 1.12% and misclassification by 2%	Undervaluation and misclassification
Ng'ang'a & Ouma (2023)	Kenya	National customs study	Import tax evasion significantly reduces state revenue; strengthening of detection technology is required	Mixed

Source: Compiled by the authors (2026)

2.2. Synthesis of the Literature and the Intersection of Corruption and Tax Avoidance

The mapping of the three traditions has worked largely at the level of econometric analysis. The focus has been on linking fiscal or institutional variables to statistically measurable levels of tax evasion. Such an approach successfully demonstrates that the problem of import tax evasion is real, measurable, and patterned across countries. It has not yet, however, fully mapped how specific practices occupy different positions on the spectrum of fiscal deviation. Econometric data show that evasion exists; they do not fully explain the quality, character, and social mechanisms of the practices that produce it.

For example, undervaluation conducted through related-party transactions with formal administrative justification has a different character from undervaluation carried out through double invoicing or outright document falsification. Although both appear in international trade statistics as "evasion," their levels of legality, justification strategies, and patterns of interaction with state authority differ substantively. Here lies the first analytical gap that the concept of *import tax circumvention* seeks to fill: providing a category capable of reading variation in practice along the spectrum between legal avoidance and illegal manipulation, rather than measuring it as a single quantitative variable.

Contemporary literature has also enriched the debate by highlighting the intersection between bureaucratic corruption and corporate tax evasion. Studies in China show that corruption among tax authority officials is correlated with declining corporate effective tax rates and increased use of tax havens (Chu et al., 2024). Cross-country studies have likewise found that when tax officials enjoy room to solicit or accept bribes, corporate reporting of income and sales tends to decline significantly (Alm et al., 2016). The complexity of tax administration is itself seen as fertile ground that allows corruption, avoidance, and evasion to develop simultaneously (Baum & Gupta, 2018). In the Indonesian context, several studies indicate that perceptions of corruption affect tax morale, while audit intensity and corruption perception both influence the propensity to engage in tax evasion (Irawan & Utama, 2021; Permana & Sanjaya, 2025).

These studies, however, generally treat corruption and evasion as mutually influencing variables rather than as a single category of practice with its own operational logic. The relation between corruption and tax evasion is approached as a causal or contributing factor, not as a form of administrative-strategic practice operating through negotiation, discretion, and institutional gap exploitation. Here lies the second analytical gap that the conceptualization of *import tax circumvention* addresses. The concept is not intended simply to add a new variable to the literature on the determinants of tax evasion. It offers, instead, a category of practice capable of integrating the regulatory, administrative, economic, and criminological dimensions that have so far been analyzed separately. On this basis, the article advances three synthesizing observations. First, the tax policy tradition tends to position the avoidance–evasion dichotomy as a juridical boundary between legal and illegal, whereas criminology reads it as a gradation of behavior shaped by opportunity structures, rationalization, and organizational pressure. Second, customs fraud emerges as a sectoral category that partially overlaps with tax evasion but possesses distinct customs-specific characteristics, since it operates within international trade chains, cross-jurisdictional documentation, and self-assessment systems. Third, the intersection between corruption and tax evasion has been demonstrated empirically, but it remains analyzed in the form of relations between variables rather than as an independent category of practice.

The analytical framework adopted in this article integrates this literature with Robert Klitgaard's (1988) parsimonious formulation of corruption as a function of monopoly, discretion, and accountability, expressed as $C = M + D - A$. The formula provides a compact diagnostic for reading institutional configurations in which the concentration of decisional power and interpretive discretion combines with limited accountability mechanisms. In the analysis that follows, this lens is applied to four critical decision points in Indonesian customs procedure, where the configuration of monopoly, discretion, and accountability produces the structural conditions within which import tax circumvention can occur.

On these grounds, the article proposes a conceptual visualization in the form of a spectrum that places tax avoidance at one end, tax evasion and customs fraud at the other, and *import tax circumvention* as the intermediate category that bridges them. Within the spectrum, the intersection between corruption and tax avoidance is positioned as the structural context that broadens the space within which import tax circumvention occurs. The conceptual diagram is developed further once the four principal dimensions of import tax circumvention are formulated systematically in the Analysis section.

3. Research Method

This article develops a conceptual category, *import tax circumvention*, through an abductive research design that iterates between scholarly literature, regulatory documents, and qualitative interview material. The paper is positioned as a conceptual contribution. Empirical material serves as illustrative voice rather than as a basis for statistical generalization, and the framework's claims rest on conceptual synthesis and institutional analysis of the Indonesian customs regime rather than on a representative sample of cases.

The conceptual track draws on three bodies of scholarship. First, tax policy literature on the avoidance–evasion distinction, including international policy documents from the OECD and the IMF, and the *creative compliance* tradition (McBarnet, 1992, 2006). Second, criminological scholarship on white-collar and corporate crime, beginning with Sutherland's (1949) foundational formulation and extending through Braithwaite (1985), Cressey (1953), and Vaughan (1999). Third, customs and trade studies, particularly empirical work on tariff evasion across multiple jurisdictions (Fisman & Wei, 2001, 2004; Epaphra, 2015; Patunru & Patunru, 2018; Yousefi et al., 2020; Tadesse, 2022). Robert Klitgaard's (1988) formulation of corruption as a function of monopoly, discretion, and accountability ($C = M + D - A$) is applied deductively as a diagnostic lens for the four critical decision points within the Indonesian self-assessment customs regime.

The empirical track draws on four semi-structured interviews conducted in person between November 2025 and March 2026 in the Greater Jakarta area. Two informants were executive-level officers within the Directorate General of Customs and Excise (Direktorat Jenderal Bea dan Cukai, DJBC); the remaining two were senior managers (a chief executive and an operations director) at an Indonesian importing firm operating through the Port of Tanjung Priok. Informants were selected purposively because of role and institutional access. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Fieldwork was conducted under an institutional research permit issued by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Indonesia. Verbal informed consent was secured before each interview, and all quotations are attributed by role only; no individual or organizational identifiers are disclosed. The material was originally collected as part of the first author's master's thesis fieldwork and is reused here in reframed form to illustrate the conceptual framework developed in this article.

Analysis followed an abductive logic. Interview material was read against the regulatory architecture of Indonesian customs procedures (Undang-Undang Kepabeanan No. 17/2006 and its implementing regulations) and against the empirical patterns identified in the cross-country literature on import tax evasion. Through iterative comparison between data, regulation, and theory, four dimensions (*maneuver character*, *regulatory space*, *operational mode*, and *actor configuration*) were refined as the analytical lens for reading practices that fall outside the binary avoidance–evasion frame.

The scope of the paper is deliberately bounded. Indonesia is treated as the empirical and conceptual focus rather than as one case among several ASEAN jurisdictions. This bounding is defensible on three grounds. Indonesia is the largest economy in ASEAN by GDP and trade volume, and a major node in regional supply chains. Tanjung Priok is among the largest container ports in Southeast Asia. The Indonesian self-assessment customs regime is broadly representative of post-reform ASEAN customs systems, which makes the conceptual lens portable to neighboring jurisdictions with appropriate adaptation. The framework's wider applicability across ASEAN, however, remains a question for subsequent empirical work.

4. Analysis

The Analysis develops in two steps. The first part shows why the configuration of self-assessment, risk management, multi-actor networks, and administrative discretion in the Indonesian customs regime generates a space of deviation that falls outside the binary avoidance–evasion frame. The second part formulates *import tax circumvention* as a spectrum category structured by four conceptual dimensions and locates it analytically alongside the closest neighboring categories.

4.1. The Indonesian Import Context: Why an Additional Category Is Needed

4.1.1. Self-Assessment and Differentiated Oversight

The Indonesian customs regime positions the importer as the first party to declare information on goods entering the customs territory. Through the *Pemberitahuan Impor Barang* (PIB, Import Declaration), the importer independently computes and reports the classification of goods under the Harmonized System (HS Code), the customs value based on transaction value, the quantity of goods, and the amount of customs duty and import-related taxes payable. The Directorate General of Customs and Excise (DJBC) then verifies the information through document examination, physical inspection where necessary, and correction through a Tariff and/or Customs Value Determination Notice (*Surat Penetapan Tarif dan/atau Nilai Pabean*, SPTNP) when discrepancies are identified.

The mechanism is designed to support service efficiency and to align with international practices in modern customs governance. Structurally, however, it places the state in the position of verifying *ex post* the information whose source rests with the regulated actor. Trade documents such as the commercial invoice, the packing list, and the bill of lading, which form the basis of the PIB, originate with suppliers abroad. The authority therefore has no direct access to the actual conditions of the transaction at the initial stage of the process. The configuration produces a systematic information asymmetry between the regulated actor and the state, a condition that opens space for interpretation and modification of data before verification takes place.

Modern customs oversight also relies on a risk management approach to allocate inspection intensity selectively. The system routes import shipments through green, yellow, and red lanes, with criteria based on the importer's profile (Mitra Utama Kepabeanan / MITA, low risk, medium risk, and high risk) and on the commodity profile. Goods routed through the green lane can generally be released without physical inspection at the initial stage. Red-lane shipments, by contrast, require document examination and physical inspection before release from the customs area.

The objective of this differentiation is to balance trade facilitation with oversight effectiveness. From an opportunity-structure perspective, however, differentiated oversight produces an uneven distribution of detection risk. Transactions mapped to lanes with lower oversight intensity have statistically lower probabilities of detection, particularly at the initial stage before post-clearance audit mechanisms begin to operate. Risk management is therefore not merely an administrative tool but also an element that shapes the regulated actor's calculation of the likelihood of detection.

4.1.2. Multi-Actor Networks and Four Critical Decision Points

Import activity is fundamentally not conducted by a single party. Each shipment of goods involves a network of actors that are interconnected and perform different functions within the customs administrative chain. The importer is responsible for fulfilling customs obligations and paying state levies. The shipper in the country of origin produces the trade documents that serve as the source data for the PIB. The Customs Brokerage Service Entrepreneur (*Pengusaha Pengurusan Jasa Kepabeanan*, PPJK), or customs broker, acts as a technical intermediary in the preparation and submission of customs documents. Logistics and shipping providers manage the physical movement of goods, while customs officers perform verification and administrative oversight.

Figure 1 maps eight stages in the import procedure flow, from the pre-import stage to post-clearance audit, and marks the position of the four critical decision points at the stages where space for interpretation and discretion is most concentrated.

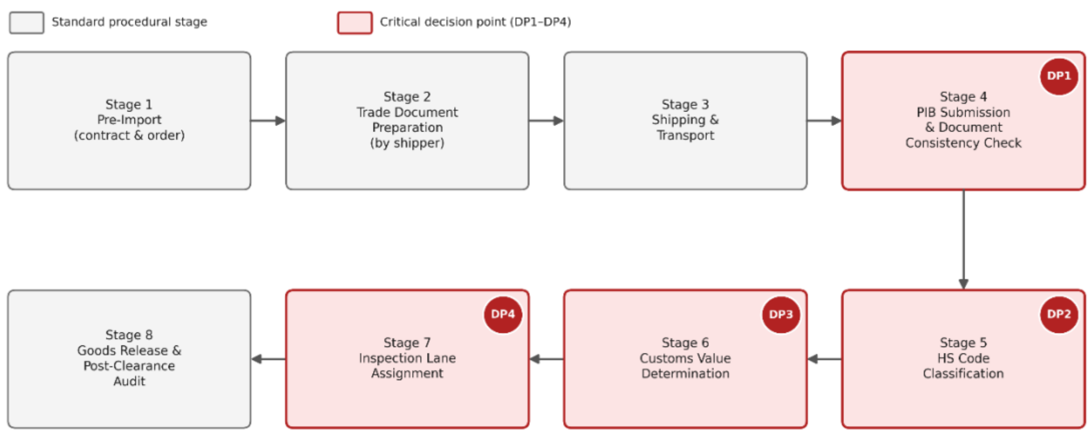

Figure 1. Import procedure flow and the four critical decision points.

Note: Red boxes mark the stages that contain critical decision points, where space for interpretation and discretion is concentrated.

Source: Compiled by the authors (2026).

The division of roles described above causes the sequence of administrative actions to be distributed across multiple actors, with a correspondingly fragmented pattern of accountability. The importer may defer to the PPJK when document issues arise; the PPJK may defer to data supplied by the importer or the shipper; while the shipper itself sits outside Indonesian domestic jurisdiction. The institutional landscape differs from the case of domestic corporate tax avoidance commonly discussed in the *tax avoidance* literature, in which the principal actor is relatively easier to identify and to treat as a single legal subject.

As shown in Table 2, the import chain exhibits a multi-actor configuration with domains of accountability that span jurisdictions. The table maps seven categories of actor that appear within one sequence of import transactions in the case firm, from the shipper in the country of origin to the central authority of the DJBC. The mapping shows how the fragmentation of administrative responsibility is not only procedural but also structural, since it involves actors with different authorities, jurisdictions, and levels of control.

Table 2: Multi-actor configuration and domains of accountability in the import chain

Actor	Primary Role / Function	Jurisdiction & Domain of Accountability	Notes on Fragmentation
Shipper / foreign agent	Supplier of goods and source documents (commercial invoice, packing list, bill of lading) that form the basis of the PIB	Jurisdiction of country of origin; subject to the commercial and customs law of the country of origin	Outside the direct reach of Indonesian authority; document or seal errors can immediately hold containers and reduce the importer's free time
Shipping line	Sea carriage, issuance of Delivery Order and Bill of Lading, determination of free time and demurrage	Cross-jurisdictional; supervised by port authorities in Indonesia	Free time policies are not uniform; demurrage charges may in practice arise before the formal free time expires
Terminal operator (Pelindo / JICT / MPCT / TPK Koja / MAL / Alter 3)	Physical handling of containers, yard storage, and release of goods from the customs area	Domestic; under the authority of the port and Pelindo	Unloading queues and vessel delays narrow free time and raise logistics costs
Freight forwarder / PPJK	Technical intermediary in the preparation and submission of customs documents through CEISA 4.0	Domestic; official partner of DJBC	Accountability is divided between importer, PPJK, and shipper concerning the validity of document data
Importer	Declarant of the PIB and domestic legal subject of customs in the self-assessment system	Domestic; legal subject of customs and taxation	Responsible for the truthfulness of PIB data yet heavily reliant on data from foreign parties
Customs and Excise officer (field)	Verification of documents, physical inspection, lane assignment, and issuance of SPTNP	Domestic; under DJBC	Holds discretionary room in the interpretation of HS Code, customs value, and inspection lane
DJBC Directorate of Facilities	Issuance of customs facilities (Bonded Warehouse, MITA, Authorized Economic Operator / AEO)	Domestic; central authority of DJBC	Restrictions on permitted goods through ministerial decree (*Surat Keputusan*, SKEP) create administrative dependence on central approval

Source: Compiled by the authors (2026).

Across the full import procedure, four decision points most strongly determine both the magnitude of fiscal liability and the smoothness of goods release. First, the completeness and consistency of core documents (commercial invoice, packing list, bill of lading, and other supporting documents) that form the basis of the PIB. Second, the classification of goods through the HS Code, which determines the customs duty rate, the obligations for import VAT and import income tax (*PPN* and *PPh impor*), and the possible application of prohibitions and restrictions. Third, the determination of customs value, which serves as the basis for computing customs duty and import-related taxes. Fourth, the assignment of the inspection lane, which determines the intensity of document examination and physical inspection.

These four decision points do not stand alone. They are interconnected, and each opens space for interpretation and administrative discretion. The technical complexity of commodity specifications, the limited availability of price comparison data, the discretionary authority of the inspector, and the constrained verification capacity of the state at the initial stage of the import process together create a substantial space of negotiation. Within this space, the economic interests of the regulated actor frequently meet the structural limitations of the state, opening room for administrative maneuvering practices that operate in the gray area between formal compliance and substantive manipulation.

4.1.3. A Configuration Beyond the Dichotomy

The configuration of self-assessment, risk management, multi-actor networks, and administrative discretion at the four critical decision points generates a space of deviation with distinctive character. Practices that emerge in this space cannot be fully classified as tax avoidance, because they are conducted deliberately, systematically, and through strategic exploitation of procedural gaps. Yet they cannot be fully equated with classical tax evasion either, since the modes employed often remain within formal-procedural corridors and resist the evidentiary threshold for direct falsification. An additional analytical category is therefore required, one that can place such practices on a spectrum of deviation rather than within a binary legal–illegal dichotomy.

As outlined in the analytical framework, the structural configuration can be read through Klitgaard's (1988) parsimonious formula, which expresses corruption (C) as a function of monopoly (M), discretion (D), and accountability (A): $C = M + D - A$. In the context of the four critical decision points in Indonesian customs, the three elements appear systematically. Verification monopoly sits with the customs authority, while the data being verified originate with the regulated actor. Discretion emerges in the interpretation of HS Code, the valuation of customs value, and the assignment of inspection lane. Oversight accountability, by contrast, is constrained by the limited capacity of post-clearance audit and the complexity of cross-jurisdictional data. The combination of high monopoly and high discretion with relatively weak accountability turns the four decision points into more than administrative steps. They become structural habitats for *import tax circumvention*.

To clarify this configuration, the following table presents a triangulation of the normative account given by regulators and the field experience of the importer across each of the four critical decision points. The triangulation is not intended to set one source against another but to show how each decision point is inhabited by two different framings. Regulators view it as a technical procedure backed by an audit trail; importers experience it as a zone of uncertainty laden with economic consequences. The difference in framing is a concrete manifestation of the configuration of monopoly (M), discretion (D), and weak accountability (A) as formulated by Klitgaard. The final column of the table maps the $M + D - A$ configuration at each point to show how the space of *import tax circumvention* is structurally produced.

Table 3: Triangulation of practice across the four critical decision points in customs

No.	Critical Decision Point	Customs Authority Perspective	Importer Perspective	$M + D - A$ Configuration
1	Completeness and consistency of core documents (invoice, packing list, BL/AWB, certificate of origin)	Examination is conducted by checking consistency across documents. Discrepancies trigger requests for clarification through the system; the importer or PPJK is asked to supply supporting documents such as contracts, technical brochures, or payment evidence.	Seal errors or differences in container numbers on the BL frequently delay goods and reduce free time. Although errors often originate with the shipper, the administrative burden is borne by the importer through document resubmission.	M moderate; D moderate (interpretation of document consistency); A relatively controlled through formal correction procedures.
2	Classification of goods through the HS Code	Officers cite misclassification as the most frequently arising issue. Overly general descriptions of goods complicate classification, leading officers to refer to prior rulings and the Indonesian Customs Tariff Book to maintain consistency.	Importers experience differences in interpretation between officers, exacerbated by relatively rapid officer rotation. As one informant noted: *"the same BL, one officer doesn't issue a correction, another does."* The situation makes inspection outcomes difficult to anticipate.	M high (the customs authority as official interpreter); D high (multi-interpretation of HS Code); A weak on cross-officer consistency.
3	Determination of	Valuation is based on CIF	Importers report that	M high (the customs

	customs value	transaction value. When not deemed credible, the value is set through an SPTNP using a comparator database of identical or similar transactions. Related-party transactions are seen as the most complex.	correction notices (*notul*) are often issued with reference to "Indonesian market price" without transparent component detail. The correction figure is perceived as lacking a fixed reference: "*there's no anchor; the pendulum will swing differently each time.*"	authority controls the comparator database); D very high; A weak, since the basis of valuation is not fully open.
4	Assignment of inspection lane and settlement of payment	Inspection lane is determined through the risk management system based on importer and commodity profile, classified as green, yellow, or red. A formal objection mechanism is provided within customs procedure.	The system automatically holds goods release until the correction notice is settled: *"if the notul is not settled, the goods can't get out; that's automatic in the system."* Pressure from dwelling time drives importers toward rapid settlement, including through informal channels.	M high (system control over goods release); D moderate (technical risk assessment); A weak, since the formal objection mechanism is costly in time and money.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on interview material (2026).

