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Beyond the Mainstream Approaches: Constructivist and Cultural Turns in Indonesian International Relations Scholarship (2015-2025)

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Abstract:

This study examines the extent to which the *constructivist turn* and the *cultural turn* are reflected in Indonesian International Relations (IR) journal articles published between 2015 and 2025, and how these *turns* manifest in scholars' research topics and analytical approaches. Using a qualitative content analysis of accredited Indonesian IR articles (published in SINTA 1-2 journals), the study finds a post-2015 rise in constructivist-cultural approaches, with the strongest concentration around 2019–2022. The turns manifest across four prominent clusters: (1) cultural diplomacy and soft power; (2) transnational issues and human rights, including advocacy networks and norm diffusion; (3) foreign policy and conflict framed through identity and ideational narratives; and (4) critical security studies, particularly securitization through discourse. While only some articles explicitly label "constructivism", the majority apply constructivist reasoning implicitly by centering norms, identity, discourse, values, and representation as key explanatory variables. Overall, the findings indicate a substantively plural, contextual, and reflective trajectory in Indonesian IR research between 2015 and 2025.

Keywords: Constructivist Turn; Cultural Turn; Indonesian International Relations.

Introduction

In the history of International Relations (IR) scholarship, both globally and in Indonesia, the field has been dominated by rationalist approaches, specifically realism and liberalism. These paradigms emphasize material factors, such as military power and economic capability, while focusing on the state as the primary unit of analysis. However, in the post-Cold War era, global IR scholarship witnessed a growing constructivist wave arguing that the structure and dynamics of international life are shaped by ideas and social

interaction, not merely by material power. As John Ruggie (1998) underlines, constructivism *"is about human consciousness and its role in international life"*; accordingly, constructivist theory places consciousness and intersubjectivity at the center of explaining IR phenomena. In other words, international reality is not determined solely by the distribution of material capabilities (such as the number of nuclear weapons or economic size), but also by shared structures of meaning (intersubjective understandings) negotiated and sustained among actors.

Alongside this constructivist development, IR scholars in the 1990s and 2000s increasingly recognized that cultural factors (e.g., religion, ethnicity, ideology, and shared values) play an important role in global politics. Works such as *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Huntington, 1996), *The Culture of National Security* (Katzenstein, 1996), and *Writing Security* (Campbell, 1992) helped popularize what is often described as a "cultural turn" in IR, an expanding scholarly focus on culture, identity, values, and norms as explanatory variables for state behavior. Put differently, the cultural turn has reasserted the role of culture in IR, focusing on beliefs, representations, collective identities, including how political communities imagine one another and how such imaginaries shape global politics (Carbo-Catalan and Roig-Sanz, 2022).

In Indonesia, signals of constructivist and cultural turns became more pronounced in the mid-2010s. During this period, Indonesian IR academics increasingly mobilized constructivism as an alternative to mainstream paradigms across a range of issues, including public diplomacy. Rachmawati (2017), for instance, argues that studies of Indonesia's public diplomacy have been largely dominated by rationalist framings that treat public diplomacy as an instrument to pursue national interests through image-building, and she therefore proposes a constructivist approach that foregrounds national identity, relationship-building, and the role of domestic actors in shaping diplomatic purposes. Similar sensibilities have also appeared in studies of terrorism (Amin, 2018), non-traditional security (Habibah et al., 2021; Setiawan and Hapsari, 2018; Sudiar, 2019), and on foreign policy (Ubaedillah et al., 2023), in which ideational and cultural factors are increasingly brought into analysis—an orientation that was comparatively uncommon in earlier decades.

These developments suggest that Indonesian IR scholarship over the past decade (2015-2025) has increasingly moved "beyond the mainstream" (rationalist explanations), signaling a dual transformation, a Constructivist Turn and a Cultural Turn, toward more reflective, ideational, and culturally oriented approaches. This shift is not merely an academic trend, but an organic response to an increasingly fluid global environment in which threats are no longer limited to military invasion, but also emerge through contestation over narratives, identities, and norms.

