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# Indonesia's maritime connectivity development: domestic and international challenges

I Gede Wahyu Wicaksana 

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## ABSTRACT

This study considers the political aspects of the Joko Widodo government's megaproject to build an integrated marine logistic system known as the *tol laut*. Expanding the existing literature which gives details about the contextual obstacles faced by and the prospects for the Indonesian government to pursue its infrastructure ambitions, the study argues that notwithstanding the relevance of the *tol laut* for advancing the Indonesian economy, it is inevitably entangled with dynamic internal and external environments which can unfavourably distort the construction processes. This is the way of understanding the political economy of Indonesia's development issues which allows for the juxtaposition of domestic political and international relations factors as its framework of analysis. The discussion is divided into four sections. Section one explains the conceptual and methodological foundation of the

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effect of international relations of powerful regional actors and Jakarta's diplomatic capacity to the on-going *tol laut*. The concluding section summarizes the findings of the study.

**Q KEYWORDS:** Indonesia Maritime Connectivity *tol laut* National Economy Domestic Politics  
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## Disclosure statement

The author does not have conflict of interests with third parties.

## Notes on contributor

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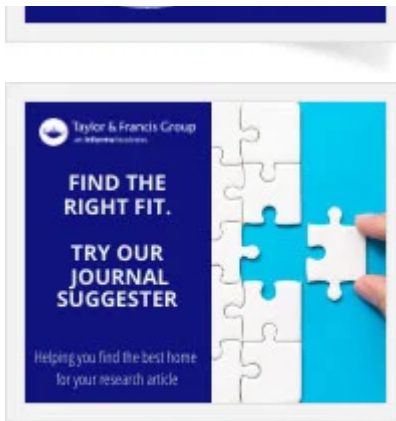


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# Indonesia's maritime connectivity development: domestic and international challenges

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## ABSTRACT

This study considers the political aspects of the Joko Widodo government's megaproject to build an integrated marine logistic system known as the *tol laut*. Expanding the existing literature which gives details about the contextual obstacles faced by and the prospects for the Indonesian government to pursue its infrastructure ambitions, the study argues that notwithstanding the relevance of the *tol laut* for advancing the Indonesian economy, it is inevitably entangled with dynamic internal and external environments which can unfavourably distort the construction processes. This is the way of understanding the political economy of Indonesia's development issues which allows for the juxtaposition of domestic political and international relations factors as its framework of analysis. The discussion is divided into four sections. Section one explains the conceptual and methodological foundation of the study. Section two outlines the importance of the *tol laut* to Indonesian national economic development. Section three looks at how the current domestic political settings pose structural hurdles to Widodo's *tol laut*, and section four observes the effect of international relations of powerful regional actors and Jakarta's diplomatic capacity to the on-going *tol laut*. The concluding section summarizes the findings of the study.

## KEYWORDS

Indonesia; Maritime Connectivity; *tol laut*; National Economy; Domestic Politics; International Situations; Diplomatic Capacity

## Introduction

This study is concerned with the megaproject of President Joko Widodo's government to build an integrated marine logistic system called *tol laut*. It is incorporated into the country's publicized maritime axis doctrine (Chandramohan, 2016: 21; Witular, 2014). The study analyses how the political environments influence the development of the *tol laut*. It is significant because the discourse and policy of the mega *tol laut* project emerges amid the continuing fragmented governance caused by the elite's political economic interests as well as the problematic application of administration, which has been decentralized. In this context, democratization renders the social and political milieus where Widodo's prioritization of maritime infrastructural development is subject to political incompatibilities and tensions.

Despite the fact that Indonesia is an archipelago,<sup>1</sup> the maritime sector received little profile in the New Order government's long-term development planning (*rencana pembangunan jangka panjang*) and implementation in which infrastructure construction was largely concentrated in the mainland areas (Booth, 1992). Since the democratic *Reformasi* (reform) era began in 1998, the concept of turning towards maritime development became more and more popular. It was voiced by Indonesian economists who were aware of the disadvantages derived from economic policies that neglected the importance of the country's huge, yet unexploited sea resources. Although the successive regimes after Suharto have endorsed the maritime turn, there has been no strong determination to implement maritime-oriented development. A new bid came about when Widodo, in his presidential campaign in 2014, revealed the notion of water connectivity and spoke about the necessity of taking the *tol laut* on in order to break out of the stagnation in Indonesia's geo-economic achievement (*Detik.com*, 2014).