With this foundation in place, *import tax circumvention* can now be formulated as a conceptual category structured by four principal dimensions, capable of reading deviation that moves between formal legality and procedural manipulation.

4.2. Conceptualizing Import Tax Circumvention

4.2.1. Working Definition as an Umbrella Category

Building on the structural configuration and empirical material described above, this article defines *import tax circumvention* as a pattern of fiscal-liability reduction in import activity that is strategic, planned, and systemic. The practice is conducted through the exploitation of regulatory gaps, the self-assessment mechanism, the space of administrative interpretation, and the discretion of officials, such that its position falls along the spectrum that runs from tax avoidance at one pole to tax evasion and customs fraud at the other. *Import tax circumvention* is therefore not understood merely as an explicit legal violation or as legal tax optimization, but as a practice that operates in the territory between the two.

The concept has the character of an "umbrella" category. The term is not intended to replace existing categories in tax and customs scholarship such as tax avoidance, tax evasion, or customs fraud. It provides, instead, an analytical space for reading practices that have until now been difficult to explain adequately through the conventional legal–illegal dichotomy. In many cases, customs practices cannot be fully categorized as lawful tax avoidance, but they do not necessarily meet the criteria for outright customs fraud either. The concept therefore serves as an analytical bridge for understanding the gray area that frequently arises in import practice.

Import tax circumvention also has the character of a "spectrum." The concept does not refer to a single fixed conceptual point but to a range of practices with varying degrees of concealment, legality, operational mode, and actor configuration. The position of a given practice on the spectrum is determined by the four conceptual dimensions formulated in the next sub-subsection. This spectrum approach permits a more flexible reading of variation in field practice without forcing it into binary categories that are too simple.

At the same time, the concept is contextual. It is formulated specifically for reading practice within customs and import governance, which carries characteristics distinct from other tax sectors. The complexity of cross-border documentation, customs inspection mechanisms, risk management systems, and multi-actor interaction give the import context a dynamic of its own. Application of the concept to other tax sectors therefore requires additional study and cannot proceed automatically without consideration of differences in regulatory structure and oversight mechanism.

4.2.2. The Four Conceptual Dimensions

The category of *import tax circumvention* is formulated through four interrelated conceptual dimensions that emerged from iterative comparison between interview material, regulatory architecture, and the theoretical literature. The dimensions are not intended to construct a rigid classification but to read variation in practices of deviation in a more pliable and graduated way. They are best read together: a practice may be located along all four dimensions at once, and movement on one often pulls another with it. Through this approach, *import tax circumvention* is understood as a spectrum of practices ranging from formal legality to procedural manipulation to administrative concealment.

The first dimension is *maneuver character*, namely the range between overt and covert practice. At one end are maneuvers conducted in a relatively open manner, in which the actor does not actively conceal the action and relies on legal argumentation or interpretive gaps as a form of defense. At the other end are practices deliberately designed to obscure traces, through document engineering, the use of non-transparent data, or the disguise of transactions. *Import tax circumvention* is generally covert in character, though the level of concealment varies. The dimension permits differentiation between practices such as tariff engineering, which is relatively open, and document-engineered undervaluation, which is far more concealed and difficult to trace. The character of the maneuver also bears on detection: overt practices can be challenged through document review, whereas covert practices often surface only through cross-border data comparison or post-clearance audit, by which time the corrective window has frequently closed.

The second dimension is *regulatory space*. The practice operates within a range that begins with the exploitation of legal gaps, proceeds through gray-area interpretation of regulation, and may reach explicit and direct violation. The gray zone is particularly pronounced in HS Code classification and customs valuation, where the formal text of regulation leaves substantial interpretive room and where prior administrative practice does not always converge into a stable line. Most everyday cases inhabit this middle ground; in certain conditions, the practice can shift toward outright breach of customs rules. The dimension matters because it helps locate the position of a given practice without becoming trapped in the simple legal–illegal dichotomy, and it places the analytical lens close to McBarnet's (1992) notion of creative compliance.

The third dimension is *operational mode*, namely how the practice is conducted in the everyday flow of import procedure. At one end lies the formal-procedural mode, such as the interpretation of data, the choice of particular classifications, or the use of administrative options formally available within the system. At the other end lies the manipulative-collusive mode, involving document engineering, informal coordination, or collusion with specific actors in the customs chain. *Import tax circumvention* often moves gradually from formal-procedural forms toward more manipulative practice, particularly when initial reliance on interpretive defense fails or when the cost of compliance under the existing risk profile rises. Intermediaries such as the PPJK or freight forwarder frequently play a pivotal role in shaping this gradient. The dimension therefore highlights not only what is done but, more importantly, how the practice is operationalized within a procedural network that appears legitimate.

The fourth dimension is *actor configuration*. Practices of deviation can be conducted individually by a single importer, but in many cases *import tax circumvention* involves a wider organizational network. The network can include the importer, the PPJK, the shipper, the freight forwarder, and, in some cases, particular officials. This networked character is one of the principal features that distinguishes *import tax circumvention* from many cases of individual tax avoidance discussed in the domestic corporate tax literature. The multi-actor configuration also explains why criminal accountability is often difficult to direct at a single individual, since actions are distributed across an interdependent and administratively fragmented chain of work. The configuration brings the concept close to Vaughan's (1999) reading of the "dark side of organizations," in which deviance emerges from the routine functioning of distributed systems rather than from individual misconduct alone.

4.2.3. Position on the Spectrum and Differentiation from Adjacent Categories

The conceptual position of *import tax circumvention* together with its four constitutive dimensions can be visualized as shown in Figure 2. The diagram places *import tax circumvention* as an intermediate zone connecting tax avoidance at one pole and tax evasion or customs fraud at the other. Within this frame, *import tax circumvention* is understood not as a fully separate category but as a space that displays gradual movement from practices that appear legal toward practices that are increasingly manipulative and concealed. The diagram also displays the four conceptual dimensions (maneuver character, regulatory space, operational mode, and actor configuration) that determine the position of a given practice along the spectrum.

At the pole adjacent to tax avoidance, *import tax circumvention* operates in the "legal gray" zone, that is, practices that still exploit regulatory gaps or ambiguity. Yet the concept goes beyond conventional avoidance because the practices frequently exhibit stronger *mens rea*, more strategic planning, and a systemic and recurring operational pattern. The issue at stake is therefore not only the exploitation of rules but also the intent and configuration of practice that is consciously designed to suppress fiscal liability through procedural manipulation.

On the other side, *import tax circumvention* also intersects with tax evasion, particularly at the manipulative and illegal end of the spectrum. The concept nonetheless remains distinct from general tax evasion because of its embedding within the customs context. The cross-jurisdictional character, the reliance on international trade documents, the risk management system, and the presence of intermediating actors such as the PPJK, shipper, and freight forwarder give customs practice a dynamic that differs from tax evasion in ordinary domestic sectors.

The relation to customs fraud is likewise intersecting but not identical. Customs fraud literature generally places the problem within a juridical-customs frame: whether a given act meets the elements of violation or fraud under customs law. *Import tax circumvention*, by contrast, is formulated more broadly, attending not only to the legal-formal dimension but also to the dimensions of organization, actor network, operational strategy, and actor rationality. The concept therefore does not only ask whether a given act breaches the law but also how the practice is produced, negotiated, and sustained within the import ecosystem.

The term *import tax circumvention* becomes relevant when a practice exhibits a combination of at least three of the four principal dimensions formulated above: covert character, exploitation of gray-area space or outright violation, a mode that moves from formal-procedural toward manipulative, and the involvement of a multi-actor network. The combination signals that the practice is no longer simple administrative optimization but a pattern of deviation that is systemic and organized.

By contrast, the term does not need to be applied to cases of pure tax avoidance in non-import tax sectors that operate entirely within a formal legal frame and lack manipulative character or organizational network. Likewise, the concept is not intended to displace simple customs fraud categories that are already adequately explained by the literature and technical instruments of international customs bodies such as the World Customs Organization. In those contexts, existing categories remain sufficient and require no additional conceptual extension.

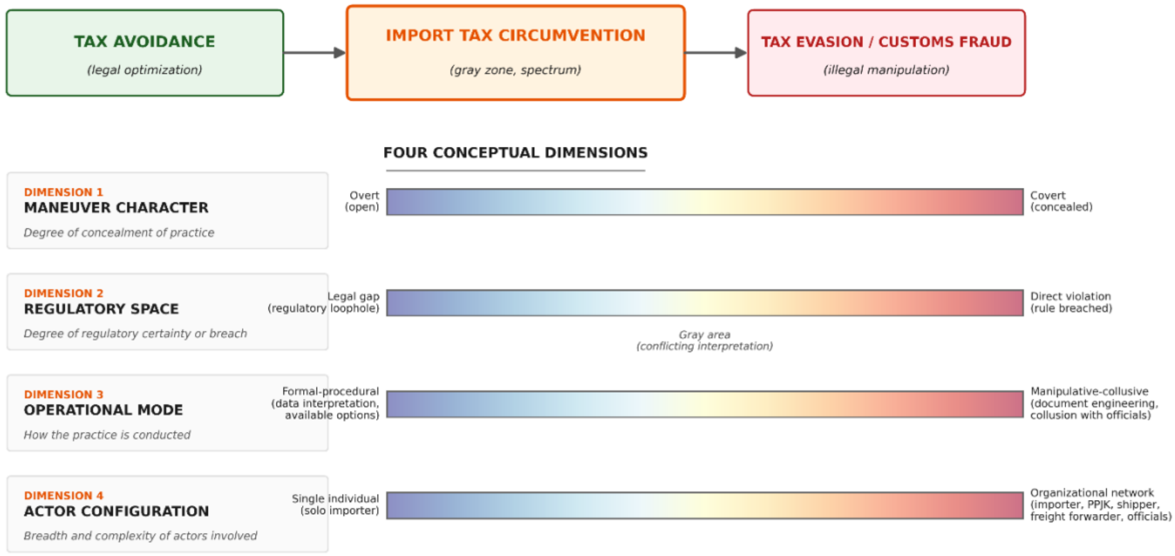

Figure 2: *Import tax circumvention*: conceptual position and four dimensions.

Note: Movement to the left approaches more legal practice; movement to the right approaches more manipulative and illegal practice. The position of a given practice on the spectrum is determined by the combination of the four dimensions above.

Source: Compiled by the authors (2026).

5. Conclusions

This article has departed from a critique of the classical avoidance–evasion dichotomy, which is no longer sufficient to read practices of fiscal deviation in the Indonesian import context. In customs practice, many actions inhabit a space between the fully legal and the explicitly criminal. The article therefore proposes the concept of *import tax circumvention* as an analytical category for understanding practices that move within the spectrum between fiscal optimization and customs manipulation.

The article has shown that the configuration of self-assessment, the risk management system, multi-actor networks, and discretion at the four critical decision points generates a space of deviation with distinctive character. Within this configuration, the monopoly of authority and the scope of discretion are not always matched by adequate accountability. The result is a problematic $M + D - A$ configuration: the authority possesses substantial interpretive power, the regulated actor controls transaction information, and oversight mechanisms face structural limitations. Fiscal deviation can therefore no longer be understood merely as individual misconduct; it is an institutional symptom that arises from the design of governance itself.

On this basis, the article offers *import tax circumvention* as an umbrella category that extends the avoidance–evasion dichotomy that has long dominated tax scholarship. The concept is formulated through four conceptual dimensions: maneuver character, regulatory space, operational mode, and actor configuration. Through this multidimensional approach, practices of deviation can be read in a more graduated and contextual manner. The focus of analysis therefore shifts from the normative question of legality alone toward a more structural reading of the patterns, processes, and actor configurations that allow such practices to recur.

The conceptualization of *import tax circumvention* opens new analytical space for economic criminology in Indonesia, particularly for reading fiscal deviation as a problem of governance and opportunity structure rather than as a problem of morality or individual compliance alone. The approach shifts the focus from a single actor toward the relations among actors, procedures, and discretionary spaces that shape deviation systemically.

In the context of tax governance, the concept shows that fiscal deviation arises from the interaction of regulation, institutional capacity, and economic incentive structure. Within the white-collar crime tradition of criminology, *import tax circumvention* extends attention to organization, professional networks, and administrative rationality that allow illegal practice to be concealed within formal procedures that appear legitimate. The concept is therefore relevant not only as a tax category but also as an analytical tool for reading organizational deviance within contemporary economic governance.

The approach also carries methodological implications. Studies of import taxation have largely operated within a compliance paradigm, measuring the extent to which actors obey rules. This article proposes a shift toward an opportunity-structure approach, which reads how institutional design, interpretive space, and multi-actor configuration create systemic opportunities for deviation. Research attention is therefore directed not only at actor behavior but also at the governance architecture that allows the practice to be reproduced.

On the practical side, framing *import tax circumvention* as a spectrum category opens the possibility of more analytically discriminating approaches to control than those derived from the simple avoidance–evasion dichotomy. The situational crime prevention framework developed by Clarke (2005) offers a relevant foundation for designing interventions that respond to the specific character of each deviation practice.

At the level of *maneuver character*, an increase of effort can be achieved through procedural simplification and the narrowing of the interpretive space currently exploited covertly. The *operational mode* dimension calls for an increase in detection risk through the diversification of audit points and the use of data analytics to read anomaly patterns across the four critical decision points. The dimension of *actor configuration* suggests that economic reward can be reduced through tariff adjustment on commodities historically targeted for undervaluation or misclassification, thereby lowering the fiscal incentive to manipulate. The *regulatory space* dimension, in turn, requires structural reform that narrows ambiguity in HS Code classification and customs valuation, reducing the provocations built into the rule architecture.

The removal of excuses can be pursued through the strengthening of integrity, the improvement of process transparency, and the dismantling of a permissive culture that normalizes "data adjustment" as an everyday administrative practice. Control is therefore directed not only at enforcement after a violation has occurred but also at the structural conditions that allow the practice to emerge and reproduce.

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Fragmented Identity, Saffron Strategy: Navigating the Bharatiya Janata Party's Ascendance in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam

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Abstract
The unprecedented rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2020 election to the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), erstwhile Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) of Assam, marked a significant development in the region's political landscape, which is historically dominated by the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), an ethnic political party representing the Bodos. For decades, the BPF exercised near-hegemonic control over the BTC, shaping governance structures and political dialogue through an ethnic-centric approach. The fourth BTR election disrupted this established order and brought in a more competitive and pluralistic political environment. The shift from single-party dominance to an emerging multi-party system not only reconfigured electoral alignments but also contested the institutional and ideological bases of BPF's authority. This study thoroughly examines the growing dynamics of electoral politics in the BTR, positioning the 2020 election as a decisive departure from conventional patterns of political mobilisation and voter behaviour. It also explores how changing socio-political conditions, including internal differentiations within the Bodo community, generated new opportunities for political contestation. Particular attention is given to the BJP's strategic interventions, especially its capacity to leverage fragmented ethnic identities and integrate them within a wider electoral framework. Through this analysis, the study intends to advance understanding of shifting political narratives, party competition, and identity negotiations in contemporary Bodoland.

Keywords: Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Bodoland People's Front (BPF), United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), Fractured Identity

1. Introduction

Northeast India, in general, and Assam, in particular, have been home to multiple social mobilisations for extended autonomy and self-governance under the Constitution of India (Gogoi, 2018; Kom, 2010). Many such demands target extended autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (Singh, 2022; Bhattacharyya et al., 2017). As Article 244(2) of the Indian Constitution suggests, the administration under the Sixth Schedule shall apply to tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram (Harsha & Ranglong, 2016;

Mohapatra, 2017). Hence, under Parts I, II, II(A) and III of the Sixth Schedule, various autonomous councils are being formed (Hansaria, 2016). In Part I, three autonomous councils in the state of Assam have been formed, namely, the Dima Hasao District Autonomous Council, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, and the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) (Hansaria, 2016; Islary, 2022). Along with these, there are statutory autonomous district councils constituted under the state acts, such as the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, the Mising Autonomous Council, the Tiwa Autonomous Council, the Deori Autonomous Council, the Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council, and the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council (Islary, 2022). The establishment of such autonomous councils is significant not only from the perspectives of tribal development and governance but also for fostering an environment conducive to democratic decentralisation in Assam. The devolution and expansion of powers to these councils provide local populations with opportunities to participate through elections (Singh, 2022; Borah, 2022). Different autonomous acts set rules for many elected officials in these councils, most of whom come from native tribal communities. This arrangement has facilitated the creation of a political space wherein tribes can contest for positions and establish a parallel administration within the autonomous regions governed by these councils. The emergence of ethnic political parties, such as the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) in Karbi Anglong (Barbora, 2008), the Bodo People's Progressive Front (BPPF), and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in Bodoland, further exemplifies this political proliferation (Basumatary, 2025). These political parties are distinctive for harbouring extended sub-regionalist sentiments and fostering specific tribal identities and cultures. Historically, they have maintained dominance in elections and the formation of autonomous councils across various parts of Assam. This situation has heightened the need for a platform that supports the comprehensive development of indigenous tribal communities. Consequently, the tribes demonstrate their habitual legitimacy and trust in the newly emerged political class within their community. For an extended period, these political parties have leveraged this legitimacy to secure their political dominance in the region. However, the dominance of ethnic political parties has gradually declined as national political parties have expanded. This shift is attributed to pre-election and post-election alliances formed between ethnic and national political parties when contesting elections beyond the Autonomous Council, such as state assembly and parliamentary elections. Additionally, reliance on state and central funds for the operation of autonomous councils has facilitated the increased influence of national political parties within autonomous regions. Moreover, evolving state-level political dynamics have further contributed to changes within the autonomous councils. The political dynamics of BTC are also similar.

The BTC is an autonomous district council in Assam. It was established on 10 February 2003 in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, arising from the prolonged and persistent struggle of the Bodo people in Bodoland (Basumatary & Pathak, 2017). The council was created to fulfil the socio-economic, political, cultural, and educational aspirations of the Bodos, as well as to safeguard, preserve, and sustain the Bodos' ethnic identity (Baro, 2017; Basumatary, 2014). Presently, the BTC comprises 46 members, of whom the Governor of Assam nominates 6 (Singh, 2004), while the voters directly elect 40 through universal adult suffrage. Among these 40 directly elected seats, 30 are reserved for Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities, 5 for non-ST communities, and 5 for all communities within Bodoland (Baro, 2017; Mahanta, 2013). From this pool of directly elected members, 12 are to be selected as executive members of the BTC, including one chief executive member and one deputy chief of the council (Basumatary, 2014). As per the Second Bodoland Accord of 2003, the BPF was entrusted with the provisional responsibility for governing the BTC areas until an elected council was established (Basumatary, 2014), which was constituted in 2005. Since that time, the BPF has remained the dominant political force within BTC under the leadership of Hagrama Mohilary. However, the fourth election of the BTC marked a significant shift in Bodoland politics, resulting in the formation of a coalition-controlled council, which was the first non-BPF-led government, in 2020 (Nath, 2020). Consequently, this study aims to examine the factors driving the paradigm shift in BTC politics and the electoral strategies employed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to expand its support in the Bodoland Territorial Administrative District (BTAD). Ultimately, these strategies contributed to the BJP's emergence as a key political player in BTC governance. It is worth mentioning that the area covered under BTC was also called the Bodoland Territorial Administrative District (BTAD) until its transformation into the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in 2020.