Despite the growing recognition of constructivist approaches in academic discussions and broader debates pointing to more ideational and pluralist directions in IR (Acharya, 2014; Rosyidin, 2015), there remains a lack of systematic research that maps the extent to which constructivist and cultural perspectives have substantively shaped Indonesian IR journal articles during 2015–2025 period. This study therefore asks: *"To what extent are the 'constructivist turn' and 'cultural turn' reflected in Indonesian IR journal articles published between 2015 and 2025? And, how do these turns manifest in scholars' research topics and analytical approaches?"*

To address these questions, the study conducts a content analysis of 19 peer-reviewed Indonesian IR journal articles accredited in SINTA 1-2 and published between 2015 and 2025. These articles are selected because they represent influential strands

within Indonesian IR (appearing in nationally reputable journals) and explicitly adopt constructivist frameworks, particularly through emphasis on culture or identity. Through this analysis, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of theoretical trajectories in Indonesian IR research, assess their contributions to disciplinary development, and identify the challenges involved in integrating these perspectives into Indonesia's evolving IR scholarship.

Methods

This study applies a qualitative approach with a content-analysis research design, using journal articles as the primary data source. The unit of analysis consists of Indonesian IR scholarly articles published between 2015 and 2025. In total, 19 articles were purposively selected from Indonesian IR journals accredited in SINTA 1 or SINTA 2 to ensure academic quality and to represent the country's mainstream scholarly literature. The articles were drawn from multiple journals across institutions, including *Journal of ASEAN Studies* (SINTA-1), *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional* (SINTA-2), *Jurnal Ilmiah Hubungan Internasional* (SINTA-2), *Global Strategis* (SINTA-2), *Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional* (SINTA-2), and *Andalas Journal of International Studies* (SINTA-2).

Data collection began by reviewing the 2015-2025 publication archives of the target journals and then screening articles based on the following criteria: (a) the article explicitly references "constructivism" in the abstract, introduction, or methods section; (b) it positions ideational-cultural variables (e.g., norms, identity, discourse, perceptions, values) as key explanatory factors; and (c) it addresses themes with a strong overlap with culture or identity (e.g., cultural diplomacy, national identity, religion in IR, human security, and related topics). Subsequently, the selected articles were subjected to intensive reading and analysis to identify relevant content units (sentences or paragraphs) that articulate the analytical lens, key concepts (ideas, culture, identity), and arguments or findings concerning the role of ideational-cultural factors in addressing the research questions.

Results

This study examines 19 Indonesian IR journal articles (2015–2025) accredited in SINTA 1–2 and oriented toward constructivist or cultural perspectives. Chronologically, these journal articles show a rising tendency in constructivist and cultural publications after the mid-2010s, with the most visible concentration occurring around 2019–2022, alongside the strengthening interest in constructivist and cultural approaches. For instance, the 2019–2020 period is represented by studies on Transnational Advocacy Networks and LGBT rights legalization in Thailand (Tyas, 2019), as well as a constructivist analysis of Trump's claim over Jerusalem (Ruhiat and Akim, 2020). Meanwhile, the most recent publications up to 2024–2025 include research on the ASEAN human rights regime (Maulana and Putra, 2024) and the diffusion of norms related to the Sexual Violence Crime Law in Indonesia (Yunazwardi and Ikawati, 2025).

From a thematic standpoint, the themes of the analyzed articles are diverse and can be grouped into: (1) Cultural diplomacy and soft power, such as Indonesia's cultural diplomacy through the Saman Gayo dance in reinforcing national identity (Alunaza, 2015), and South Korea's public diplomacy in Indonesia through the King Sejong Institute (KSI) (Hutagalung et al., 2019); (2) Non-traditional security and human rights, including the diffusion of gender norms in Bali (Wiranata, 2021), advocacy for LGBT rights (Tyas,