After he was inaugurated as president, Widodo began promoting maritime development as the core framework of both his domestic and foreign policies. The *tol laut* is designed to provide accelerated water transportation among main ports, such as Belawan in North Sumatra, Tanjung Priok in Jakarta, Tanjung Perak of Surabaya in East Java, Makassar in South Sulawesi, and Sorong in Papua (Pradhana, 2015: 5). It is aimed at speeding up circulation of valuable commodities throughout the archipelago, especially to the remote areas in the eastern part of the country. A robust shipping circuit is established to enable smooth mobilization of people, goods, and services passing through the aforementioned pivotal sea ports. The government has to spend around 700 trillion rupiah (US\$ 53 billion) to construct the entire maritime connectivity facilities planned to be completed in 2019. These include building 24 new commercial harbours, upgrading 1,481 non-commercial ports, developing 15 industrial centres, and purchasing operational ships (Negara and Das, 2017: 4). Transport through the *tol laut* route comprises big vessels going back and forth regularly from Sumatra to Papua. The construction of the whole system was initiated in May 2015. A few months later Widodo launched the first operation of the *tol laut's* boats (*Detik.com*, 2015). The construction of the supporting infrastructure, such as airports, railways, and highways, has been enhanced (*Tribunnews*, 2016). Through the infrastructure focus programmes, the government expects to achieve a gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 7 per cent in 2019 (Indriastuti, 2015).

The *tol laut* is also envisioned to be internationally effective. The Widodo government deems it promising for integrating Indonesian sea freight with wider foreign connectivity projects within China's Maritime Silk Road blueprint (*Kompas*, 2015a). The Maritime Silk Road is an integral part of President Xi Jinping's government's 'One Belt One Road' initiative announced in 2013 to achieve the 'Chinese Dream' of reviving the twenty-century-long trade route from mainland China to Europe. Beijing has started to expand cooperation with Southeast Asian, South Asian, and Northern Indian Ocean states to facilitate massive overseas infrastructure development through their vital waters, which will terminate in Europe (Laporta, 2015: 6–7). Somewhat conspicuously, the plan was first delivered in the Chinese president's speech before the Indonesian parliament meeting in October 2013 (Jinping, 2013). To move the strategy forward, China promises Silk Road funding of US\$ 40 billion to stimulate participating countries to enhance their maritime infrastructure (Bloomberg, 2014).

In order to show his serious commitment to strengthening maritime policies, Widodo has assigned a new ministry level agency—the Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Resource Affairs—to coordinate the management for maritime sectors, including transportation, fishery, energy and mineral resources, tourism, and external relations. Other executive agencies are instructed to work hand-in-hand with the new ministry to support the national programme towards a maritime nation with a ‘blue economy’, employing cohesive strategies to foster maritime education, maritime culture, and maritime society (Kompas, 2014). The *tol laut* is one of the pathways to achieve this goal. The project initiation received wide-ranging responses from the general public and private stakeholders. Optimism has risen in parallel with a growing awareness of the future of the country’s crucial economic development sectors, namely food production, energy diversification, and environmental protection.

The existing literature, such as Centre of Policy Analysis and Development for Asia Pacific and African Regions (2011), Davidson (2015), Dikun (2004), and Ihsan (2015), which gives details about the contextual obstacles faced by and the prospects for the Indonesian government to pursue its infrastructure ambitions, has focused merely on partial explanations. There has been no attempt to see the political economy of infrastructure development from a cross-boundary approach to study both internal and external factors together. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to expanding knowledge through a framework of thinking consisting of two levels of analysis, namely the domestic and the international influences. The argument is that notwithstanding the relevance of the *tol laut* for advancing the Indonesian economy, it is inevitably entangled with dynamic internal and external environments, which can unfavourably distort the construction process. This argument is clarified in the following discussion sections. Section one explains the conceptual and methodological foundation of the study. Section two outlines the importance of the *tol laut* to Indonesian national economic development. Section three looks at how the current domestic political settings pose structural hurdles to Widodo’s *tol laut*, and section four observes the effect of international relations of powerful regional actors and Jakarta’s diplomatic capacity on the ongoing *tol laut*. The concluding section summarizes the findings of the study.