1.1. Objectives

The current paper has the following objectives:

- To understand the changing political trends in BTR.
- To explore the different factors responsible for the changing dynamics of BTR politics.
- To examine the BJP's strategic approach to leveraging political support in BTR.

2. Methodology

The research is qualitative in nature. It applies an in-depth interview method. Both primary and secondary data sources were collected for the research. The primary data were collected through an unstructured interview schedule. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling, including leaders and workers from various political parties, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Bodoland People Front (BPF), and United People Progressive Front (UPPL), as well as academicians and a few voters from the region. A total of 44 respondents were interviewed. The interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. Telephonic and physical interviews were conducted for a period of one month. Interviews were taken in the Assamese language and later transcribed in English. For the data analysis, the thematic analytical method was employed to analyse the primary data collected from the field. The secondary data were collected from a wide range of sources, including books, articles, government reports and newspapers. Moreover, statistical data on election records and the BJP's membership strength were collected from competent authorities, including the Election Commission of India, the Assam State Election Commission, the state office of the BJP in Assam, and district offices of the BJP in the Bodoland region.

3. Results

3.1. Electoral Politics of BTR, Since 2005

After years of sustained agitation by various Bodo militant groups in Bodoland, the second Bodo accord was signed in 2003. As a result of this Accord, one of the most vital Bodo militant groups, the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF), surrendered with their arms and ammunition and started to participate in the politics of Bodoland by forming a regional political party in the name of the Bodo People's Progressive Front (BPPF). The former BLTF leaders and some All-Bodo Student Union (ABSU) leaders formed the BPPF on 13th April, 2005. Since its formation, BTC has become one of the most influential political parties in Bodoland, significantly impacting the politics of BTAD regions at the national (Lok Sabha), state assembly (Assam), and local levels. In the first BTC election in 2005, the BPPF had a strong presence, and Hagrama Mohilary became BTC chief for the first time. Since then, he has continued to lead the BTC in its second and third elections, held in 2010 and 2015, respectively (Talukdar, 2020). The BPF's rising dominance has extended to the subsequent Lok Sabha and Assam legislative assembly elections. There are 14 Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam; among them, only one constituency belongs to the BTC in the name of Kokrajhar, which is specially reserved for ST candidates. Earlier, an independent candidate dominated this Lok Sabha constituency. However, after its formation, the BPF won this constituency for the first time in 2009 under the leadership of Sansuma Khunggur Bwiwumuthiary (Election Commission of India, 2009). Later, an independent candidate, Naba Kumar Sarania, dominated this Lok Sabha constituency for almost a decade, i.e., from 2014 to 2024 (Election Commission of India, 2014 & 2019). However, in the last parliamentary election, the UPPL candidate, Jayanta Basumatary, won the Kokrajhar constituency, an alliance partner of the BJP in Assam.

Concerning the Assam Legislative Assembly election, there are twelve (12) assembly constituencies in the BTAD region. In the first Assembly election following the formation of the BTC in 2006, independent candidates won all twelve seats. No political party secured any seats in this election (Election Commission of India, 2006). However, in the next Assembly election in 2011, the BPF swept 11 of the 12 seats and became part of the Congress-led government in Assam (Election Commission of India, 2011). In the 2016 Assam assembly election, the BPF retained its previous dominance in the BTAD region by sweeping all twelve seats and becoming part of the BJP-led NDA government in Assam (Election Commission of India, 2016). However, the BPF was unable to replicate its previous political performance in the 2021 assembly election. In this election, the BPF got only three assembly seats. At the same time, another ethnic regional party in Bodoland, the UPPL, emerged in Bodoland's politics and secured seven assembly seats out of 12 in the BTR. Along with the UPPL, the BJP also rose in the politics of BTAD by winning two assembly seats in Bodoland (Election Commission of India, 2021). Notably, this was the first time in the history of Bodoland politics that a right-wing nationalist political party had strategically achieved victory over ethnic regional politics in Bodoland.

As in state politics, the politics of BTAD also exhibit two trends: a shift from one-party dominance (BPF) to a multi-party coalition and the entry of a national political party into BTR. Consequently, the entry of national political parties has impacted the stronghold of regional political parties in BTR. In the council's first election in 2005, the BPF captured a majority of seats and formed the government in BTC, a position it retained in the next two elections as well. It was an era of complete domination of BPF in BTC. The table below shows the electoral results for various political parties in the BTC election from 2005 to 2015.

Table 1. Electoral Performance of different political parties in BTC elections from 2005 to 2015

Name of the Political Parties	Seats Won in 2005	Seats Won in 2010	Seats Won in 2015
AGP	01	00	00
AIUDF	00	00	04
BJP	00	00	01
BPF	22	31	20
CPI(M)	00	00	00
INC	00	03	00
IND	17	06	15
Total:	40	40	40

Note: AGP (Asom Gana Parishad), AIUDF (All India United Democratic Front), BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), BPF (Bodoland People's Front), INC (Indian National Congress), IND (Independent candidates)

Source: Assam State Election Commission

The table above indicates the dominance of ethno-regionalism in Bodoland. In the first BTC election in 2005, the BPF won 22 out of the 40 seats and formed the council under the chairmanship of Hagrama Mahilary. In contrast, independent candidates won 17 seats, while the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) secured only one seat. Surprisingly, the Indian National Congress, which was Assam's most dominant political party at the time, could not secure a single seat in this election. Along with the Congress, other political parties, such as the CPI(M) and AIUDF, failed to secure any seats in the BTC. In the second BTC election on 9th April, 2010, BPF retained its dominance with a clear mandate. In this election, the BPF won 31 of 40 seats, the INC won 3, and independent candidates won 6, while the other contested parties—BJP, AGP, AIUDF, and CPI(M)—were once again unable to win any seats.

On 8th April 2015, the third BTC election took place, and the BPF once again formed the autonomous council in Bodoland under the leadership of Mohilary, who had consistently managed the party's support base there. The table demonstrates that six political parties and numerous independent candidates provided their candidatures in this election. However, as in the first and second BTC elections, BPF again emerged as the dominant force by winning 20 out of 40 seats. In this election, independent candidates took fifteen seats, including the first-ever victories of the AIUDF with four seats and the BJP with one. An article argued that the AIUDF's participation in the BTAD election contributed to ethnic polarisation and helped the BJP secure its first electoral victory in the area by winning one seat. If we look at the vote share, the percentages are as follows: BPF 28%, BJP 13%, AIUDF 4%, INC 6%, and independent candidates 47%. The most intriguing fact, however, is that the INC, the then-ruling party in Assam, could not win even one seat in this BTC election (Tripathi et al., 2018). With this one-seat win, the BJP was poised to enter BTR politics. The BJP capitalised on this in the fourth BTC election in 2020.

3.2. The Fourth BTR Election: Millstone for Saffron Tide

The fourth BTC election in the newly created BTR region was held in two phases. The polling date for the first phase of the election was 7th December 2020 in the constituencies under the Udalguri and Baksa districts, and the polling date for the second phase was 10th December 2020 in the constituencies under the Kokrajhar and Chirang districts (Islary, 2022). Despite their alliance with the state government, the BJP and BPF contested this election as bitter rivals. For the first time, the BJP has invested significant resources and efforts in the BTC election, employing various electoral strategies to mobilise voters in favour of the party. It has fielded 26 candidates for 40 council seats and backed the independent candidate for the remaining seats (Pandey, 2020).

The results of the fourth BTC election were surprising for everyone. Without breaking its continuity, the BPF again emerged as the single largest party, with 17 out of 37 seats contested by the BPF candidates. Along with BPF, another newly formed ethnic, regional party of Bodoland, i.e., UPPL, emerged as the second-largest party in this election by contesting all 40 constituencies of BTC. At the same time, this fourth BTC election became a historic event in the entire history of BTC politics, where a nationalist political party, i.e., the BJP, was able to manage nine seats in the BTC election, which was limited to only one in the previous election of 2015 (Basumatary, 2022).

The table below presents the electoral results for various political parties in the 2020 BTC election.

Table 2: Electoral Performance of BJP and Other Political Parties in the BTR Election in 2020

Name of the Political Parties	Seats Contested	Seats Won
AGP	01	00
AIUDF	07	00
BJP	26	09
BPF	37	17
Gana Suraksha Party (GSP)	35	01
INC	13	01
IND	00	00
UPPL	40	12

Source: Assam State Election Commission

Table 2 shows that seven political parties contested the 4th BTC election. The results of this election have altered the direction of Bodoland's politics. It became the first historic election in BTC, where, for the first time, the BPF did not form the council in Bodoland, despite being the single largest party. According to the table, BPF contested 37 of 40 seats and won 17, while UPPL won 12 of 40 seats, and BJP secured 9 of 26 seats contested in this election. Meanwhile, the Gana Sangram Parishad (GSP) and the INC won only one seat out of 35, with 13 seats contested. The AIUDF, which had won 4 seats in the 2015 BTC election, could not secure even a single seat this time.

4. Discussions

The illustration above shows that the fourth election resulted in a hung house. Therefore, as the single largest party and an alliance partner with the BJP in both state and central governments, BTC chief Hagrama Mohilary had earlier appealed to the BJP to extend its support to them in forming the council. However, after a serious deliberation among party leaders, the BJP decided to join hands with UPPL and GSP to form a post-poll alliance in the next BTC, which will be headed by the UPPL chief Promod Bodo (The Economic Times, 2020). This decision by the BJP took a new shape in BTC politics, where, for the first time in history, BTC formed an opportunistic post-poll alliance. The electoral verdict of the fourth BTC election was surprising for the BJP, as it assumed a kingmaker role in ethnic politics while being a nationalist political party. Here, several factors contributed to the changing dynamics of BTC politics.

4.1. Strategic Utilisation of Fractured Identity of the Bodos

Like other parts of Assam, Bodoland is ethnically and religiously diverse. Despite a Bodo majority, several non-Bodo communities also inhabit this region, each with their own identities and aspirations that differ from those of the Bodos. At the same time, intra-group differences also exist among the Bodo tribes themselves. These differences, including religious identity, ideology, and aspirations, have become evident over the long years of the Bodo movement and have continued to evolve from the 1st Bodo Accord to the 3rd Bodo Accord. For example, there was a religious and ideological difference between the two major armed militant groups of Bodos, i.e., the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF), which led to intra-ethnic violence and fratricide killings in Bodoland (Sahni, 2002). Similarly, diverse identities among Bodos also lead to the formation of different regional political parties within the community. For instance, BPF was initially the only regional political party to emerge from the Bodoland movement. As a result, the people of Bodoland have sympathy for the party, which led to the continuous dominance of BPF in BTC politics from 2005 to 2020. Nevertheless, owing to intra-group, religious, and ideological differences among the Bodo people, another regional party, namely the UPPL, was established in Bodoland. Earlier, BPF had a monopoly over the politics of Bodoland at both the state and local levels. However, after the formation of UPPL, it became an alternative for the people (Hassan, 2020), leading to a decline in the BPF's influence in Bodoland's politics at both the state and local levels. Such a fractured identity within a group allows the national party to enter the regional space. The BJP strategically replaced BPF as the alliance partner of the BJP-led NDA government in 2020, and it then allied with UPPL in local, state, and federal politics. There were sufficient indications that the UPPL and the BJP had entered into an unofficial electoral understanding before the fourth BTC election poll (Deka, 2020), which later evolved into state politics in Assam and national (Lok Sabha) politics.

One of the noted academicians of the Bodoland region argued that fractured identity within the Bodo community shapes the BJP's proliferation in the region, which was also accepted by the leaders and workers of the BJP and UPPL during the interview. During the In interviews, several voters from the Kokrajhar and Udalguri districts also stated that during the fourth BTR election, the BJP successfully utilised the diverse nature of the people in the Bodoland region. In this regard, Bhuyan et al. (2022) argued that intra-ethnic confrontation within the Bodo community has been evident since the Bodoland movement. Later, these intra-ethnic confrontations were extended into the politics of the BTR, leading to the creation of fractured identities arising from ideological, objective, and aspirational differences. Moreover, it was observed that the BJP's successful strategy to capitalise on the fractured identity within Bodo communities is mainly responsible for the party's rise in the politics of Bodoland (Bhuyan et al. 2022).

Like other parts of Assam, Bodoland is ethnically and religiously diverse. Despite a Bodo majority, several non-Bodo communities also inhabit this region, each with its own identities and aspirations that differ from those of the Bodos. Moreover, the Bodos themselves are not a homogeneous community. Intra-group differences based on religion, language, and other factors also exist within the Bodo community (Bhattacharyya, 2018). These differences, including religious and linguistic identity, ideology, and aspirations, have become evident over the long years of the Bodo movement and have continued to evolve from the 1st Bodo Accord to the 3rd Bodo Accord. For example, there was a religious and ideological difference between NDFB and BLTF, which led to intra-ethnic violence and fratricide killings in Bodoland (Sahni, 2002). Such a diverse identity also leads to the formation of different regional political parties within the community. For instance, initially, BPF was the only regional political party representing the Bodo, a result of the Bodoland movement. Therefore, the people of Bodoland have sympathy for the party, which resulted in the continuous dominance of BPF in BTC politics from 2005 to 2020. However, due to intra-group and religious, linguistic, and ideological differences among the Bodo people, another regional party emerged in Bodoland, namely the UPPL. Earlier, BPF had a monopoly over the politics of Bodoland at both the state and local levels. However, after the formation of UPPL, it became an alternative for the people (Hassan, 2020), leading to a decline in the BPF's influence in Bodoland's politics at both the state and local levels. Such a fractured identity within a group allows the national party to enter the regional space. The BJP strategically replaced BPF as the alliance partner of the BJP-led NDA government in 2020, and it then allied with UPPL in local, state, and federal politics. There were sufficient indications that due to the fractured identity between the

BPF and UPPL, the BJP and UPPL had entered into an unofficial electoral understanding before the fourth BTC election poll (Deka, 2020), which later evolved into state politics in Assam and national (Lok Sabha) politics.

4.2. Deepening the Membership strength of the BJP in BTR

Another significant indicator of the BJP's proliferation in the Bodoland region is the increasing strength of the party's primary membership in BTR. As per information from the Assam BJP office and the district BJP offices in BTR, it is observed that, like the rest of the state, the party launched the Prime Membership Abhiyan in 2014 in BTR. Since then, the BJP's membership has steadily increased in Bodoland. But there are no digitised records of the party's first two primary membership drives in the region, held in 2014 and 2019. However, during the interview, the BJP's office secretaries at the state and district offices under BTR stated that, following the 3rd Bodoland Accord of 2020, membership has surged to a massive level. The table below shows the number of prime members of the party in the Bodoland region up to the latest drive in 2024.

Table 3: Registered Members of BJP in Bodoland Region

Date	District	LAC	Form Filled
		1 No. Gossaigaon	23,451
04.10.2024	Kokrajhar	2 No. Dotma (ST)	19,370
		3 No. Kokrajhar (ST)	22,903
		4 No. Baokhungri	41,684
		5 No. Parbatjhora (ST)	44,258
	Total:		1,51,666
20.09.2024	Chirang	19 No. Sidli Chirang (ST)	22,231
		20 No. Bijni	45,522
	Total:		67753
04.10.2024	Baksa	41 No. Manas	44,211
		42 No.Baksa (ST)	43,291
	Total:		87502
19.09.2024	Tamulpur	43 No. Tamulpur (ST)	42,923
		44 No. Goreswar	48,425
	Total:		91348
		45 No.Bhergaon	45,422
04.10.2024	Udalguri	46 No. Udalguri (ST)	42,343
		47 No. Mazbat	41,426
		48 No. Tangla	44,184
	Total:		173375

Sources: Assam Province BJP office and District Offices of the BJP, BTR

Table 3 presents the current membership strength of the BJP in the BTR. The district office secretaries of the Bodoland region's BJP argued that the party has strengthened its political roots in the BTR districts since 2014. During the interview, the district presidents of the BJP in Kokrajhar and Udalguri districts asserted that the party's primary goal was to achieve a substantial membership base of 40,000 in each assembly constituency within the Bodoland region. Notably, the preceding table indicates that eight Assam State Assembly constituencies have successfully reached their respective goals in the region, whereas only four constituencies, i.e., Gossaigaon, Dotma, Kokrajhar, and Sidli Chirang, have not. Of these four constituencies, three are in the Kokrajhar district. In this regard, they also observed that for a long time, the Kokrajhar district has been a bastion of the BPF. However, the party has increased its membership strength in these constituencies compared to the first two drives. As the table highlights, the districts have attained 151666, 67753, 87502, 173375 and 91348 registered members of the BJP, respectively, as of the last membership drive of 2024. The table also highlighted that not only in the non-reserved Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC) but also in the ST reserved LACs, except Dotma, Kokrajhar, and Sidli Chirang, the membership strength of the BJP has attained its goal. As informed by the district presidents of the BJP in the Baksa and Kokrajhar districts, the BJP's membership drive has accelerated since 2020. The increase in membership in these LACs is symbolically significant, as it indicates the BJP's proliferation in tribal-dominated areas that were previously assumed to be the pocket votes of the BPF or UPPL.

4.3. Massive level of the BJP campaign

The fourth BTC election served as a semi-final for the upcoming Assam Assembly election, anticipated in 2021. It was an experiment for the BJP to expand its plan in the northeast, testing the party's potential in an unfamiliar zone. The BPF won all 12 assembly seats in Bodoland in 2016, while the BJP won none (Deka, 2020). Therefore, all the high-profile BJP leaders, including Himanta Biswa Sarma and Sarbananda Sonowal, actively participated in the BTC election campaign. Mr Sarma, a star campaigner of the BJP, proactively participated in various public meetings, bike rallies, and other campaigning activities for the fourth BTC election. During the campaigning, allegations and counter-allegations between Himanta Biswa Sarma and Hagrama Mohilary remained appalling in the multi-ethnic, democratic setting of Assam (Hassan, 2020).

Alongside Sarma, Sarbananda Sonowal is also playing a crucial role in increasing the BJP's popularity and support base in Bodoland. As reported, then-Chief Minister Mr Sarbananda Sonowal had attended an election meeting in Nimua, Baksa, where, during his public address, he urged the politically informed citizens of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) to endorse BJP candidates for holistic development (Singh, 2020). He underscored the party's dedication to implementing transformative reforms across BTR's four districts and to rectifying years of mismanagement by ensuring the efficient allocation of central and state government resources. In the same meeting, Sonowal again urged voters to extend their support to the BJP's leadership, as he believed the party's developmental policy was necessary for Bodoland's overall development (Singh, 2020). Such active engagement was instrumental in establishing the BJP's regional presence in BTC politics in 2020.