2019), efforts to address sexual violence (Yunazwardi and Ikawati, 2025), and the ASEAN human rights regime (Maulana and Putra, 2024): (3) Foreign policy and conflict, such as identity narratives in Vanuatu's pro-Papua policy (Hanafi and Annahda, 2022), Dao philosophy China's foreign policy (Khasanah et al., 2021), Trump's claim over Jerusalem (Ruhiat and Akim, 2020), and US-mediated Israel–Arab normalization in the Israel–Palestine context (Derajat and Kurniawan, 2022); and (4) Critical security and securitization, for example the construction of "refugees" as a threat in Hungary (Rachmat, 2022). This thematic variety suggests that the constructivist and cultural turns are not restricted to a single issue; rather, they extend across multiple IR subfields, from diplomacy and security to area studies, indicating the widening application of these perspectives in Indonesia.

The Constructivist Turn

To discuss how the constructivist paradigm is employed in Indonesian IR research, one key question concerns the extent to which constructivism is referenced explicitly or implicitly in these journal articles. The findings indicate two patterns: roughly one third of the articles openly identify "constructivism" as their theoretical framework, while the rest adopt an ideational standpoint without consistently stating it explicitly.

Explicitly, several articles affirm a constructivist approach in their abstracts or methodological sections. Derajat and Kurniawan (2022) clearly state that their study uses a constructivist perspective to explain the normalization of Israel–Arab relations. Similarly, Ruhiat and Akim (2020) explicitly employ a constructivist approach to interpret Donald Trump's unilateral claim over Jerusalem. Rachmat (2022) even combines a constructivist perspective with securitization theory from the Copenhagen School, indicating an integration of ideational frameworks within security studies. Another example is Hanafi and Annahda (2022), who apply holistic constructivism in a relatively sustained manner to bridge Vanuatu's domestic and international identity. Azza Bimantara (2023) goes further by placing the term "Constructivist" directly in the title of the article: "A *Constructivist* Analysis of China's Geopolitical Economic Strategy Toward Africa: A Case of Sino-Tanzanian South-South Cooperation." These authors' decisions to treat constructivism as an analytical foundation suggest that, in Indonesian IR scholarship, constructivism has become a recognized and legitimate framework for addressing research questions.

On the other hand, most articles implicitly reflect a constructivist paradigm through their emphasis on ideational-cultural variables, even when they do not explicitly use the term. In other words, they use a constructivist logic without stating "constructivism" directly. Pamungkas (2018) does not mention "constructivism," yet the analysis clearly adopts a reflective stance by foregrounding the "socio-cultural dimension" in border management, an aspect often overlooked in more conventional political approaches. Likewise, Tyas (2019) discusses changes in Thai society's social construction following political reforms regarding LGBT issues, showing how domestic cultural values play a key role in the acceptance of LGBT rights. Although Tyas does not explicitly invoke "constructivism," the use of the Transnational Advocacy Network framework alongside the concept of domestic cultural values aligns with constructivist reasoning (i.e., ideas and local norms shape policy outcomes).

A further illustration can be found in the study of South Korea's public diplomacy in Indonesia (Hutagalung et al., 2019), which employs a conceptual framework of strategic public diplomacy. At first glance, this may appear pragmatic; however, its focus on cultural

diplomacy in the King Sejong Institute program underscores the importance of perceptions and socio-cultural interactions. Without explicitly labeling the approach as "constructivist," the article reflects constructivist reasoning, because Hutagalung et al. analyze how Korea's image and identity are shaped through cultural engagement with Indonesian audiences, an intersubjective analysis characteristic of constructivism.

Overall, these findings suggest that the *constructivist turn* in Indonesian IR research appears in two forms. First, there is explicit theoretical articulation, which reinforces the legitimacy of constructivism as a framework that Indonesian IR scholars openly recognize and employ. Second, there is substantive application, meaning that constructivist ideas are embedded in the analysis, norms, identity, and discourse are treated as explanatory factors even when constructivism is not named explicitly. Notably, none of the articles relies entirely on a materialist–rationalist logic without incorporating ideational variables. All articles contain constructivist or cultural elements to varying degrees. This is consistent with the broader pattern in which approximately 12 of the 19 articles (63%) explicitly mention terms such as identity, norms, discourse, or values as key concepts, and nearly half refer to "social construction" or a constructivist perspective more directly.

The Cultural Turn: Culture, Identity, and Representation

Based on the analysis, the *cultural turn* is evident in scholars' strong attention to culture, identity, and representational practices in the Indonesian IR studies. Across the selected articles, ideational–cultural factors are consistently treated as key explanatory variables.

Identity emerges as a central concept in many of the reviewed articles. Rumkabu (2022) shows that development failure has contributed to the construction of Papuan identity marked by anger and resistance toward the state; the argument suggests that only by understanding what "development" means from the perspective of indigenous Papuans can we grasp why aspirations for independence persist. This is an identity-based explanation grounded in collective meaning-making, rather than a purely economic–political calculation. Similarly, Ruhiat and Akim (2020) highlight identity-related elements in Trump-era policy framing, particularly through the construction of Israel as a "friend" and Palestine as an "enemy." Their analysis illustrates how identity categories and perceptions can help explain controversial political decisions.

Derajat and Kurniawan (2022) further emphasize the role of identity and values in Israel–Arab normalization, arguing that the Abraham Accords were shaped by actors' identity, interest, intention, and values, rather than material interests alone. Hanafi and Annahda (2022) also analyze Vanuatu's identity both domestic and social as a background for its support of Papuan independence. Their findings reinforce the view that Vanuatu's foreign policy is constructed through anti-colonial orientations and Melanesian solidarity, meaning that cultural identity can be a decisive driver of policy, it is beyond geopolitical considerations.

Beyond identity, *norms and cultural values* stand out as prominent variables. Tyas (2019) provides a clear example: political change in Thailand contributed to the repression of tolerance norms associated with Buddhist beliefs, yet advocacy networks sought to reactivate Buddhist values of openness to support the legalization of LGBT rights. In other words, global norms of equality were articulated through local values (Buddhist teachings), which helped foster broader acceptance of LGBT communities. This illustrates the cultural turn in human rights research, where local value contexts become central to

explaining policy trajectories. Meanwhile, Wiranata (2021) examines how activists in Bali diffuse global gender-equality norms into a patriarchal local context. The study shows that global norms are not absorbed automatically; they require adaptation through cultural glocalization, as activists align global equality frames with Balinese traditional values to build resonance and acceptance. Balinese customary values become a medium through which gender-equality ideas are translated into locally meaningful terms, this is an empirical demonstration of how local culture shapes the reception of international norms.

It is important to note that several articles explore *representation and cultural narratives* as instruments of diplomacy or security. Karamy and Bainus (2020), for instance, interpret the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra as a representation of cross-cultural peace messaging in the Middle East through music. Music, as a cultural product, is treated as a diplomatic language capable of communicating a *shared imagination* of peace. Likewise, Alunaza (2015) shows that efforts to secure UNESCO recognition for the Saman dance as intangible cultural heritage function as a strategy of cultural diplomacy to consolidate Indonesia's national identity in international forums. Cultural representation through UNESCO recognition is framed as Indonesian soft power (an attempt to elevate national image and gain global acknowledgment). Collaboration between the state and local communities enables the Saman dance to be presented as a symbol of Indonesia's cultural distinctiveness, which in turn strengthens national confidence and improves Indonesia's international image. This is a concrete example of the cultural turn in diplomacy, where culture becomes a primary diplomatic asset.

Regarding *narrative and discourse*, several security-related studies adopt constructivist approaches by examining the construction of discourse rather than material capabilities. Rachmat (2022) explains how the Hungarian government under Viktor Orbán produced an "Muslim refugee" threat narrative to reshape public perceptions. In this context, national security is reframed through speech acts that cast refugees as dangerous "others". The cultural turn is visible in Rachmat's focus on intersubjective meaning: security is treated as an intersubjective condition, and the threat to Hungary is understood as a discursive construction formed through political communication. More broadly, this reflects the cultural turn in security studies, where stigma, images, and narratives are positioned as key variables rather than merely evaluating weapons, alliances, or other material indicators.