4.4. The factor of Anti-incumbency

Anti-incumbency factors have significantly affected the outcome of the fourth BTC election, reducing Hagrama Mohilary's chances of re-election. Before the election, some analysts and commentators suggested that people did not like the status quo, and the numerous corruption claims against the former BTC head could significantly impact the outcome (India Today, 2020). Since the formation of the BTC under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the BPF's continued success has resulted in the monopolisation of certain political elites and increased corruption in Bodoland's governance. While addressing a crowd at an election meeting, the BJP leader, Dr Sarmah, alleged corruption charges against the BPF leaders prior to the 2020 elections for the BTC. He also alleged that BPF council members misappropriated central and state funds for personal gain (Staff, 2020). The dissatisfaction of these ordinary people leads them to consider an alternative party in BTC. During the interview, some respondents stated that since the formation of BTC, the BPF has played a dominant role in the politics of Bodoland and has governed the BTC without any interruptions from other national or regional parties. Therefore, a conventional ruling elite emerged within the party, which began to undermine the people's dissatisfaction with the region's socio-political, economic, and administrative mechanisms. There is also manifest uneven development, massive corruption in the utilisation of public funds, infrastructural gaps, poor road conditions in rural areas, and even political patronage in Bodoland, which has led to a massive anti-incumbency wave against the BPF regime. Similarly, several respondents gave examples of how the political elite of the BTC misused public funds in the name of road construction, implementation of government schemes, etc., in the Bodoland region during the BPF government.

A similar allegation was also made by Sarbananda Sonowal during the electoral campaign, in which he raised corruption charges against the long-serving BPF government, highlighting the embezzlement of public funds and corruption in BTC, which had prevented much-needed development in the region. He said the BJP would end corruption in Bodoland if it won BTC, as it has in the rest of the state (Singh, 2020). Additionally, the Kokrajhar-centric development agenda of the BPF government fuelled public dissatisfaction with the BPF in the BTC's fourth election, indirectly helping the BJP, UPPL, and other political parties increase their strength in the Bodoland region.

4.5. Impact of the 3rd Bodo Accord and Developmental Agendas of the BJP

The 3rd Bodoland Accord resulted from years of sustained mass mobilisation by the Bodo in the Bodoland region. Since 1996, this region has become the hotspot for ethnic violence, both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic, as well as movement against the government, which makes the entire area more violent and leads to massive homelessness. Therefore, in January 2020, the 3rd Bodoland Accord was signed, and this tripartite BTR agreement significantly contributed to the development of a new political spectrum in the BTC (Hassan, 2020) and to peace and development in the Bodoland region. Regarding the Accord, Home Minister Amit Shah stated that 'this 3rd Bodo agreement is another success of the PM's vision of Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' (Press Information Bureau, 2020). Through this Accord, the long years of violent movement have ended, and over 1500 armed cadres abjured violence and joined the mainstream. According to the provisions of this Accord, the Union Government will provide a unique developmental package of ₹1,500 crore over three years to undertake specific projects for the development of Bodoland areas (Press Information Bureau, 2021). It also promised to establish new institutions, including central and state universities, a medical science institution, and a National Institute of Technology (NIT), among others, for the overall development of the region. However, different academicians and civil society groups argued that this accord would consolidate the BJP in the ethnic regional space of Bodoland. Bhuyan (et al. 2022) also observed:

> 'On the one hand, the 3rd Accord consolidates the autonomy of the Bodos and institutionalises their identity on a wider scale. However, from an electoral point of view, it was just insinuating an unprecedented shift rooted in the consolidation of the BJP in the politics of the north-east, or what may be called the *Rising Tide of Saffron.*' (Bhuyan et al., 2022).

Therefore, the 3rd Bodo Accord has enabled the BJP to strengthen its regional base ahead of next year's Assembly election. The BJP itself believes it is imperative to be part of the council to consolidate its position in the region ahead of next year's Assam Assembly election (Basumatary, 2020).

4.6. Social Consolidation

The Bodo are the largest plains tribe in Assam, primarily residing in the four districts of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra River, namely, Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, and Udalguri. The Bodo people make up less than one-third of Bodoland's total population. In contrast, the non-Bodo population comprises around 70 per cent, including Assamese, Tea Tribes (Adivasis), Bengalis, Muslims, Koch Rajbanshi, Rabha, and Nepalis (Hassan, 2021). Therefore, the non-Bodo vote becomes crucial to winning the election, mainly if all this follows a similar pattern (Pandey, 2020). Drawing on references from Naba Sarania, the BJP attempted to consolidate all non-Bodo voters in the Bodoland area in the fourth BTC election. For example, in the fourth BTC election, the BJP provided candidature to all the Bodo and non-Bodo people. This is not an overstatement when considering the current BTC executive committee. Several non-Bodo members are elected from the BJP, including Arup Kuman Dey (Fakiragram), Abhiram Mahanayak (Thuribari), Gautam Das (Mathanguri), Dharma Narayan Das (Nagrijuli), Sanjib Tanti (Nonwi Serfang), Diganta Baruah (Mwdwibari), among others. Additionally, the BJP has adopted a bottom-up approach throughout its entire political journey, which has enabled it to make inroads in tribal areas and portray itself as the insider party (Bhuyan et al., 2022).

4.7. Strong Leadership of the BJP in Assam

Leadership is one of the most critical factors for the success of any political party. After independence, in the first three general elections, the INC became the single largest party in Indian politics, where its leadership played a prominent role in the party's successes. Since 2014, the BJP has played a dominant role in Indian politics, with its national leadership a key factor in its rise to power. As with national politics, the state politics of Assam is also dominated by the BJP, where the strong leadership of Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, Sarbananda Sonowal, and other political leaders played a significant role in the BJP's sudden success. This leadership factor has also become very prominent with the recent victory of the BJP in the politics of BTC, Assam. As discussed above, the three earlier BTC elections, in 2005, 2010, and 2015, were entirely dominated by the BPF, the most potent regional political party in Bodoland, under the strong leadership of Hagrama Mohilary. However, in the most recent BTC election, in 2020, the BJP emerged as the dominant and most influential political party in the BTAD area. The BJP got only one seat in the third BTC election of 2015. However, it suddenly increased to nine in the 2020 election, where strong leadership, electoral decisions, and the election campaign played a significant role in the BJP's recent success in the BTC election. In this regard, we cannot overlook the political nimbleness of Himanta Biswa Sarma, Sarbananda Sonowal, and other prominent BJP leaders who actively participated in the election campaign, rallies, and public meetings to popularise their policies and agendas among voters.

4.8. Particular focus on local issues

Although the BJP is a national political party in India, it primarily focuses on national and state-level issues. However, it has become more regionally focused since 2014, and BTAD is at the top of its priority list. The BJP government began addressing local issues and problems in BTAD that had previously remained unresolved. One of the most crucial issues of BTAD was the enduring movement of NDFB, which was resolved through the 3rd Bodoland Accord of 2020 by integrating all NDFB fractions as well as other Bodo organisations like ABSU and providing them the BTR, replacing the earlier BTC and also promising to offer some new institutions like Central and State Universities, a Medical Science Institution, a National Institute of Technology (NIT), etc. Additionally, BJP leaders assure the people that they will eradicate problems such as corruption, favouritism, and the embezzlement of public funds in Bodoland and ensure equal development throughout the BTAD region.

5. Conclusion

The provision of the Autonomous District Councils were established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to preserve, promote, and sustain the ethnic identity and self-governing system for the tribal people of the four northeastern states of India, including Assam. Currently, there are three autonomous district councils in Assam (Gogoi, 2018). Ethnic political parties traditionally dominated the politics of these autonomous councils, enabling them to fulfil their aspirations. Slowly and steadily, a right-wing Hindu nationalist party, namely the BJP, began to enter the politics of these autonomous councils. For example, we can discuss the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC). Earlier, the politics of KAAC were dominated by either the INC or the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC). However, in the last two elections of KAAC, the BJP became the most dominant force in Karbi Anglong. Like KAAC, the BJP also began to proliferate in the politics of the BTC.

As we have already discussed the trends in BTC's politics, we observe that since its formation, BPF has successfully dominated BTC's politics for an extended period. However, after the formation of UPPL in Bodoland, it began challenging the BPF's monopoly in the region. These intra-group electoral rivalries benefited the national political parties in making inroads into the regional space, as evidenced by the fourth BTC election in Bodoland. The results of the fourth BTC election show how the BJP has capitalised on regional rivalries to create a presence at the BTC. Arguably, the BJP, as a national political party, was engaged in the politics of BTAD only after the formation of BTR in 2020. The increasing dominance of national political parties in local politics has raised questions about the existence and future of regional political parties. They always try to nationalise the regional space as a national political party. For example, in Assam, the AGP's role in Assam politics is declining after it entered into a coalition with a national political party. In Bodoland, the diverse ideologies and aspirations of the BPF and UPPL provide spaces for the BJP to mobilise voters in favour of the party, leading to changes in political trends throughout the region. The rising organisational strength, membership and support base and the improvement in the political performance of the BJP in BTR have shown two trends: one, the decline of political legitimacy of the traditional and regional political bodies among the natives of Bodoland; and second, growing acceptance of national political parties and their ideologies among the people. However, it can also be expected that the divided regional space in BTR, if it joins hands, may challenge this possibility of nationalising the regional space.

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Contextualization the Meaning of *Peciren Bebadungan* in Kori Agung of Desa and Puseh Temple Kesiman Village, Denpasar

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Abstract
The application of local architectural principles can show respect for ancestral legacy, and local architecture contains a variety of features (Widi & Prayogi, 2020). There are several native architectural types and styles in Indonesia. Bali is one area with a wide range of regional architectural styles. The varied architectural creations from the classical era, which include temples (places of worship), palaces (royal homes), and other structures, demonstrate Bali's rich architectural diversity. Depending on the area in which the architectural work is located, Bali has a wide variety of architectural design kinds and styles. The diverse types and styles of architectural design in Bali are manifested based on the region where the architectural work exists. These styles are referred to by the representative name of the place, *bebadungan* for those located around the Badung and Denpasar areas. Kesiman Village is one place that has been impacted by the *bebadungan* style. Kesiman Village was an independent area ruled by Puri Kesiman, a unified province under the Badung Kingdom, during the classical Balinese era. As a result, many historic structures from the classical era exhibit the influence of the Bebadungan style. Peciren bebadungan is a characteristic that distinguishes the *Bebadungan* style (Wasista & Noorwatha, 2018). The contextualisation of *peciren bebadungan* in the Kori Agung edifice at the Pura Desa and Puseh of the Kesiman Traditional Village will be covered in this article.

Keywords: Contextualization, Meaning, *Peciren Bebadungan, Kori Agung,* Kesiman Village

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Exploring local architectural characteristics as an application of socio-cultural values is a way to honor ancestral heritage and take strategic steps to create contextual, meaningful, and sustainable architecture (Nursanty, Cauba Jr, & Waskito, 2024) . The design approach known as "exploring local architectural characteristics as an application of socio-cultural values" prioritizes aesthetics and function. This approach emphasizes local wisdom derived from traditions, customs, and the value systems of the local community. Balinese architecture is one of the local wisdoms that has been deeply rooted in Balinese culture (Paramita, 2025). Balinese architecture has distinct characteristics in each region. These characteristics arise from differences in regional potential and the social conditions of the communities residing in those areas (Satria & Diasana Putra, 2020).

The development of information and interregional relations led to the spread of architectural styles and styles from other regions (Majerska-Pałubicka, 2020). The development of information and interregional relations, whether through trade, colonialism, migration, or modern communication technology, has led to the spread of architectural styles from one region to another (Fuller, 2007). This significantly influenced the form, function, and expression of local architecture. The spread of architectural styles in Bali occurred due to trade and kinship relations between regions driven by rulers during the classical Balinese period. Therefore, several architectural objects originating from that period have similarities to each other, brought by *Undagi, Tukang, Sangging,* who were the actors of development during that period.

One of the local styles that has developed in Bali, particularly in the southern region, is the *Bebadungan* style. The term "*bebadungan*" itself refers to a construction style typical of the Badung region (Mahastuti & Laskara, 2018). This style is part of the traditional Balinese architectural genre, influenced by the customs, social structure, and religious beliefs of its inhabitants. *Bebadungan* style has easily recognizable characteristics, namely walls and building structures often made of exposed red brick or *padas* stone (soft limestone), but the most common type used in residential areas around Denpasar is red brick (Prijotomo, 2010). Efforts to explore the characteristics of local architecture are through the translation of local architectural values in the *peciren Bebadungan*.

Kesiman Village is one of the places influenced by the *Bebadungan* style. During the classical Balinese period, Kesiman Village was an autonomous region within the Badung Kingdom, led by the Puri Kesiman (Pratama, Prakoso, Rahadian, Basuwendro, & Wardhana). During that period, various buildings, such as temples and palaces, were influenced by the *Bebadungan* style. One of the buildings that still exists today is the Pura Desa and Puseh Desa Kesiman. This temple is located in the Kesiman Petilan Village area, specifically in the Banjar Batanbuah area, East Denpasar District. This temple was chosen as the object of research because of its originality and uniqueness as part of the Kori Agung. Therefore, this study will attempt to trace the *Bebadungan* style in the Kori Agung building, as well as the form and model of the *Bebadungan* style translation.

Based on the explanation in the background section which has been explained in the previous section, the problems in this research include:

1) What are the characteristics, values, and distinctive features of the *peciren bebadungan* at the Kori Agung Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman?
2) What is the form and contextual model of the *peciren bebadungan* at the Kori Agung Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman?

1.2 Importance of the Problem

Kesiman Village is one place where the *Bebadungan* style has been influenced. Kesiman Village was a self-governing territory in traditional Bali, part of the Badung Kingdom and ruled by the Puri Kesiman. During that time, the *Bebadungan* style impacted various structures, including temples (*pura*) and palaces (*puri*). Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman are two structures that still stand today. These temples are in Kesiman Petilan village, Banjar Batanbuah, East Denpasar District. These temples have been selected for study due to their unique characteristics and great architecture.

This research will specifically examine the characteristics of the *peciren bebadungan* in the Kori Agung of the Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman. The research process will be conducted by comparing several Kori Agung objects located around the Kesiman Village. This research process will be carried out by depicting and recording the physical structure in the form of two-dimensional drawings. Through re-drawing, the model and translation of the *pepalihan* and *peciren bebadungan* in the study object can be seen.

1.3 State of The Art

Previous research has discussed the *peciren bebadungan* as a study of the identity of the Denpasar style. Other research attempts to analyze the significance of the characteristics of the *bebadungan* style in symbols and cultural expressions in buildings in Bali. Research conducted by Pranajaya, Rijasa, and Dewi (2023) states that the implementation of *peciren bebadungan* on building facades in Badung and Denpasar has been implemented in several public buildings. However, in its application, some buildings simplify and simplify the form and decorative motifs of *peciren bebadungan* to adapt to the building's appearance. Therefore, in its implementation, the application of *peciren bebadungan* in public buildings is based on the expression of cultural symbols and deeper meanings. Therefore, in its application, symbols that express certain intentions should not be misused in public buildings.

Another study conducted by Noorwatha and Tiaga focused on exploring the types and forms of *peciren bebadungan* decorations on *Pemesuan* in Kesiman Village. Some findings from the research conducted include the characteristics of *peciren bebadungan*, which prioritizes structural clarity while also serving as a decorative element (Wasista & Noorwatha, 2018). In its installation, the *pepalihan* model emphasizes patterns and repetitions that produce a certain rhythm resulting from the continuity of the red brick masonry. In addition, various ornaments and applications of Chinese plate materials were found in several buildings that adorn the walls of the building's walls. The attachment of Chinese plates to buildings indicates prestige, considering that at that time these plates were luxury items owned only by certain groups. Based on the research process conducted by Noorwatha and Tiaga, it can be concluded that there are several elements that form *peciren bebadungan,* namely creativity, acceptability, and conformity.

Two previous studies have attempted to identify and analyze the significance of *peciren bebadungan* in each of the objects studied. This research will focus on interpreting and exploring the symbolic value of *peciren bebadungan* in Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman. The interpretation and symbolic value must be fully and comprehensively conveyed to the architectural object, namely through its re-depiction in digital media. The innovation offered in this research is the concept and contextualization of the meaning and symbolic value embodied in *Kori Agung*, which has become an interesting phenomenon.

2. Method

This article focuses on efforts to translate the socio-cultural values contained in the *peciren bebadungan* as an ornamental architectural element in the *Kori Agung* at the Pura Desa and Puseh of the Kesiman Traditional Village. The exploration of the symbolic meaning and cultural value of the *peciren* was conducted through descriptive qualitative methods, which included direct observation, visual documentation, and in-depth interviews (Arifin, 2014).

In the research design, a qualitative approach was chosen because the primary focus lies in a deep understanding of the symbols, meanings, and cultural background of architectural ornaments. This approach is crucial for capturing local cultural values that cannot be measured quantitatively but must be interpreted based on the narratives of indigenous communities, cultural figures, and visual documentation.

The observation method was conducted by directly observing the form, position, and composition of the *peciren bebadungan* on the Kori Agung. This observation was supported by visual documentation in the form of photographs, sketches, and descriptive notes. The observation locations focused on the Pura Desa and Puseh of Kesiman Village because they strongly represent the *Bebadungan* style.

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore local perceptions and knowledge from key informants, such as temple caretakers, village leaders, and traditional leaders. Interviewees were selected purposively based on their experience and authority on traditional architectural values. The interviews aimed to explore the meaning of the *peciren's* form, its spiritual and symbolic functions, and its relationship to the community's social structure.

2.1 Data Collection

Data collection on the shape and characteristics of the *peciren Bebadungan* was conducted through direct observation of the Kori Agung objects located in the Pura Desa and Puseh of the Kesiman Village. This visual data collection process was carried out using physical documentation techniques using high-resolution digital cameras and drones to accurately capture details of the shape, composition, and position of the *peciren*. In addition, measurements of the dimensions and proportions of the *peciren* were also carried out using manual measuring tools such as tape measures and field sketches. These images were used as the basis for recreating two-dimensional illustrations, as part of the process of revisualizing the architectural ornaments as a whole.

In addition to visual and physical data, data was collected through in-depth interviews with local individuals such as stakeholders, traditional leaders, and cultural people who understand the *peciren Bebadungan* ideology and symbolic value. The interviews were structured but open-ended, allowing participants to explain the significance, function, and cultural context of each Peciren observed. This process was captured with a voice recorder for further study. We collected secondary material from traditional village archives, palm-leaf manuscripts, reference books, and Balinese cultural texts to better comprehend local values and the historical background of the *Bebadungan* style.

The architectural object translation process involves careful measurements of the *Kori Agung* elements at the Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman. For objects with a higher level of complexity, a comparative study method is employed, measuring key elements that serve as scale references, such as door openings, the building's height, and width. This data is then used to create proportional enlargements without altering the original form or detail.

The next stage is the re-creation of the architectural object based on the building's front view as the primary reference. This rendering is based on previously obtained field measurements. The final result of this process displays the building's form, proportions, and visual character, and allows for comparisons between objects. This approach allows for a nearly accurate estimation of the object's size and dimensions compared to its actual condition. Some of the objects used as references are described in the following section.

2.2 Data Analysis

The main focus is on interpreting the meaning of the *peciren bebadungan* as a local architectural ornamental element that represents the socio-cultural values of the Balinese people, particularly in South Bali. Therefore, the data analysis techniques will utilize visual analysis and qualitative narrative analysis.