In summary, within this purposively selected articles, all analyzed articles incorporate cultural or ideational elements in their analysis and place *culture* and *idea* at the center of explanation. Culture and identity appear as independent variables, intervening mechanisms, and contextual foundations. Representational practices, whether through music, dance, rhetoric, or symbols, are recognized as having tangible effects in international relations.

Research Theme Clusters

This section presents the thematic clustering results of the content analysis. By mapping the research topics across the 19 articles analyzed, several thematic clusters can be identified where the influence of both the constructivist and cultural turns appears most pronounced. These clusters include: (1) cultural diplomacy and soft power, (2) transnational issues and human rights, (3) foreign policy, and (4) critical security and securitization. Within these clusters, constructivist or cultural approaches were most frequently applied by Indonesian scholars during 2015–2025.

1. Cultural diplomacy and soft power

This cluster covers studies on the use of cultural elements in diplomacy and nation-branding efforts by states. Based on the analysis, the cultural turn is highly dominant in this cluster, especially about public diplomacy. Public diplomacy studies in the selected articles consistently place culture or identity at the center of explanation. Key examples include the study of Saman dance diplomacy (Alunaza, 2015) and South Korea's public diplomacy through the King Sejong Institute Center (Hutagalung et al., 2019), both of which treat cultural resources as core analytical variables. The Saman dance study highlights that cultural diplomacy is closely tied to cultural recognition and the interaction between state initiatives and broader socio-cultural stakeholders, rather than being reducible to state-driven promotion alone. Meanwhile, the King Sejong Institute Center study finds that people-to-people engagement through Korean language and cultural programs, within the broader attraction of Korean popular culture (Hallyu), contributes to the formation of a positive image of South Korea in Indonesia.

Rachmawati (2017) criticizes Indonesian public diplomacy research that has been overly instrumentalist and proposes a constructivist orientation that foregrounds identity and relational dynamics (Rachmawati, 2017). In line with this critique and proposal, post-2017 public diplomacy research increasingly adopts a more reflective lens. Cultural diplomacy emerges as a subfield undergoing a visible "turn", as Indonesian scholars increasingly interpret diplomacy not merely as state propaganda but as an arena of cultural interaction. This marks a significant shift in Indonesian research on public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy.

2. Transnational issues and human rights

Another prominent cluster concerns transnational movements, norm diffusion, and human rights. In this cluster, the constructivist turn appears particularly evident, given that research in this area is connected to values and norms. Four articles specifically focus on advocacy and norm diffusion: Tyas (2019) on LGBT advocacy networks in Thailand, Khurun'in (2017) on the formation of a migrant domestic workers' rights protection movement in Malaysia, Wiranata (2021) on gender activists in Bali, and Yunazwardi and Ikawati (2025) on implementing international norms on the elimination of sexual violence in Indonesia. Across these studies, a shared analytical thread is the examination of how global ideas and norms are advanced across borders. Their findings indicate that cultural and ideational factors significantly shape advocacy outcomes. Tyas (2019) shows that societal acceptance of LGBT rights advocacy is closely linked to the alignment between LGBT-rights discourse and domestic cultural values and norms associated with Buddhist teachings. Khurun'in (2017) demonstrates how civil society networks frame migrant worker issues through universal human rights language and forms of collective identity, particularly cosmopolitan and humanitarian identities, to mobilize cross-border solidarity. Wiranata (2021) underscores the importance of glocal adaptation; rather than simply adapting Western norms, Balinese activists adjust strategies so that global gender-equality norms can gain acceptance within specific segments of Balinese cultural traditions.

These studies suggest that constructivist approaches provide strong explanatory leverage for transnational issues where norms, identity, and meaning-making processes are central. At the same time, the cultural turn is visible in this cluster because, without

attending to ideational factors (local values, community identities, and public perceptions), it becomes difficult to explain why advocacy succeeds in certain contexts or places but fails in others. Accordingly, scholars studying LGBT rights, migrant labor, gender equality, and sexual violence increasingly treat constructivism as a foundational analytical framework.

3. Foreign policy

The next cluster centers on foreign policy analysis grounded in identity and ideational factors. Traditionally, foreign policy analysis in IR has often emphasized material national interests and relied heavily on realist or liberal assumptions. However, the selected articles indicate that constructivist approaches are increasingly used in this domain. For example, Hanafi and Annahda (2022) analyze Vanuatu's foreign policy stance through the lens of historical identity and anti-colonial ideology. This diverges from mainstream accounts that might interpret Vanuatu's policy primarily as strategic positioning for external support. In another case, Khasanah et al. (2021) interpret China's geopolitical strategy in the South Pacific through Daoist philosophy (particularly the yin–yang notion of balance), arguing that China's behavior involves a culturally grounded paradigm that combines soft and hard power. This represents a clear signal of the cultural turn, as Indonesian scholars incorporate non-Western perspectives (in this case, East Asian philosophy) to explain the foreign policy behavior of a major power, an element that would likely be overlooked by strictly materialist lenses.

In addition, Ruhiat and Akim (2020) and Derajat and Kurniawan (2022) can also be placed within this foreign policy cluster, as both address U.S. policy in the Middle East. These studies emphasize how leadership ideology and domestic identity politics within the U.S. (Trump administration), shape policy choices in the region. This challenges conventional IR assumptions that foreign policy is driven primarily by material interests; instead, identity-based domestic politics and culturally inflected sentiments are treated as crucial explanatory variables. Implicitly, these works support the constructivist thesis that identities shape interests (Wendt, 1992).

It can be argued that the constructivist turn in Indonesian foreign policy studies has become more visible, indicated by the appearance of such analyses in reputable journals. This suggests an expanding analytical horizon in Indonesian IR scholarship, meaning scholars increasingly recognize that explaining foreign policy, especially on normatively charged issues (e.g., Palestine–Israel, decolonization claims, and related cases), requires attention to identity, perceptions, and norms.

4. Critical security and securitization

The final cluster involves security studies that challenge traditional approaches, including refugee and migration issues (Rachmat, 2022), as well as themes linked to Islamophobia and security narratives (Ruhiat and Akim, 2020; and implicitly in Rachmat, 2022), alongside human security concerns (also present across several human-rights-related articles). The constructivist turn is evident in this cluster through the explicit use of securitization theory. Rachmat (2022), for instance, applies Copenhagen School securitization theory to analyze Hungary's anti-refugee policies. This indicates that Indonesian security studies increasingly adopt constructivist approaches that emphasize intersubjective processes rather than treating threats as purely objective facts. The findings highlight threat construction through political discourse, via leaders' speech acts

and amplification by mass media, in the end producing legitimacy for restrictive policies. For traditional security studies, such discursive mechanisms are often under-examined; in this sense, the "turn" not only shifts the analytical lens but also enriches security analysis.

In summary, the constructivist and cultural turns are most clearly visible in research areas that are characterized by with ideational dimensions: cultural diplomacy and soft power, transnational issues and human rights, identity-based foreign policy, and critical security and securitization.

How Do Ideas and Culture "Work"?

One important contribution of the constructivist and cultural turns in IR is that these paradigms offer alternative explanations of how ideational factors (ideas, culture, and norms) shape actors' behaviour and outcomes in international politics. Based on the 19 articles analysed, several mechanisms illustrate how ideas and culture "work" in IR: (1) shaping actors' perceptions and interests; (2) facilitating collective action through solidarity; (3) providing legitimacy and policy justification; (4) driving actors' behavioural change through norm internalisation.