The first method involves visual analysis of the *peciren's* form through documentation of field observations and photographs/sketches. This visual data was then reprocessed using AutoCAD software to accurately and proportionally depict the *peciren's* form. This process enabled researchers to understand the structure, repetition patterns, and details of the ornaments spatially, as well as to explore the influence of the *peciren's* position within the *Kori Agung* structure.

Qualitative narrative analysis was conducted on transcripts of in-depth interviews to capture local narratives that strengthen the visual interpretation. The analysis process was carried out by grouping data based on sacred function, the philosophy of the form, and the historical development of the *Bebadungan* style.

3. Results

3.1 General Description of Kesiman Village

Kesiman Village is located approximately three kilometers northeast of downtown Denpasar, Bali. Administratively, this area is part of the East Denpasar District and is crossed by the inner-city ring road that connects various major areas of eastern Denpasar. This traditional village encompasses three administrative villages: Kelurahan Kesiman, Desa Kesiman Petilan, and Desa Kesiman Kertalangu. Its boundaries are: to the north, it borders the Traditional Villages of Tembau, Bekul, Oongan, and Tonja; to the east, it borders the Traditional Villages of Tegehe and Batubulan; to the south, it borders the Traditional Villages of Sanur and Tanjung Bungkak; and to the west, it borders the Traditional Village of Sumerta.

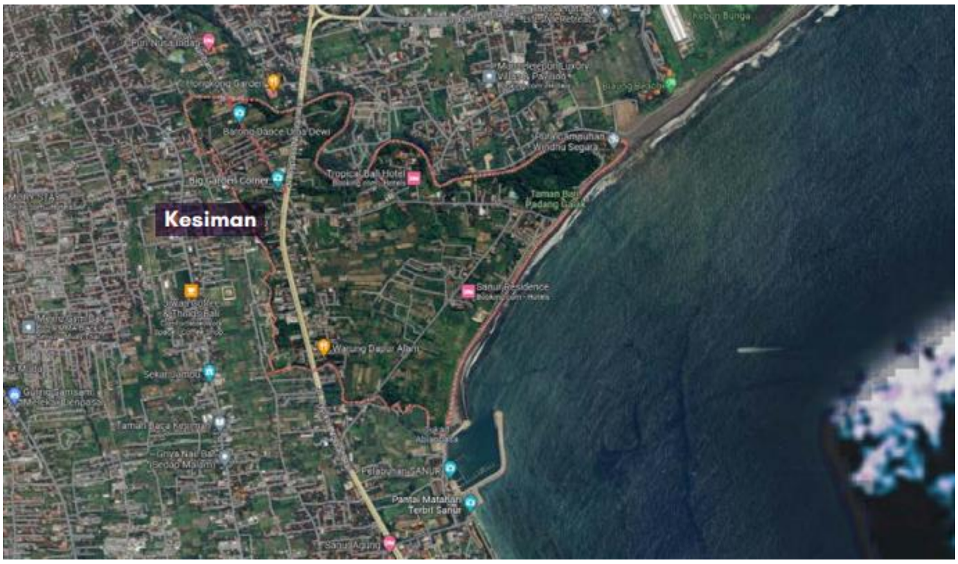

Figure 1: Boundary Area of Kesiman Village

Source: Denpasar City Tourism Office, 2024

Historically, Kesiman has a long history that reflects the social, political, and cultural dynamics of Balinese society. During the ancient Balinese period under the Warmadewa Dynasty, Kesiman was already recognized as a significant region. During the Majapahit era, Kesiman became a center of local government, thriving throughout the subsequent Balinese kingdoms. In the 17th century, Puri Kedaton was established, serving as the center of power and spatial orientation for the Kesiman community (Santhyasa, 2010).

In the 18th century, with the construction of Puri Gede Kesiman, the center of power shifted to the west of Puri Kedaton without altering the village's pre-existing spatial structure. Puri Gede Kesiman then developed into a center of social, political, and economic activity (Semadi, 2023). The spatial structure around the grand intersection *(catus patha)* demonstrates the order of traditional Balinese spatial planning, where the palace, market, *wantilan*, and other public spaces are harmoniously arranged according to a sacred-profane orientation (Wijaya, 2013).

The administrative development of the Kesiman region has also undergone significant changes in the modern era. Around 1970, the Kesiman District encompassed 11 villages, including Kesiman, Tonja, Penatih, Sumerta, Sanur, Renon, Sesetan, Panjer, Serangan, Ubung, and Peguyangan. Then, in 1978, a regional expansion was carried out, resulting in three sub-districts in Denpasar City: West Denpasar, East Denpasar, and South Denpasar (Agung, Parimartha, Budharta, & Rama, 1986). Following this expansion, on December 1, 1979, Kesiman was designated as Kesiman Village, which then gave birth to two new villages, Kesiman Petilan and Kesiman Kertalangu, all of which are traditionally under the auspices of the Kesiman Village in East Denpasar District.

The Kesiman region boasts a rich wealth of historical sites, making it a key area for the study of Balinese architecture and cultural history. In addition to Puri Gede Kesiman, one of three surviving palaces from the Puputan Badung War of 1906, the area also boasts several historic temples, including Pura Agung Petilan Kesiman, Pura Petapan Dalem Kesiman, Pura Gegelang Kesiman, and Pura Dalem Kahyangan Kesiman, all of which maintain their architectural authenticity.

3.2 Description of Desa and Puseh Temple Kesiman Village

One of the important temples that became the focus of the study is the Village and Puseh Temple of the Kesiman Village located at Jalan Sulatri No. 23, Kesiman Petilan, East Denpasar. This temple complex was originally the *Paibon* Temple which later functioned as the Village and Puseh Temple in line with the existence of the Traditional Village since the 1900s. At that time, the King of Kesiman invited the Priest, Ida Pedanda Made Sidemen from Sanur, to request him to designate one of the three temples around the Kesiman area to be designated as the Desa and Puseh Temple of Kesiman.

In this context, in the Kesiman Village, there are several Pura Dalem that were formerly built by each ruling palace government. Previously, the Pura Dalem was a temple of worship for the *Dalem* (king) family. However, after the establishment of the *Kahyangan Tiga* system, the Dalem Mutering Jagat Temple was designated as the *Dalem Kahyangan Tig*a Temple for the Kesiman Village. As a result of this transformation, the place of worship structures in the Desa and Puseh Temples have their own uniqueness compared to other Desa and Puseh temples in other places, as they still retain several place of family worship as a legacy from their original function as ancestral temples.

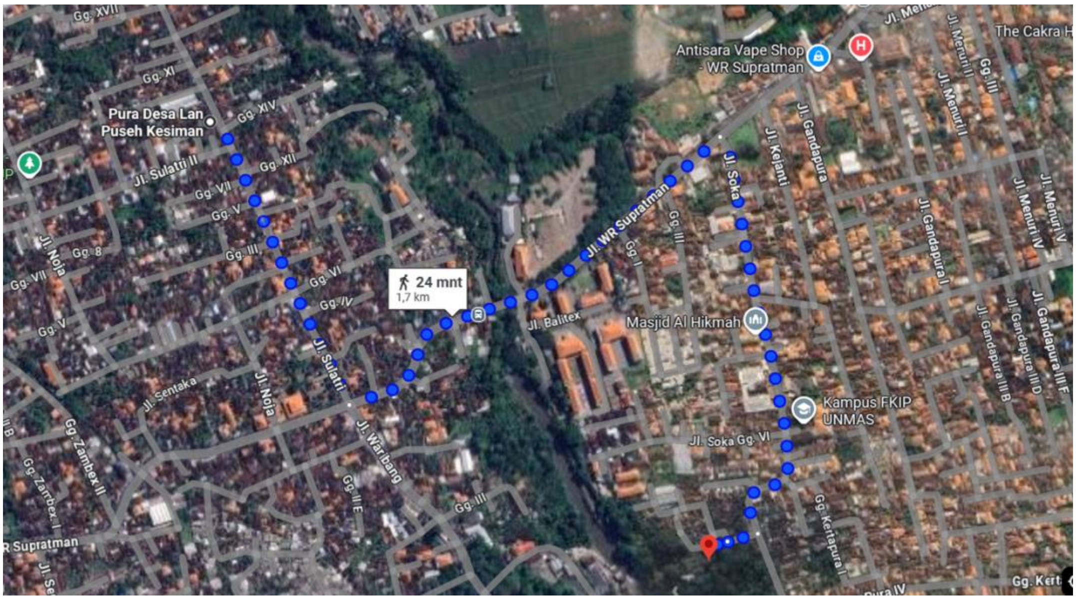

Figure 2: Location of the Desa, Puseh, and Dalem Temples in Kesiman Village
Source: Google Location, 2025

Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman complex from an architectural perspective, it is surrounded by a *tembok penyengker* which functions as a sacred boundary between the *sekala* and *niskala* spaces. Inside it are the main place of worship such as *Padma, Gedong Ratu Desa, Gedong Ratu Puseh, Gedong Manca Desa, Bale Pepelik, Bale Gede, Saka Roras, Bale Piyasan*, as well as several supporting buildings such as *Bale Kulkul* and *Bale Gong*. The restoration of several parts of the temple, including the *pelinggih* (the building for worship) and *penyengker* (boundary wall of the area), has been carried out in several stages and inaugurated through *melaspas*, that's the a sacred process to align the physical and spiritual aspects of a building and *piodalan* ceremonies there is sacred and periodic celebrations as a form of devotion to the temple by Balinese Hindus, as well as maintaining spiritual balance between humans, nature and God.

Thus, the Pura Desa and Puseh Desa Adat Kesiman are not only centers of religious activities, but also serve as symbols of historical continuity, cultural identity, and the transformation of religious architecture amidst changes in spatial planning and government systems from the kingdom era to the modern era. This temple also represents the relationship between ancestral heritage (*kawitan*) and the collective religious system of the Balinese indigenous people, which continues to adapt to the dynamics of the times without losing its sacred meaning.

3.3 Measurement and Drawing Results on the Kori Agung Pura Desa and Puseh

Kori Agung of the Pura Desa and Puseh of the Kesiman serves as the main entrance to the main temple area. This *Kori Agung* is designed to be quite large to create a majestic and monumental impression. Furthermore, the different dimensions also serve as a marker that distinguishes this building from other buildings in the surrounding area, considering that there are several temples and public buildings in the area. The Kori Agung at the Pura Desa and Puseh of the Kesiman Village has three main doors leading to the temple area. Initially, there was only one main door, the *Kori Agung*, but later expanded with the addition of *Kori Pengapit* beside it.

Based on documentation and measurements, the total width of the Kori Agung building reaches 12.3 meters, while the height to the *murda* reaches 23.2 meters, showing a majestic and towering proportion. *Kori Agung* Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman uses a combination of brick and *paras* stone throughout, with brick as the main material that forms the building structure. *Paras* stone is used selectively in several important ornaments such as the *Karang Boma* and *Patra Punggel* ornaments at the end of *Karang Tapel*, which adds to the artistic and aesthetic value of the building.

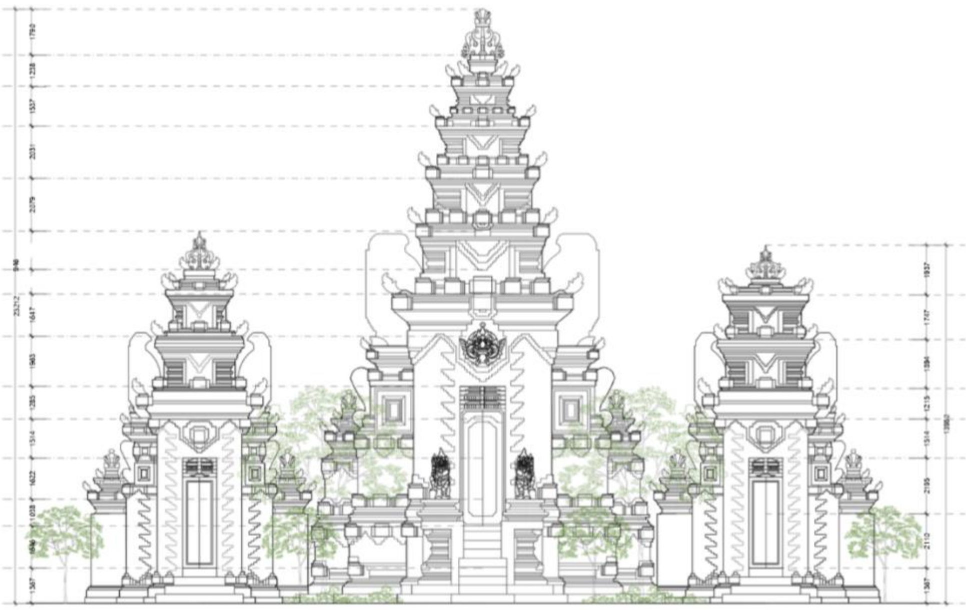

Figure 3: Image of the Kori Agung Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman
Source: Field Measurement, 2025

The Kori Agung Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman are designed based on the *Tri Angga* architectural concept that divides the building structure into three main parts: the foot, the body, and the head, each with its own function and characteristics (Gelebet, 1998). The foot consists of a sturdy building base, starting from the *bataran* to the stairs that connect to the entrance, providing a strong foundation as well as visual accentuation as the foundation of the structure. The body is the main focus with the *pengawak* section as the main door that invites entry to the Pura mandala area. On the right and left sides of the door are two *lelengen* that complete the visual balance, as well as *caping* or *penempil* that function as additional ornaments and protection on both sides.

This combination of materials not only strengthens the structure but also accentuates the distinctive ornamental details. The Kori Agung's continued existence, intact and sturdy, demonstrates the material's resilience to the changing weather and climate, while also demonstrating the craftsmanship and traditions of the Kesiman traditional architecture, passed down through generations. This structure serves not only as the main gateway but also as a symbol of the cultural strength and aesthetics of traditional Balinese architecture.

The main door stands 5.4 meters tall, reinforcing the building's grandeur and monumental feel. Above the door, a finely carved wooden *ulap-ulap* (a wooden panel) adorned with gold leaf paint reflects traditional Balinese carving and lends a touch of luxury. Furthermore, the paras stone ornament is installed above the door, enhancing its aesthetic appeal and demonstrating the harmonious blend of wood and stone. This overall design not only maintains its structural function but also emphasizes the strong artistic and symbolic value inherent in the architectural tradition.

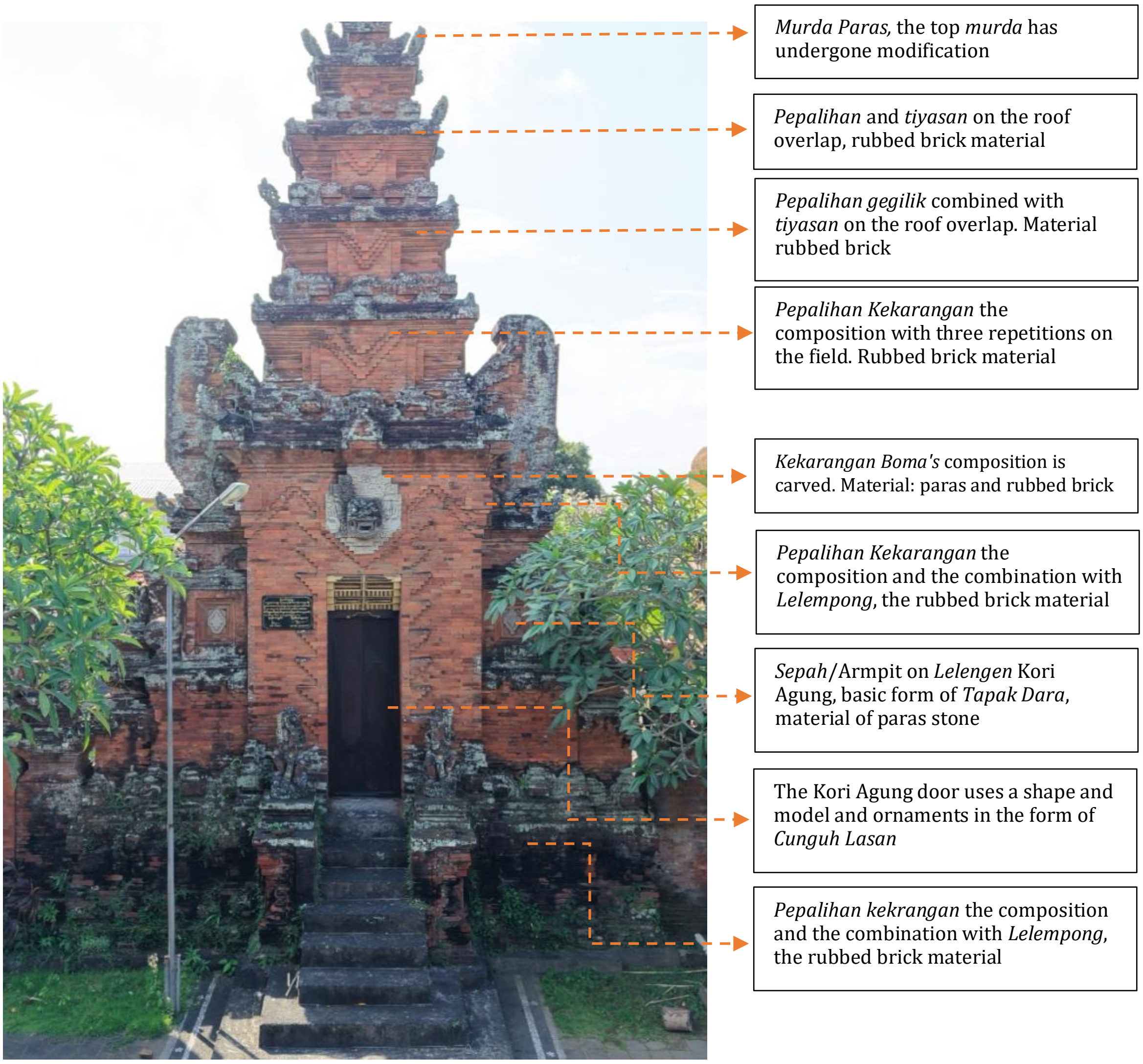

Figure 4: The Original Parts of the Kori Agung Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman
Source: Field Measurement, 2025

3.4 The Values and Meanings of Peciren Bebadungan Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman

Peciren Bebadungan comes from the root word *pecire* with the addition of the phoneme *-en* after the word, thus being called *Peciren. Pecire* in Indonesian is known as a characteristic, sign, character, or distinctiveness. The characteristics and characters referred to are styles, signs, and distinctiveness that are considered to represent a certain character. *Peciren Bebadungan* itself is a style, character, or motif that represents the architecture that developed in the Badung, Denpasar, and surrounding areas. Overall, *peciren bebadungan* is a dividing element or framing path carved into the building structure, especially on the vertical or horizontal sides.

In analyzing the values and meanings of *Peciren Bebadungan* in an architectural object, an understanding of the meaning of a symbol is necessary. As an entity within Balinese culture, Balinese architecture is inseparable from the meanings conveyed through the symbolization of form and space (Suartika, Zerby, & Cuthbert, 2018). Balinese architecture does not stand as a form solely functional but is rich in symbolic elements that connect humans, nature, and their creator. In this sense, Balinese architecture acts as a mediator connecting these three elements (Rieger-Jandl, 2013).