1. Shaping actors' perceptions and interests

Constructivist and cultural perspectives help explain how ideas and identity shape actors' interests and actions. For example, Ruhiat and Akim (2020) show that Donald Trump's identity and ideological orientation, particularly his Islamophobic suspicion toward Islam, contributed to how the United States perceived Israel as an ally aligned with "American values" while viewing Palestine as the "enemy." The mechanism is that identity-based bias (Islamophobia) encourages an exaggerated perception of threat from Muslims, which in turn supports pro-Israel and anti-Palestine policy. In other words, threat perception is socially constructed through identity, rather than produced by purely "objective" rational calculation.

A similar mechanism appears in Rachmat (2022), who argues that in Hungary, Viktor Orbán constructed a sense of threat through the rhetoric that "refugees are terrorists." The mechanism operates through a *speech act* that links refugees to terrorism, persuading the audience (the Hungarian public) that their security is endangered and thereby legitimising policy responses. These cases reflect a central constructivist insight: threats are "constructed," and security is intersubjective.

Both studies show that ideology and identity often operate through framing (defining who as "friend" and who as "enemy"). What is considered a threat becomes the result of ideational and perceptual framing. Once a frame is formed and accepted intersubjectively, actors tend to behave in line with that frame. This constructivist mechanism differs from realist assumptions that treat threats as essentially objective and material.

2. Facilitating collective action through solidarity

Several studies suggest that ideas and culture can enable cooperation across actors and beyond state borders. Khurun'in (2017), for instance, finds that a migrant domestic workers' protection movement in Malaysia developed transnational networks partly because activists mobilised a cosmopolitan identity and relied on inclusive claims grounded in universal human rights. The mechanism works through an identity frame that

positions "us" as humans who possess rights; and as a result, cross-border solidarity becomes more likely and collective action can emerge. In this sense, ideas (human-rights universalism) function as an identity bridge that connects actors across national boundaries.

3. Providing legitimacy and policy justification

In constructivist paradigm, ideas, values, and norms can legitimise political actions taken by actors. Rachmat (2022) illustrates that Orbán's threat discourse ultimately offered a normative justification for Hungary to pursue exceptional policies that risk violating the non-refoulement principle (refugee protection) in its treatment of refugees. As described above, once the public accepts the notion of an "existential threat", extreme policies (often inconsistent with human-rights standards) can be regarded as legitimate in the name of national security.

In public diplomacy or cultural diplomacy, Alunaza (2015) shows that the Indonesian government used cultural recognition (the UNESCO acknowledgement of Tari Saman) to justify claims about a diverse and culturally rich national identity. Such recognition can be projected internationally, meaning cultural achievement becomes a source of legitimacy and soft power.

Meanwhile, Khasanah et al. (2021) argue that China's Daoist foreign policy narrative provides legitimacy for an unconventional strategy that blends hard power and soft power. Because Daoist philosophy emphasises harmony between yin and yang, China can rationalise the combination of military approaches and foreign aid to other country as consistent with its identity. In this context, traditional ideology supplies a justificatory narrative for foreign policy, enabling strategies criticised by others to be defended as "identity consistent".

4. Driving actors' behavioural change through norm internalisation

In their analyses, Wiranata (2021), Yunazwardi and Ikawati (2025) emphasise that once new norms and values are internalised, actors tend to behave according to those norms. Indonesia ratified CEDAW in 1984, yet full internalisation has remained incomplete due to domestic resistance (Yunazwardi and Ikawati, 2025). However, the passage of the TPKS (Sexual Violence Law) in 2022 signals that certain elements of the norm have begun to be internalised, meaning the state has started adjusting behaviour (legal rules) toward global standards. Wiranata (2021) notes a related pattern: internationally, gender-equality norms have been accepted widely (with 189 states ratifying CEDAW), yet at the local level in Bali these norms still require adaptation and deeper embedding. Ideally, after diffusion and adjustment, an external norm becomes part of local values, so that local actors follow it without coercion.