As explained by Covarrubias (2018) by every element in Balinese architecture works as a 'visual language' that carries philosophical and religious messages. *Peciren Bebadungan* is part of this visual language, namely an ornamental framing element that has a strategic position in organizing visual hierarchy, emphasizing sacred boundaries, and articulating spatial structures based on the *Tri Angga* and *Tri Mandala* systems. *Peciren Bebadungan* in an architectural semiotic framework can be interpreted as a boundary that clearly separates characteristics and signs. So that these characteristics and signs provide deeper meaning to both users and connoisseurs of the architectural work (Krampen, 1989). Therefore, *Peciren Bebadungan* becomes a visual instrument that organizes how someone 'reads' *Kori Agung* as the main gate that marks the cosmological transition in the Balinese sacred space system. At the symbolic level, the linear and repetitive form of *Peciren Bebadungan* reflects the principle of 'confinement' or 'framing', which in the Balinese symbolization tradition is understood as a mechanism of limitation and hierarchy.

As an entity and structure that serves as a boundary for a spatial hierarchy, *Kori Agung* philosophically has the meaning of a sacred gate, given the function of fencing off negative energy while guiding positive energy so that it remains directed (Satria & Diasana Putra, 2020). The presence of *Kori Agung* in confined spaces with a tiered hierarchy, this provides a boundary between one hierarchy and another (Wirawibawa, Diasana Putra, & Aritama, 2022). In the context of traditional Balinese architecture, this boundary is not only physical, but also has a symbolic dimension that marks the difference in the level of sanctity, access, and quality of energy (*tattwa*) within a sacred area. *Kori Agung* functions as a threshold or transition threshold, which conceptually separates mandalas with a lower level of profaneness from those with a higher level of sanctity. Thus, this gate serves as a marker of the transformation of spatial status as well as the transformation of behavior and consciousness.

Furthermore, the placement of the *Peciren Bebadungan* on the body of the *Kori Agung* building emphasizes the vertical and horizontal stratification of space. Waterson (2012) states that this framing element helps create a 'narrative structure'. A narrative structure provides descriptions and storylines for key ornaments such as *Karang Bhoma, patra punggel,* and *karang goak* positioned within a hierarchy of visual narratives. In other words, the *Peciren Bebadungan* works as a visual discourse organizer, ensuring that each part of the building conveys a message according to its level in the cosmology.

Overall, understanding *Peciren Bebadungan* requires a multi-faceted approach, encompassing iconography, cosmology, spatial semiotics, and traditional Balinese aesthetics. Without understanding this symbolic literacy, reading Balinese ornamentation and building structures will always be partial. Therefore, an analysis of *Peciren Bebadungan* is essentially an attempt to reread the traditional Balinese knowledge system embodied in architectural form.

4. Discussion

4.1 Interpretation of the Meaning of Peciren Bebadungan at the Kori Agung of Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman

Peciren Bebadungan comes from the root word *pecire* with the addition of the phoneme *-en* after the word, thus being called *Peciren. Pecire* in Indonesian is known as a characteristic, sign, character, or distinctiveness. The characteristics and characters referred to are styles, signs, and distinctiveness that are considered to represent a certain character. *Peciren Bebadungan* itself is a style, character, or motif that represents the architecture that developed in the Badung, Denpasar, and surrounding areas. Overall, *peciren bebadungan* is a dividing element or framing path carved into the building structure, especially on the vertical or horizontal sides.

In Balinese philosophy and local knowledge, the concepts of *Desa Mawacara, Dresta Desa*, and *Uger-uger* are known (Gelgel, 2017). Likewise, in traditional Balinese architecture, the local aspect and the concept of local knowledge differentiate it from other architecture. Throughout its history, Balinese architecture has left behind a legacy in the form of tangible heirlooms, namely buildings. These legacies include *lontar* (palm leaf) manuscripts and ancient manuscripts on building methods, construction methods, and building types, found throughout Bali (Hinzler, 1993). Other legacies include oral and spoken stories that accompany these physical structures. For example, stories from elders about the origins of a building, passed down from generation to generation. These three aspects are always present in the history of traditional Balinese architecture.

As an architectural object, the Kori Agung Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman represent the *Peciren Bebadungan*. *Peciren Bebadungan* is a *pecire* form featuring a massive, dense, and strong arrangement of planes and ornaments, which in Balinese cultural symbolism represents strength, steadfastness, and protection of sacred spaces. In a symbolic context, *Peciren Bebadungan* depicts the cosmological awareness of the Balinese people, where the solidity of its form and the repetition of its motifs are metaphors for the stability of the universe (*sthiti*) and the role of the *kori* as the guardian of the balance between the profane outer world and the *adhyatmika* inner world. Thus, the application of *Peciren Bebadungan* to the Kori Agung Kesiman not only strengthens local identity, but also emphasizes religious values, the order of sacred space, and the Balinese people's outlook on life regarding harmony, protection, and respect for sacred areas.

The interpretation of the meaning of *Peciren Bebadungan* in Kori Agung reveals that the density of the *peciren* elements, its bold visual rhythm, and the massive character of the *bebadungan* serve as markers of spiritual solidity and the firmness of sacred boundaries. In Balinese architectural aesthetics, *Peciren Bebadungan* serves as a medium that emphasizes the monumentality of the gate, presents an image of authority, and emphasizes the sacred nature of the space guarded by *Kori Agung*. On the other hand, the locality of Kesiman is reflected through the decorative variations of the *bebadungan* which are processed according to the artistic traditions of local craftsmen, resulting in a unique, dense form, yet remains harmonious with local materials and Kesiman's visual identity.

4.2 Contextualization of the Meaning of Peciren Bebadungan

The preservation and sustainability of the *Peciren Bebadungan* architectural style will continue to exist if its meaning and symbolism are contextualized within the architectural designs. This contextualization of meaning should not only be confined to traditional buildings, but also be embodied in modern buildings in Badung and Denpasar. Therefore, it is crucial to implement and contextualize *Peciren Bebadungan*, so that it not only produces an aesthetically appealing form but also has value and is contextualized according to the model and character of the building that will color it.

Peciren Bebadungan aesthetically displays a strong visual composition through the use of massive planes, repeated vertical lines, and structured ornamentation. Its distinctive feature lies in its tendency toward solid forms (*bebadungan*), which emphasize the solid and monumental impression of the *Kori Agung*. This aesthetic serves to highlight the image of majesty and authority of the sacred space that is bounded by the *kori*. *Peciren Bebadungan* visualizes the aesthetic principle of steadfastness that characterizes the main level of sacred buildings. The massive density and volume represent protective power, cosmological stability, and spiritual authority. This aesthetic is directly connected to the meaning of the *Kori Agung* as a sacred threshold guardian whose visualization must foster respect and sacred awareness.

The repetitive *pecire* arrangement pattern provides a structural locking effect, namely the mutual binding effect between vertical elements, thereby strengthening the overall integrity of the gate body. In the Kori Agung Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman, the *Bebadungan* pattern shows how aesthetic and structural aspects are merged into one inseparable whole in traditional Balinese architectural practice where structure is never present without meaning, and meaning is never separated from its construction form. Philosophically, *Peciren Bebadungan* contains symbolic values rooted in the concepts of steadfastness, protection, and cosmic stability. The solid and sturdy character of the *Bebadungan* represents the element of *bhūmi* (earth), a symbol of stability and strength that supports all layers of life. In Kori Agung's position as the gateway to the highest realm of holiness, this *peciren* serves as a symbol of the guardian of the threshold, mediating between the outer world (*sekala*) and the more sacred inner realm (*niskala*).

5. Conclusion

Peciren Bebadungan is a framing element of the typical Badung-Denpasar architecture, functioning as a visual feature, a marker of local identity, and as a structural and symbolic reinforcement of sacred spaces. In meaningful Balinese architecture, *Peciren Bebadungan* serves not only as an ornament but also as a visual language that emphasizes sacred boundaries, spatial hierarchies, and cosmological systems such as the *Tri Angga* and *Tri Mandala*.

Its application to the *Kori Agung* of the Pura Desa and Puseh Kesiman demonstrates that this element serves to convey sturdiness, protection, and spiritual stability through its solid and repetitive form. Aesthetically, it emphasizes the monumentality and authority of the sacred gate; structurally, it strengthens the building's body; and philosophically, it represents the *Kori Agung's* function as a guardian of the threshold between the profane and the more sacred main space.

The meaning of the *Peciren Bebadungan* can only be understood through three sources of knowledge of Balinese architecture physical heritage, palm-leaf manuscripts, and local folklore which together form a framework for traditional interpretation. Therefore, understanding *Peciren Bebadungan* means rereading the symbolic system of Balinese architecture, while ensuring the continuity of local values, aesthetics, and identity in contemporary architectural practice.

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A Marxist Reading of The Scarlet Letter

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Abstract
Throughout the years, the novel *The Scarlet Letter* has become a source of the representation of women's empowerment. Many researchers generally focused on the role of women from the perspective of Hester Prynne in a patriarchal and religious society and her punishment as an outcome of gender inequality and spiritual doctrines. In the name of bringing a new viewpoint for the novel, this research paper seeks to analyze *The Scarlet Letter* under Marxist reading by focusing on the demonstration of ideological hegemony and social hierarchy with sufficient examples from the life of Hester Prynne and through her miserable experiences in the Puritan society. By applying pivotal conceptions from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and Marx's seminal work *Das Kapital* (1867) as the primary sources of this paper, the study aims to delve into the ways in which Nathaniel Hawthorne's ability to demonstrate and critique the construction of ideologies of Puritan society that are based on religious doctrines. This paper attempts to answer two main questions: How the novel *The Scarlet Letter* illustrates social hierarchy among characters from a Marxist viewpoint and what effects of ideological hegemony in terms of religion and class in *The Scarlet Letter* can be seen. With a detailed inspection of character communication and social relations, the research aims to display how Hawthorne's work discloses the latent economic and ideological impacts that shape human interactions and societal notions of 17th-century New England.

Keywords: Marxism, Hegemony, Patriarchy, Puritan Society, 17th-Century New England

1. Introduction

The Scarlet Letter is a prominent novel in American literature which was written by Nathanial Hawthorne and first published in 1850. The plot of the novel is set in the 17th century Massachusetts Bay Colony. The novel mainly focuses on the guilt of adultery that the protagonist Hester Prynne commits. The plot revolves around a woman named Hester Prynne and her action of adultery that has resulted in a punishment which is characterized by the obligation to wear the scarlet letter "A" symbolizing her sin. Upon the fact that Hester Prynne refuses to reveal the true identity of the father of the baby, the story unfolds around the themes of sin, redemption, morality, contradictory values of Puritan society, and oppression of society. Written in the 19th century, the novel reflects the deep engagement of Nathanial Hawthorne with the historical and cultural realities of his descendants, namely, Puritans. The novel delves into the depth of human psychology and complexity along with social expectations.

Analyzing the novel from an autobiographical approach plays a crucial role in distinguishing the connection between Puritan society and its social dynamics. Since Hawthorne's legacy is based on Puritans, including John Hathorne who was a judge involved in the Salem witch trials that shaped Hawthorne's perception of Puritans thus it is inevitable to see the connection between his background and the themes of the novel such as sin and guilt. This historical reality influenced Hawthorne's writing and revealed the critical and harsh approach against the unforgiving and hypocritical social dynamics of Puritanism. The constant confrontation with his ancestors is evident throughout the novel as Hawthorne delves into the psychological and societal impact of sin and punishment through the protagonist Hester Prynne. Through Hester Prynne and her sin, Hawthorne critiques Puritanical diligence for public ostracism and the harsh imposition of moral codes. Hester's flexibility and dignity throughout public shaming and ostracism denote the implication of Hawthorne's perspective of individual strength under the influence of societal oppression. Class distinction and societal oppression, which are prominent themes throughout the novel highlight Hester's clash between individual identity and public acceptance that resonates with Hawthorne's struggle with his Puritan legacy.

The socio-economic dynamics of the Puritan community in Massachusetts Bay Colony provide the reader with a Marxist viewpoint of the novel. Hawthorne gives the impression that he skillfully employs Marxist theory that allows us to read the novel under the idea of class struggle and varying judgments of the superstructure including religion, morality, and hypocrisy of Puritan society. The resistance of Hester Prynne against the patriarchal and capitalist structures of her time is central to the article. The analysis of the novel from a Marxist viewpoint reflects how the protagonist Hester's punishment and conclusive public shaming reveal themselves as a result of social hierarchy and economic imperatives of Puritan society. By focusing on Hester's economic self-sufficiency through her needlework, the novel illustrates subversion in gender roles with the representation of a woman as a breadwinner and societal expectations of the ruling class. The patterns that Hester uses to decorate the letter "A" denote her dignity against the oppression that is imposed by the ruling figures of Puritan society. She transforms the letter "A" from being a mark of shame into the representation of her autonomy and capability. This resilience symbolizes the subjugated class discrimination, the hypocrisy of Puritan society, and the ideological dominance of ruling figures in the community. Accordingly, the analysis will proceed to examine the dichotomies between socioeconomic and religious-political systems in The *Scarlet Letter* with a Marxist viewpoint.

2. Literature Review

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* is a profound example of the exploration of the themes of sin, guilt, and punishment within the rigid Puritan society that imposed its moral codes through oppressive ideology. Despite analyzing the novel in terms of feminism or through psychoanalytic lenses, a Marxist reading of the novel reveals the deeper socioeconomic crosscurrent and class struggle coordinated with the critiques of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and Marx's seminal work *Das Kapital* (1867).

In its very essence, Marxism's focus point is to reveal the inequality between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The conflict between the oppressive bourgeoisie and the submissive proletariat strengthened its reality with the rise of capitalism. The bourgeoisie functions as the subject and the proletariat becomes the object that plays a submissive role in production and money. According to Karl Marx, this paradox is imposed in a hypocritical system of politics and capitalism. As Marx stated in his work *The Communist Manifesto* "Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another" (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 32) Subsequently, political and religious powers are interested in exploitation to favor upper-class despite applying more neutral and equal approach towards society. They perpetuate oppression or ostracism against the proletariat which results in social discrimination.

In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels argue that history is driven by everlasting class struggle, oppression by the ruling class, and the contradiction between varying socioeconomic structures. In this context, *The Scarlet Letter* designates these dynamics under the influence of Puritanism and Puritan societal structure. Hester Prynne illustrates the existence through resistance that challenges the established moral codes and socioeconomic structure of her society. Her punishment and ostracism not solely represent moral judgments of Puritan society but also reveal the social control that is reinforced by the existing social hierarchy.

In this context, Marx's *Das Kapital* provides a deeper analysis of the nature of capitalist society. In fact, this reality reveals how socioeconomic base and class struggle shape the social superstructure. Hester's needlework symbolizes her self-sufficient nature that accompanies her independent identity and challenges the patriarchal and capitalist norms threatening the conventional economic structure and gender roles. This economic independence pushes her to revolt against ostracism and subvert the applied punishment by transforming the letter "A" which is the mark of shame into the symbol of resilience and confidence. As a matter of fact, since Marx and Friedrich mention the hypocritical approach of the state institutions, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale demonstrates this hypocrisy that exemplifies the internal conflict of the ruling class. As a religious figure, Dimmesdale embodies the superstructure that resonates with the socioeconomic base of Puritanism. The sin he committed reveals the hypocrisy and moral contradictions in maintaining social control and judgment.

The power that is shaping the Puritan community of 17th century New England is the significant force that is disguised under the presence of religious doctrines and the patriarchal structure of the society. The demonstration of the very structure of Puritan society and the ways in which they use certain discourse to employ their power over the community which creates class distinction will be exemplified through the journal article *Passion and Authority in The Scarlet Letter* (1970) by Nina Baym. It is crucial to apprehend the societal structure of the Puritan community that Hester Prynne lives in order to be able to analyze social dynamics that are based on class and religious hegemony.

Subsequently, a Marxist reading of *The Scarlet Letter* elucidates the class struggles and socioeconomic conflicts that underpin the narrative. By focusing on the two prominent works of Marxist theory, *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital* it can clearly be seen how Hawthorne critiques the junction of economic conditions and social relations indicating how ideology and the doctrines of capitalism shape societal expectations. This perspective provides the reader with a broad vision of the socioeconomic dynamics of Puritan society and its impact on the judgment of individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. At this point, it must be understood that this study has closely bound us with two central questions such as how *The Scarlet Letter* illustrates social hierarchy among characters from a Marxist viewpoint and the effects of ideological hegemony in terms of religion and class in *The Scarlet Letter.*

3. Socioeconomic Dynamics in *The Scarlet Letter* and Its Reflection on the Characters Interchangeably

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne serves as an eloquent definition of social hierarchy and class distinction or inequality through the social interaction among characters that can be scrutinized with Marxist theory. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 9) This idea can be captured from *The Scarlet Letter* through the contradiction among the characters such as Hester Prynne and the aristocratic ruling class of the Puritan community. Hester Prynne, in this context, symbolized the proletariat that is obligated to obey the rules and doctrines that are imposed by the ruling class. Therefore, because of her underestimated position in society as a both woman and an individual from the lower class, she suffers from double alienation. Her ostracism and punishment demonstrate the subjection and alienation of the working class implemented by the religious ruling figures of society. Hester, doomed to wear the letter A symbolizing her sin and punishment, epitomizes the misfortune of the proletariat.

Hester's position in the community that she lives in resonates with the lives of the proletariat that Marx defines in his many works. She becomes the illustration of the error in society and symbolizes the oppressed working class under the heavy expectations of the upper class. Despite her ability to seamstress which provides a source of income and economic independence for her, she becomes the indication of a position that is being the outcast and alienated figure in society due to the severe religious and moral codes of the Puritan ruling class. Throughout the novel, even the townspeople find something in Hester when they witness her craftmanship, they are hesitant to express their admiration, especially women of the town. "She bore on her breast, in the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her delicate and imaginative skill, of which the dames of a court might gladly have availed themselves […]" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 94) It can be clearly seen that her fascinating skillful work in seamstress is not enough to be welcomed in her community. As Marx and Engels state in *The Communist Manifesto,* the only aim of the bourgeoisie is to exploit the proletariat to get most of the work done and keep the production and cycle of money functioning perfectly. "Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests." (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 20) Subsequently, the societal apparatuses that the ruling class or bourgeoisie uses function as a way to disguise their deeds to benefit the proletariat by exploiting them. In this case, the townspeople take advantage of Hester's ability to sew without accepting her existence in their community as an individual. They still see Hester as a person who committed a sin that will never be forgiven.

Similar to the situation of the proletariat of the modern world, the same kind of societal structure can be seen in the Puritan community that Hester lives in. Marx explains the emergence of capitalist structure in society as

> In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market. (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 18)

Subsequently, Marx and Engels define the situation of the proletariat under the oppression of the bourgeoisie. Their existence is hinged on their labor which benefits the capitalist system. The proletariat has been seen as a commodity that only functions to produce for the capital. They are doomed to ambivalence and harsh conditions. Additionally, the severe conditions do not provide them with a comfortable life in the future. They work to please the capital and still are ostracized by the system. The same situation can be demonstrated with the life of Hester Prynne in her community. Hester Prynne is punished and ostracized by the public due to her sin, nonetheless, she has to work and provide a decent life for herself and for her daughter Pearl. In this context, even with her marginalization from the community she produced and functioned in her society to fit in and to gain economic freedom. The attempt to make a living and to fit in the community does not imply that Hester Prynne feels guilty about her actions. This symbolizes her dignity and revolt against the rigid punishment. However, the exploitation of Hester Prynne's labor resembles the capitalist ideology. The ruling class and also the public uses Prynne's labor to get benefit from it at the same time marginalizing her existence in the community. Hawthorne also describes Hester's loneliness and the beautiful needlework that she depends on to prove a sufficient life for herself and for her daughter.

> Lonely as was Hester's situation, and without a friend on earth who dared to show himself, she, however, incurred no risk of want. She possessed an art that sufficed, even in a land that afforded comparatively little scope for its exercise, to supply food for her thriving infant and herself. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 94)

Hester's needlework becomes a commodity. It is the production of skillful hands. The things that Hester sews are fanciful yet plain which refers to Puritanism. However, her great work and beautiful productions do not determine her position in the community. She provides quality with her needlework, while she never witnesses respect and an increase in her position in society just like the laborers of the capitalist system. In this case, she and her work are seen as commodities. "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as " an immense accumulation of commodities," its unit being a single commodity." (Marx, 1867, p. 41) Despite her contributions to the community through her needlework, she remains an outcast in society. The situation of Hester Prynne mirrors the ideological state apparatuses that the Puritan community of New England. Her punishment and marginalization from the community illustrate the social expectations and religious order that the ruling class attempts to impose. In this way, the ruling class preserves its control over both the proletariat and women. By declaring Hester as a sinner in the community they aimed to control her and maintain her submissive position. This reveals the ideological control that is applied by the upper class.

> Power in this community is vested in a group of elders, ministerial and magisterial, who blend its legal and moral strands into a single instrument, and, acting as a group, make that power appear diffuse and impersonal. This is the Puritan oligarchy as an outsider, or an unbeliever might perceive it. (Baym, 1970, p. 214)

The oligarchy that is mentioned above represents the group of elders in Massachusetts Bay Colony which maintains their power over the public through religious doctrines. They exploit the lower class by imposing their ideological dehumanizing deeds. In the novel, Governor Bellingham is one of the members of this oligarchic structure. Arthur Dimmesdale comes in second place with his devoted priest appearance. People in the community obey them and believe their words since they are supported by the presence of religion and power. Their authority is based on moral and religious notions. In this way, the legitimization of their exploiting power over the public, especially, the ruling class can be seen. From a Marxist viewpoint, this oligarchic and patriarchal structure of the ruling class mirrors the existence of the bourgeoisie.

This power also reveals the essence of hypocrisy of the Puritan ruling class. For instance, even though Reverand Arthur Dimmesdale is Hester's secret partner with whom she committed the sin of adultery, his position as a priest in society secures him from being exposed to punishment. He becomes the bridge between moral and legal powers. Dimmesdale's position in the community hinders him from getting the same punishment as Hester. Governor Bellingham and other older people of the community do not think of Dimmesdale as someone who would commit the sin of adultery. He is seen as a perfect figure and described as "He was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the Church; he had all the Puritanic traits, both good and evil." (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 8) Subsequently, Arthur Dimmesdale is described as a perfect, flawless figure who symbolizes the moral codes of Puritan society However, it was easy to judge and punish Hester without any hesitation due to her position in the public as a woman who is alone. On the other hand, Hester Prynne is exposed to public shame right away due to her sin of adultery, while no one puts Mistress Hibbins' sin of witchcraft into words.

> This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly, there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who leave made it of no eff'ect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray! (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 57)

The social hierarchy and the approach of the ruling class change according to the position of the characters throughout the novel. To illustrate this situation, Governor Bellingham's sister Mistress Hibbins can be taken into account. As a matter of fact, it is explicitly implied in the novel that Mistress Hibbins is involved in witchcraft and frequently goes into the woods to attend the rituals. The rigid religious existence of Puritan society, normally, would not allow such a sin to be committed in a small community. "Mistress Hibbins, Governor Bellingham's bitter-tempered sister, and the same who, a few years later, was executed as a witch." (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 141) The late punishment of Mistress Hibbins symbolizes the hypocritical systematic exploitation of the lower class that also resonates with the situation of the proletariat in the capitalist system. Due to her position in the community, Mistress Hibbins is not punished because of her frequent visits to the "black man", years later she is punished because of her involvement in witchcraft. While the older people in the community try to impose artificial virtues to disguise their rigid power that is aimed to exploit the public, individuals such as Mistress Hibbins are favored even if they share the same errors with the proletariat such as Hester Prynne.

4. Ideological Hegemony in Terms of Class and Religion

Mills states that "gloom of the Puritans is one of Hawthorne's chief motifs" (Mills, 1948, p. 82) Hawthorne uses the oppressive and gloomy or mostly melancholic psyche of Puritans in *The Scarlet Letter* to convey how severe and self-righteous they are in terms of justifying their hypocritical exploitation of the public. Mills also states that "Gloom was a prevailing characteristic of the age, Hawthorne wrote in "Dr. Bullivant," its long shadow, falling over all the intervening year visible, though not too distinctly, upon ourselves." (Mills, 1948, p. 83) Hawthorne's examination of the gloomy atmosphere throughout the Puritan age, and its withstanding reflection demonstrates the very structure of Puritanism and Puritan society in terms of moral and cultural notions. In the context of *The Scarlet Letter,* this idea is illustrated by the characters' position and the perception of sin in a rigid societal foundation. Hawthorne saw Puritanism as "[…] hard, cold, and confined; it was only the fervent faith of firm believers that redeemed." (Schwartz, 1963, p. 4) He saw the religion as harsh and apathetic. The true believers demonstrated the restrictive approach of the followers of this sect, especially when they found out about Hester Prynne's sin. In this case, Hawthorne's relationship was distant but based on respect since believed in individual practices of religion. The essence of the acceptance of religion and its impact on the community through Hester Prynne and Pearl can be exemplified with a further analysis of Governor Bellingham.

> Hawthorne knew enough of their theology to have Governor Bellingham mention depravity as an essential tenet of the Puritan religion in The Scarlet Letter. When the eminent townsmen are deciding whether or not to take Pearl away from Hester, Bellingham is abashed by Pearl's liberal and elfin responses to his attempt to discover how well she knows the accepted religion. "This is awful!" he cries, because a child of three cannot tell him who made her. "Without question, she is equally in the dark as to her soul, its present depravity, and future destiny!" (vi, 159-160.) (Schwartz, 1963, p. 5)

The depravity that Governor Bellingham acquires as a view of life suggests the foundational notion of Puritanism. In this context, it reveals the inherent moral corruption and sinfulness of the individuals.” liberal and elfin” responses of Pearl symbolize her disobedience of Puritan doctrines with her nonconformist existence in the community. This is the point that Bellingham and the rest of the community interpret as she is the child of the devil. Since Pearl doesn’t obey their theological doctrines, they ostracize her. It reveals the basic essence of the religious ideological hegemony that the colony has at its core. Bellingham’s reaction of “This is awful!” suggests his surprise against the ignorance of the child towards religious doctrines since it is significant to impose religious doctrines on children in order to shape their brains as conformists to the established system. In this way, Hester Prynne becomes the emblematic reflection of the challenged figure against the religious doctrines of Puritan society.

> “Nathaniel Hawthorne’s defence of his family lies in the creation of a monolithic Puritanism, in which all figures of authority acted as his own ancestors acted. To this end, he obliterates the history of subversion and heresy that involved even the colonial elite; heretics are represented in Hawthorne's fiction as exceptional individuals, and subversives are always defeated by the overwhelming forces of orthodoxy.” (Madsen, 1999, pp. 1-2)

The individual who is so-called, defeated in the case of Hester represents the subvarieties and monolithic structure of Puritan society that acquired heretical elements. All in all, it reflects Hawthorne’s awareness of the religious background of his ancestors and the difference of their sect in terms of worldview. Hester Prynne becomes one of these exceptional individuals who are overwhelmed with the harsh orthodoxy. Her act of adultery designates the defiance of Puritan teachings and religious doctrines that they impose on society. Nonetheless, against her resilience, she faces the rigid judgment of Puritan society and she is ostracized from the community. Even though Hester tries to preserve her dignity, the ultimate subversion happens when Dimmesdale confesses that he is the partner in the sin of adultery. It displays the consequences of a lack of conformity.

Throughout the novel, the unforgiving nature of Puritan society is on point to reflect their rigid and harsh evaluation of any mistake that is committed. This severe bleakness of Puritan society shapes the lives and actions of the characters and imposes conformity. Mills states that “The Puritan sternness is also seen in what Hawthorne calls in The Scarlet Letter "the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law." He pictured the Puritans waiting with "grim rigidity" outside the jail for Hester to appear.” (Mills, 1948, p. 84) The structure of the Puritan society is described as harsh and vindictive, which designates Puritan’s perception of the world that is filled with sin and forbidden worldly pleasures. The emergence of strictly established notions of Puritan society evokes an image of a community that requires conformity. As a matter of fact, the action of waiting outside the jail to see Hester represents the satisfaction that Puritan society feels when they see that the social order that they aim to preserve is functioning. This also denotes the indispensable public judgment equal to legal punishment.

> These primitive statesmen, therefore, —Bradstreet, Endicott, Dudley, Bellingham, and their compeers, — who were elevated to power by the early choice of the people, seem to have been not often brilliant, but distinguished by a ponderous sobriety, rather than activity of intellect. (Hawthorne, 1850, pp. 290-291)

According to the quote above from the novel, it can clearly be understood that these “primitive” older men in charge of ruling the colony are not “brilliant” or “intellectual” which resonates with the fact that they lack progressive ideas and innovative ways of governing. Their ideology is based on religious foundations. The ideological hegemony that they tried to impose on both Hester and the public symbolized the modern state of the proletariat and their suffering in a capitalist society. In the colony, the Puritan society uses the presence of religion instead of money as in modern capitalist societies. The elders represent “heaven” and the guarantee of a better life in heaven if the public obeys the rules that are constructed to exploit society. “Heaven-the society of elders. […] the assertion of manhood involves a shift of allegiance away from the values of a male-dominated ethos towards those held rather by a female.” (Baym, 1970, pp. 214-215) Away from intellectuality, elders of Puritan society pledge a better life in heaven with the condition of obeying rigid moral codes of society which are designed to fulfill the expectations of the elite ruling class. The time has no significance in terms of oppression and exploitation. Through the times of Puritanism and long ago, it was religion held against the public to control and exploit, while it is money in modern societies to dominate and exploit. “Undoubtedly,” it will be said, “religious, moral, philosophical, and juridical ideas have been modified in the course of historical development. But religion, morality, philosophy, political science, and law, constantly survived this change.” (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 26) As Marx and Engels put it into words, over the course of history, ideological hegemonies such as religion, law, morality, and so on are used to control society. However, the most powerful and in the context of using it as a weapon, insidious one is religion. Throughout the novel *The Scarlet Letter* the ruling class figures especially Bellingham impose religious doctrines to control and judge Hester Prynne.

Governor Bellingham contradicts his pure and rigid devotion to religion as a Puritan. Through the depiction of his house, the contradictory image between his aristocratic, and exquisite existence and Puritanism’s plain and modest proposition of a lifestyle can be extracted from the novel. This situation reflects the false and artificial doctrines that both elderly forefathers of the colony impose, and the modern bourgeoisie enforce to grasp the power in their hands.

> Here, on the cushion, lay a folio tome, probably of the Chronicles of England or other such substantial literature; even as in our own days we scatter gilded volumes on the center-table, to be turned over by the casual guest. The furniture of the hall consisted of some ponderous chairs, the backs of which were elaborately carved with wreaths of oaken flowers; and likewise a table in the same taste; the whole being of the Elizabethan age, or perhaps earlier, and heirlooms, transferred hither from the Governor's paternal home. (Hawthorne, 1850, pp. 123-124)

Even though, ruling figures such as Governor Bellingham indoctrinate a lifestyle that is away from worldly-pleasures and luxurious assets, the depiction of Bellingham’s house reveals the very essence of aristocracy and the elegant, luxurious lifestyle of the ruling class. The Elizabethan table, and the furniture that is described as “heirlooms” denote that his assets are ancestry and imply the existence of aristocracy. As Marxist theory is taken into account, the depiction of the house of Bellingham and little details accompanying the idea of aristocracy reflect the means of product in capitalist society. Through exploitation and oppression, they preach to the townspeople anonymity and to be plain. Nonetheless, “the ponderous chairs” which are elaborately and extensively decorated show the aristocratic background. They impose false grand narratives by indoctrinating morals and ethics that are filled with contradictions. This is a way of exploiting the public to get the highest production both socially and economically. Marx and Engels explain the very essence of the disguised deeds of the oppressive class “It compels all nations […] to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.” (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 16) Consequently, the power of the bourgeoisie is reflected through their attempt to create an artificial world that mirrors their power. They aim to create the illusion of a better life for the proletariat that they never reach. However, the reader sees the contradiction between Bellingham’s lifestyle and the values that Puritanism teaches from the mouth of Bellingham. “But it is an error to suppose that our grave forefathers […] made it a matter of conscience to reject such means of comfort, or even luxury, as lay fairly within their grasp.” (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 129) While repeating the ideas of his forefathers which is about rejecting all sorts of luxury and the pleasures of the world, he has a lifestyle of an aristocrat.

5. Conclusion

Reading *The Scarlet Letter* from a Marxist viewpoint reveals elaborate ways in which Puritan society imposed ideological hegemony and other state apparatuses to control the society that can be found in modern societies under the influence of capitalism. The ruling class of the Puritan colony that Hester Prynne lives in, creates a community that is shaped around conformity through the application of moral and legal codes stabilizing the social hierarchy. Hester Prynne’s situation designates the tools that the Puritan ruling class applied such as religion to oppress the public. The public shaming and ostracism reinforce the satisfaction that Puritan society gets by imposing rigid moral codes on individuals. The severe religious doctrines that Puritans apply to townspeople resonate with the Marxist view of the bourgeoisie perpetuating power to control the proletariat in order to reach the utmost production.

The analogy of Puritan society and capitalist society underscores the use of ideological hegemony. Both systems create the illusion of righteousness baffling the disguised power dynamics. This paper reveals the false doctrines of Puritan society to keep the power of the ruling class stable through the exploitation of the lower class. The ultimate class distinction and societal conflicts reveal Hawthorne's aim to show the hypocrisy of the ruling class of Puritans and their oppressive social structure. Subsequently, this paper provides a Marxist reading of the novel to unveil the manipulated ideologies in order to preserve power with the false vision of Puritan perception of the world. Hester's commitment to adultery that resulted from wearing the scarlet letter "A" and her attempt to change the meaning of the letter by improving its meaning from a devaluing symbol to a symbol of determination and dignity serve as an allegory for broader societal oppression and exploitation of individuals. This study underscores a timeless application of Marxist theory in order to demonstrate the power relations between the characters and the ideological state apparatuses in order to stabilize the power that the ruling class grasps throughout the centuries by changing the driving source as it is religion in the past, and money in the present.

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Unveiling Gender Roles: Analysis of *The Bell Jar* by Slyvia Plath in terms of 1950s American Society

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Abstract
In literary criticism, gender roles have always been under discussion from a variety of perspectives. Especially in 1950s American Society, after World War II within the effects of disillusionment, there have been overwhelming changes in society in terms of culture and politics. The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath as a novel narrates these important compendiums in terms of gender roles by considering the new transformative culture of the USA. Thus, Plath strongly narrates these issues from such a perspective that the reader of the novel can obtain new perspectives towards relevant issues. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the novel The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath in terms of gender roles from a feminist perspective by considering 1950s American Society, sexual double standards, identity of women, and the very discussion will be done within a perception of Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Identity Crisis, Hypocrisy of Patriarchy, 1950s American Society, Conformity

1. Introduction

The Bell Jar by Slyvia Plath plays a crucial role in literary field. The novel was published in 1963 and is considered her touchstone along with her other precious works. The period of its publication and the era in which Slyvia Plath wrote *The Bell Jar* is critically important in every sense to understand its multiple dimensions within its compendiums in terms of gender roles. Since Slyvia Plath was born and raised in USA, her observation of her period as a "woman" author is very important. Slyvia Plath, through her remarkable observations had written down her novel *The Bell Jar.* These observations are involved in the structural richness of the novel in which the reader can comprehend the infrastructural formulation of American Society in 1950s USA. In a historical context, when we look at 1950s America, we encounter a post-war country after World War II. Thus, USA was affected by WW II. in its core and its society was disillusioned in a wide range dimension. After the war, the country had gone under a cultural change which was filled with fatal errors. These fatal errors are sociologically open for argumentation in terms of gender studies, because societal expectations and the range of conformity was arousing in its structure, it was becoming patriarchal in all respects. This patriarchal transformation was existed to rout the signifiers of institution of family, education, and mass media in terms of gender roles.

It is important to give brief definitions of the cultural change of America in 1950s, because *The Bell Jar* is a narration of this very society from a woman's' perspective. Therefore, before digging into details of the novel to understand its paratext, the first critical thing to comprehend from a feminist perspective is the term "gender" which is socially constructed and is a negative impression which is established to create domestication. In post-war era, this was the core base of the new culture in America. This new patriarch culture inevitably gave a birth to change the signifier of the term "woman". In this new order, "woman" became the object of production and "man" became the subject of provider. As Jennifer Holt states in her article *"The Ideal Woman":*

> Most everyone is familiar with the storybook image of America in the 1950s. Images are continually popularized of a simpler, happier time emerging from the aftermath of the Second World War. Families moved to the suburbs, fostered a baby boom, and forged a happy life of family togetherness in which everyone had a specified role. Women were considered domestic caregivers, with sole responsibility for the home and child rearing, while men 'brought home the bacon. (Holt, 2014, p.1)

Jennifer Holt's definition provides a very beneficial perspective for us to understand the general concept of such a society and their patriarchally based ideologies. As a matter of fact, within the consideration of the changes in relation with the concept of the family, it caused a subliminally inherited separation in terms of gender-based requirements and conformism, this concept of family was called as nuclear family, in her article Bridget O'Keefe states that: "America during the 1950s and 1960s was grounded in and centered on the conception of the nuclear family." (O'Keefe, 2014, pg.1). All in all, the purport of family and the process of emplacement of women in the society became a very subject to make a criticism. In this regard gender roles found its own position to fit into the societies' core. By that, women were targeted from vantage point of views and as time passes through what was expected from women became something cyclopean until it is domiciliated. That's the very reason of this paper to analyze the thematic qualities of *The Bell Jar* from a feminist perspective by considering gender roles. By doing so, the reader of this article will acquire an understanding within the cultural realities of this very society in the novel.

Based on the given critical compendiums, when we focus on Slyvia Plath's book "*The Bell Jar"* we can say that we see a strong reflection of the effects of these realities. Slyvia Plath's novel presents Esther Greenwood, the protagonist who tries to survive under the circumstances of 1950s America to become a writer, under an order which is constructed upon patriarchy. In fact, this main character represents every women individual who struggled under such circumstances to achieve their goals to obtain their freewill. The implication of these significant elements in the book initiates a path for the reader to observe the fatal errors in this patriarchal order and shows how it can damage one's real identity to build its stereotypical one, as Simone De Beauvoir states in her book *The Second Sex* "We are not born woman, we become it" (De Beauvoir 1949, p. 102).