To sum up this section, the norm-internalisation mechanism above shows how ideas and culture can affect real-world actions. Ideational and cultural factors are no longer treated as mere "superstructure," but are understood as capable of: (1) shaping actors' perspectives and interests; (2) facilitating collective action through solidarity; (3) providing a basis for legitimacy and policy justification; and (4) driving behavioural change through norm internalisation.

One additional point is that several articles also combine ideational mechanisms with material considerations. Bimantara (2023), for example, shows the interaction between material interests and normative commitments in China's geopolitical-economic

strategy. This suggests that constructivist-oriented scholars are not "naïve" about power, they recognise that material capabilities still matter, while arguing that ideas and norms shape how material interests are interpreted and pursued.

Implications of the Constructivist and Cultural Turns for Indonesian IR Research Traditions

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that a constructivist turn and a cultural turn have occurred in Indonesian International Relations (IR) research during the 2015-2025. This dual transformation has encouraged Indonesian IR scholarship to move beyond mainstream approaches, particularly realism and liberalism, that previously dominated the field. Several important implications emerge from these findings:

First, constructivist and cultural approaches have helped fill the "gaps" that were often overlooked or could not be adequately addressed by traditional IR approaches (realism and liberalism). Earlier Indonesian IR research tended to rely heavily on established, materialist Western theories, for example, explaining foreign policy mainly through concepts such as *hegemonic stability* or *security dilemma*, while paying limited attention to local identity factors. In more recent studies, Indonesian scholars have increasingly brought local values, national identity, and even non-Western philosophical perspectives into their analyses. This development supports the "Global IR" agenda (Acharya, 2014), which calls for incorporating non-Western cultural perspectives in the analysis of international issues. In other words, the cultural turn in Indonesia is not merely an adaptation of Western constructivism; it also begins to bring Global South intellectual voices (Eastern philosophies and local wisdom) into academic debates.

Second, the constructivist and cultural turns have enriched research methods and analytical approaches in Indonesian IR. These perspectives allow scholars to employ more diverse qualitative methods, including discourse analysis, interpretive case studies, and phenomenological approaches (including culturally grounded observation in qualitative inquiry).

Third, in terms of empirical contribution, the articles analyzed show that constructivist and cultural perspectives can provide explanations that are more contextual and relevant to Indonesian and regional cases. For instance, understanding Indonesia's cultural politics in UNESCO forums (such as the case of the Saman dance) or Vanuatu's stance on Papua is difficult to explain through materialist approaches like realism, but becomes more clearly interpretable when examined through the lens of cultural identity. This suggests that Indonesian IR research can become more meaningful and useful for Indonesian policymakers.

Finally, the constructivist and cultural turns also bring a critical implication: they encourage epistemological reflection within the Indonesian IR community that knowledge (especially in the social sciences) is not value-free. Applying constructivist or cultural approaches while contextualizing them within Indonesian perspectives signals that Indonesian scholars have begun to work with theory in a more active way, rather than simply consuming Western theories. If this trend continues, it may open pathways for the development of distinctly Indonesian IR theories grounded in local culture (an "Indonesian IR Theory").

In summary, the constructivist turn and the cultural turn in Indonesia have emerged simultaneously and have mutually complemented one another. These approaches go beyond the mainstream not by eliminating traditional perspectives, but by

enriching Indonesian IR scholarship. Ultimately, Indonesian IR research traditions become more plural, contextual, and reflective.

Conclusion

This study finds that constructivist-cultural orientations increased after the mid-2010s and continued into more recent publications. These turns are visible across several thematic clusters, ranging from cultural diplomacy and soft power, transnational issues and human rights, foreign policy, to critical security and securitization, this indicates a widening of Indonesian IR research beyond material-centered explanations. At the level of analytical approach, the articles employ constructivist reasoning both explicitly (by stating constructivism as a framework) and implicitly (by treating norms, identity, discourse, values, and representation as key explanatory variables). In conclusion, the findings suggest that the constructivist and cultural turns have been substantively present in Indonesian IR scholarship during 2015-2025 and have contributed to a research tradition that is more plural, contextual, and reflective.

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