The protagonist of the novel presents us one's individual struggle in her personal life and her clash with societal expectations, to summarize being a "woman" with all these attached norms which we had discussed so far. The novel can be considered a journey of Esther's self-discovery; her journey is complex and introspective which also highlights remarkable thoughts of Slyvia Plath. The journey of independency of Esther Green from patriarchy can only be achieved by breaking through the societal conformity so that she can achieve what she desires. In this respect, this paper will discuss Slyvia Plath's *"The Bell Jar"* from a feminist perspective in terms of gender roles and will focus on 1950s American Society by regarding societies' fatal errors, thus *"The Second Sex"* by Simone De Beauvoir will be mainly used as a primary source to initiate a comprehensive path to understand the overall perspective.

2. Literature Review

In this very paper the aim is to provide a critical point of view of 1950s American Society in terms of gender roles. As a matter of fact, the chosen work to be analyzed is *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. The reason of why this novel is the very subject of this significant argumentation is directly related with the novel and what it presents to reader with its narration. The novel depicts the life of Esther Greenwood, a young woman who lives in 1950s patriarchal American Society after World War II. Sylvia Plath with her novel makes a very distinguished feminist criticism toward this patriarchal order. Throughout the novel, reader is able to encounter with multiple layers of this system, for this reason the concept of gender roles to be discussed with its concepts of sexual double standards, identity, and patriarchy becomes more significant to make a criticism of 1950s American Society.

For the very aim of this paper, a process of literary review has been done by the writer. Since the very aim is regarding the compendiums of gender roles, *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir and her perception on the relevant topic has been considered and applied to the paper. The very reason is that Beauvoir in her important criticism in her book, explores the problematic manner of the term "gender roles" which is artificial and constructed by the patriarchal society. The terms are socially controversial for the sake of conformity of woman as the binary opposition of man, thus for her, it is also related with the society of the individual in which she lives. The very term transforms itself within the changes of the society. In fact, Simone De Beauvoir states that women are placed in a secondary position compared to its opposition to men. In social life they became the inferior one, so that the concept of the family became a tool to get rid of the unreality, as Simone De Beauvoir states in her book *The Second Sex "*socially she feels inferior to man; she has no hold on the world or the future; she will try to compensate for her frustrations through the child" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 632). Therefore, in such a position woman are expected to conform societal expectations to become submissive more than ever**.** Considering the information that is given in this section as a primary source *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir becomes very beneficial to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the 1950s cultural problems when it comes to the issue of gender. An implication of such perspective illuminates different ideas on Slyvia Plath's *The Bell Jar.*

On the other hand, İlkay Ağır explores the very alienation of women by regarding the historical context of the novel, in his article which is titled as *Identity crisis and alienation in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar*. He is mainly arguing the focal points of this patriarchal manner of approaching women. Thus, he mostly focuses on the main character Esther Greenwood in terms of gender roles and its relationship with her identity. As he states in his article "Especially, her female identity sharpens the role crisis between human and the society so that she was unconvinced by the unfair patriarchal society." (Ağır, 2015, p.37). His point of view provides a very significant in-depth perspective for the relevant study of this paper.

For last, Vanessa Martin Lamb's research in her article, The *1950's and the 1960's and the American Woman : the transition from the "housewife" to the feminist* is a very detailed and extensive research of the main argument of this very article, examines 1950's and 1960's American Society by considering the contextual elements of the *The Bell Jar* from a feminist perspective. The insights and the very discussion of her article are very beneficial for the further study of this article.

As matter of fact, Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* used in this article as a primary source to discuss the relevant term of gender roles in *The Bell jar*, on the other hand İlkay Ağır's, *Identity crisis and alienation in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar* and Vanessa Martin Lamb's article, The *1950's and the 1960's and the American Woman : the transition from the "housewife" to the feminist* are used mainly to make a further discussion to emphasize on the subject of identity and inferiority of women within a consideration of historical context of the novel. Other sources which are given in the references part are used to elaborate on the highlighting points.

3. The impact of 1950s "American Society" in *The Bell Jar*

1950s' trajectory in historical context is remarkable to comprehend the new ideal structure after World War II in sociological dimensions to examine gender roles in an in-depth approach within a consideration to its cultural phenomena. The cultural shift which emerged after the war traumatized the identity of women. There was a significant separation between man and woman in social context. In fact, mass media was very effective to spread this ideological understanding to initiate its path into culture. As an example, for mass media, a magazine article which is published under the name of "*The Good Wife's Guide" (1955)* is an example to this shift in culture. The article is a "guide" for women of its time in terms of manners of a woman and guides women how to act and talk in their marriage. If we give an example from the article, it would be easier to comprehend this very delusional ideology "Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking. He has just been with a lot of work-weary people."

(Housekeeping Monthly, 1955, p.1). In this regard, the given line actually is just "one" example of this gendered discrimination in American Society. This kind of publications were common to manipulate the society in a broader sense.

The identity of women became inferior as the manipulation progresses and the rise of patriarchy was inevitably taking its position in a very deep dimension, destructive, discriminative, separatist yet the ideal. For this very reason, in general perspective the manipulation obtained its own success by anti-feminists in American Society in terms of segregation between two sexes. As De Beauvoir states "The defiant position that American women occupy proves they are haunted by the feeling of their own femininity." (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.24). The patriarch order made American women to believe that their "femininity" is their very "inferiority" and its opposite is required to find the balance which is the essential "male", a masculine figure which can inherit this very balance.

Furthermore, Slyvia Plath as a woman novelist and poet was also struggling under same circumstances. This is the very reason that in this paper a part is also focusing on periodical realities. The purpose is to open a way to understand the sociological aspects in a wide range. Slyvia Plath as an author involved these harsh discriminative realities into her novel by using the character, Esther Greenwood. The compendiums given so far are the significant structure of *The Bell Jar*. The novel profoundly gives vivid images with its depiction of the 1950s American society and its effects on the protagonist. Esther depicts this ideology and its expectations through her observations in the novel; the following lines presents the reader what a woman would dream of if they conform to the expectations of the society:

> This hotel – the Amazon – was for women only, and they were mostly girls my age with wealthy parents who wanted to be sure their daughters would be living where men couldn't get at them and deceive them; and they were all going to posh secretarial schools like Katy Gibbs, where they had to wear hats and stockings and gloves to class, or they had just graduated from places like Katy Gibbs and were secretaries to executives and junior executives and simply hanging around in New York waiting to get married to some career man or other (Plath, 1963, 1.2)

In this part of the novel, Esther depicts the middle-class white women's education and their expectations. As it can be understood, she depicts an educational system that is structured for the "feminine", a school system in which women can learn manner and how to dress-up properly. The only goal a woman could achieve in work environment is being a secretary of a "powerful" man and the only and biggest dream is getting married with a rich man. Slyvia Plath purposefully depicts these lines with the help of her character; in a way she depicts the circumstances how women are manipulated. The term "feminine" is important to re-consider understanding the structure of this patriarchal society, because this term was not only depicted but was tried to be shown as inferior scientifically and psychologically to persuade society that women are inferior in their own nature, Simone De Beauvoir makes an important statement about this problematic act:

> it insists all the more fiercely that woman's place be in the home as her emancipation becomes a real threat; even within the working class, men tried to thwart women's liberation because women were becoming dangerous competitors—especially as women were used to working for low salaries. 6 To prove women's inferiority, antifeminists began to draw not only, as before, on religion, philosophy, and theology but also on science: biology, experimental psychology, and so forth. (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.32)

In Simone De Beauvoir's statements we can clearly indicate that, the era in which Esther Greenwood lives including the author Slyvia Plath, the term "woman" had been overwhelmingly targeted as a threat, its existence in an equal dimension compared to man was a problematic one if she can gain her freedom. This freedom must have been taking under control; in this regard this patriarchal order had implied some other formulations into the very core of the society so that woman can be transformed into an objectification process in which "it" is not a threat anymore. For this reason, they made it seem like they are inferior ones by using science and psychology, and this figure of speech was filled with errors. This problematic action is the important example of 1950s American Society.

This stereotypical indication of women found its process of objectification and it resulted with the general societal expectations as it is stated before, but in a more detailed perspective, the perception towards women from the perspective of male figures significantly shaped around the ideology that women should present themselves in their "feminine" positioning so that they can establish what is expected from them. This patriarch mentality has been shown through the pages of the novel and again Esther Greenwood is aware of these circumstances. She is aware of the expectations and does not want to conform to them, however, if she does not, it is hard for her to find a significant place for herself, in this respect we can also emphasize her dilemma, as James Vandrau states in his article that:

> The society Esther finds herself in levies different expectations for men and women in the workplace. The stereotype of woman focusing only on being homemakers, baby makers and housewives is beyond prominent and they are made to believe that caring for their spouses and children is better than pursuing their own dreams. (Vandrau, 2020, p.1)

As is mentioned in the introductory part of this research paper, we can state from the given quote that this dilemma is also a cause of the workplace too. In this regard we can emphasize that the traumatic experiences of women in 1950s are directly comes from the image of women as they are being a baby producing machines. In fact, the initiation of such a path in society resulted in another position for them to be submissive at their house. The role of being a housewife is more important compared to working when it comes to women. Thus, male should be the provider of money and women should be carers of their house, children, and husband. They should be sexually objected to please their male and should not try to achieve their dreams in life.

Since we had discussed some several facts about the representation of women in its different layers, the concept of marriage also another layer to consider to have a comprehensible understanding of the concept of marriage in 1950s through the lens of our protagonist Esther Greenwood. First of all, a reader of the novel can recognize that Esther sometimes makes comments on such societal expectations which in the very core of the society. She usually makes statements from her observations onto some specific concepts. In this regard, Esther Greenwood's familial background is very important to consider too. Since she comes from a family in which she also struggled from their expectations, she wanted to establish a new life in which she can success and can "earn" her own freewill. Her struggle in this very sense has been greatly emphasized in his article by İlkay Ağır, "Patriarchal society and deficiency of her family have negative influence on Esther's maturity." (Ağır, 2015, p.30) Than, one of the most important concept in this context is the concept of "marriage", in the novel Esther states that:

> A man's world is different from a woman's world and a man's emotions are different from a woman's emotions and only marriage can bring the two worlds and the two different sets of emotions together properly. My mother said this was something a girl didn't know about till it was too late, so she had to take the advice of people who were already experts, like a married woman. (Plath, 1963, 7.54)

As we can see from the given quotation, it is a very important depiction which depicts the ideal goal of a woman and what is expected from this woman to conform by her family. This quote indeed shows the reader that these stereotypes are not only expected from the outer layers of society, but it also comes from one's own family. In this respect, Esther concludes what was expected to conform, her mother's statement is the proof of very structure of 1950s. What is expected from her is being successful in marriage and it can only be obtained through her femininity. Her mother is a very good example of these stereotypical women figure which this society appreciates, and she expects her daughter to conform into the same dimension and only in that way a woman can make sense in a family and can serve what she is expected to. As Vanessa Martin Lamb states in her article "In reality American social culture at the time was entirely based on the family" (Lamb, 2012, p.11)

In terms of gender roles, a woman will not only be under the authority of her husband to serve, but in general sense, she is also expected to serve to other male figures. If she has a brother, father, she is also under the control of patriarchy from other sides too, Simone De Beauvoir comments on this subject and states that:

> After marriage, she is still subjected to the authority of her father or her oldest brother—authority that will also extend to her children—or of her husband after marriage, she is still subjected to the authority of her father or her oldest brother—authority that will also extend to her children—or of her husband. (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.106)

As a matter of fact, with this part of this research paper, the aim was to provide an overall picture of the 1950s American Society, and how it affected women individuals within a change in its cultural dimension. The perception of American Society changed after the effects of World War II. The society was disillusioned in this very post-war era, and it was structured by patriarchal order. Gender roles as an artificial terminology which is also constructed by this very patriarchal order initiated a new path to formulate new perspectives and ideologies towards women in every era of social life. An inferior image on "female" sex was indeed necessary to showcase the patriarchal power on women, thus this patriarchal order maintained to provide a stronger structure, to establish such a dimension, they used mass media, culture, and institution of family. *The Bell Jar* by Slyvia Plath with its narrations depicts the environment and circumstances of 1950s America from the perspectives of Esther Greenwood. The protagonists' observations are not fictional but are reality which are also observed by the author herself.

4.From a Feminist Perspective, Sexual Double Standards in The Bell Jar

To begin with, the very idea of gender roles as a term significantly stands for societal expectations. They are existing for "one" to conform them in their stereotypical dimension. In feminist criticism, the dynamics between men and women have always been criticized from multiple perceptions. Within these terminologies, in a broader sense, it must be understood that there is an important term to point out, which is the gender "male", this term has its own powerful indication compared to its opposite "female". The inferiority of the "female" one is pre-constructed before her birth. Thus, what it stands for is ambivalent in relevance to its culture. Hence, almost in every aspect this reality of power relations and women as being the one who is inferior does not change. In this regard we can say that women are not able to be independent if they conform these societal expectations, as Simon De Beauvoir states in her book that, "women have never constituted a closed and independent society; they form an integral part of the group, which is governed by males and in which they have a subordinate place" (Beauvoir, 1959, p. 567). As it is stated by Beauvoir herself, it can be said that the society itself is "male", but females are the ones who are just a part of it, the ones who are inferior. In fact, this situation provides a negative compendium which is hypocrisy in terms of sexual double standards.

Regarding the given dynamics above, the problematic manner of women in this context considering the novel is required to be analyzed from an extensive glance from a feminist perspective in terms gender roles; by doing so one can comprehend the ultimate errors and can see the reality of this two-faced patriarchal order. Considering what had been stated so far from a feminist glance in terms of gender roles, in *The Bell Jar* by Slyvia Plath, we can encounter with the examples of hypocrisy of gender roles in which we can find our protagonist Esther Greenwood in such position that it proves us Beauvoir is significantly right in her statement when stating that women are just "an integral part of the group". This integral part of the group is filled hypocrites, and our main character Esther is aware of this situation and states her disgust on it, "I couldn't stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not" (Plath, p.100). In this regard, Slyvia Plath as an author of her own era (1950s) makes a very distinguish feminist statement by involving such lines into her novel which shows the reader sexual double standards. For that very reason, Esther Greenwood is an important character to focus on. Because her lines and the way she speaks and behaves are all representations of a woman individual who struggles under the errors of the patriarchal society in terms of her own exploration of what gender roles are standing for in this two-faced system.

The difference when it comes to Esther is her "consciousness" compared to other women in her environment in which she criticizes and is aware of the error in her own society. Since she is aware of the reality that there is something wrong with the expectations of society, she understands its errors and is aware of its hypocritic dimension. For this reason, she is not that much in obedience as other women but is submissive because of fear of not fitting in conformity. This situation of women in general and how they repeat every faulty positional circumstance without illuminating its fallacies is summarized by Beauvoir in a very strong way.

> It is easy to see why woman clings to routine; time has for her no element of novelty, it is not a creative flow; because she is doomed to repetition, she sees in the future only a duplication of the past. If one knows the word and the formula, duration allies itself with the powers of fecundity – but this is itself

> subject to rhythm of the months, the seasons; the cycle of each pregnancy, each flowering, exactly reproduces the one that preceded. (Beauvoir, 1959, p.569)

This hypocrisy has been significantly illustrated in the novel with Esther's relationship with men. Her relationship with Buddy Willar is an example of this context. Their relationship is hard to give a complete definition since it is not stabilized and is in change with Esther's points of view towards this relationship. Their relationship is a very strong exemplification of what is expected from women in relationship and how women should react to fit into the conformist ideology of male dominated society. This relationship is really hard because of Esther's mental changes, her "feminine" is targeted as being the inferior one and it causes her to struggle when it comes to relationships. On the opposite side, Buddy Willard is an exact definition of how a man should act in societal expectations. He represents the general ideology of this patriarchal society and dictates what this ideology expects from woman. He is maybe not ideal for Esther but for sure he represents what other would expect to see when it comes to man. In this respect, Slyvia Plath created this male figure to put an image of the very hypocrisy which we had discussed so far. Esther Greenwood as the lead female figure in the novel makes a strong definition to show the reader how much hypocrite he is "I discovered quite by accident what an awful hypocrite he was, and now he wanted me to marry him, and I hated his guts." (Plath, p.65) The main point here is that Willard is introducing himself as conservative, morally illuminative, royal and such. However, he also shows his other side in his relationship with Esther. He is actually the opposite of what he introduced. Such that, he tries to have sexual relationship with Esther, it is something completely opposite to what Esther thinks about, thus, he talks about women's purity afterwards. This act is the very summary and is an example of the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society, the system itself is already corrupted and is contradictory "Now I saw he had only been pretending all this time to be so innocent" (Plath, p.47). As a matter of fact, Esther was affected by this reality very much, her point of view towards life makes her question life in her society. This idea of purity makes her disgust, and she hates the idea of being in a relationship with Willard, in other words living in this morally corrupt society.

Considering the given compendiums within the novels structured narration in terms of its relevance to gender roles, its hypocrite ideology causes mental frustration on the main character Esther Greenwood. Indeed, she cannot "accept nor reject" because she tries to fit in, for this very reason her identity becomes something which she struggles to make sense. Thus, this frustration causes her to think about suicidal thoughts to end her life. "I unscrewed the bottle of pills and started taking them swiftly, between gulps of water, one by one by one" (Plath, pg.191). Since she cannot fit in and cannot imagine any future for herself, there is no purpose in keeping up with the struggle in this hypocrite and patriarchal order.

When we consider the overall plot of the narrative in *The Bell Jar* a pervasive dimension occurs, the rising hypocrisy of gender roles in such society is narrated with the help of the protagonist Esther Greenwood. Slyvia Plath uses her main character to serve as an evident of that time of period, in this regard we can say that the very gender roles which we had discussed so far are illuminating the reader that gender roles are duplicitous in its core. For such a purpose, Slyvia Plath challenges her protagonist to make depictions of the harsh reality in which the reader can observe the patriarchal dynamics of her society, and this society comes up with sexual double standards, and these standards are ultimately hypocritic.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper discussed "*The Bell Jar"* (1963) by Slyvia Plath in terms of 1950s American Society within a perspective in which the argumentative focal point is gender roles. Considering the compendiums of gender roles, it can be stated that the significant positioning of women in a secondary dimension has been analyzed with the help of protagonist Esther Greenwood. In this respect, Slyvia Plath's narration in the novel unveils women's struggle within a critical point of view and it exposes the fatal errors of that very patriarchal society and how it attaches societal expectations over women. By unveiling these problematic dimensions, the readers of the novel can have a very significant comprehension of the novel. Thus, Slyvia Plath with *The Bell Jar*, narrates this cultural error of conformity of American Society regarding its hypocritic reality. As a matter of fact, a feminist approach towards the novel is indeed necessary to make an illuminative literary criticism. For the sake of this purpose *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone De Beauvoir along with other research perceptions of the field are used by the author of this article to underscore the significant and destructive realities which are attached upon women in 1950s conformist society, in fact, such an attempt shows us paratexts of this gender based discriminative attitudes of the patriarchal order. Hence, understanding these layers shows the reader that the characters of the novel are inevitably representations of different aspects of this hypocrite ideology under different formulations. All in all, the aim of this paper showed us that that *"The Bell Jar"* by Slyvia Plath remains as a touch stone in 21st century when it comes to gender studies in terms of feminism, because the novel itself is in fact a criticism of male domination and its effects on women individuals. The novel itself challenges its society to question over these expected gendered roles and societal expectations which are expected by male dominated society.

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