## The political economy of infrastructure development

The political economic understanding about infrastructure development includes two important points, namely the scene and the approach. The scene refers to different aspects of the infrastructure projects, each of which has specific challenges which vary from economy, politics, environment, social and demography, to finance (Ginko, 2005: 1–42). The approach refers to the level of analysis used to explain how the relevant factors influence the infrastructure development being observed. This study utilizes a two-level approach by synthesizing domestic and international levels so that, as Starr (2006: 1–2) argues, the research design is able to capture the multiple causal paths encountered within the phenomena.

The interaction between politics and economy in infrastructural development is generally understood to be the game played by actors struggling for benefits from infrastructure construction, service, and management conducted by either government agencies or private businesses. The political economic practices are pervasive in countries where

different policy preferences, ideologies, and levels of development progress exist (Kunneke *et al.*, 2009). However, what happens in democratic governments is more complex than what happens in undemocratic ones, due to the fact that wider segments of the population are enabled to engage in the decision-making and implementation processes (Bhardwaj and Vijayakrishnan, 1998).

In the emerging market economies, the increase in the level of democratization provides beneficial micro- and macro-conditions which attract large foreign direct investment to fund infrastructure projects (Doces, 2010). Nevertheless, the impact of democracy on infrastructure projects is paradoxical. On the one hand, the pluralistic model of power distribution and the rule of law within democratic governance make available formal mechanisms to deal with the negative effect of inefficient and ineffective government projects (Moszoro *et al.*, 2015: 4–38). On the other hand, democratic consolidation and authorities formation accompanied by economic liberalization are prone to unhealthy competition between political forces to gain access to valuable resources. This tendency is commonly observable in Third World countries where the ruling regime which suffers from internal splits, political polarization, and financial dependence upon foreign donors tends to collaborate with the capitalists (Bellin, 2002; Chua, 2000; Przeworski, 2000). Consequently, infrastructure governance becomes weak, and it affects the quality of the construction. In the case of Indonesia's *tol laut*, the role of political dynamics is obvious in challenging the viability of the project amid the government's lack of internal cohesiveness.

Since states are integrated into the international system, and globalization permits increasingly intensive local and global linkages, the influence of external factors on domestic development is unavoidable. Foreign policy bridges the internal and outward-looking aspects of state affairs, and is influenced by both of them (Evans *et al.*, 1993). The conduct of foreign policy is directed by a set of national interests formulated through domestic political processes, and hence internal constituencies matter as a variable that determines the success of the government's actions in world politics (Putnam, 1988). In state-to-state relations, national interests can be identical, conflictive, and complementary to one another (Robinson, 1969: 183–185). The way states perceive others' interests creates situations that lead to policy options. Noticeably, economic interests are significant in driving conflict and cooperation among nations (Barbieri, 1996). Seen from this view, infrastructure development which is part of national economic interests is likely to intersect with international politics when the construction impacts on interstate relations both in regional and global contexts.

In order to cope with the impact of international dynamics, states have to undertake foreign policy supported by sufficient diplomatic capability. Otherwise, strategies and their application will not be effective. Diplomatic capability consists of three essential elements: involvement within international institutions; technological instruments used for military activities; and leadership which is related to how leaders manage foreign policy resources. States apply three strategies: reallocating resources; resolving unfavourable effects of international politics through negotiation and compromise; and aligning with other states which have greater capabilities (Powell, 1999). These strategies can be feasible for states facing external pressure and crisis derived from foreign powers' policy towards their infrastructural development.

The following sections present analyses of the main argument of this study based on the above integrative conceptual framework. However, it does not mean to examine all factors.

The focus is on influential issues such as elite behaviour and decentralized governance in domestic politics as well as great power competition and diplomacy in the international context. The study does not employ a special methodological technique to collect, select, and organize data. It works on secondary sources, while expert and official consultations provide supporting information which is not found in the written materials.

### **The *tol laut*'s relevance for national economic development**

The Widodo government affirms that the *tol laut* is a comprehensive and practical instrument in overcoming the longstanding problems of disparity in local economic development (Ministry of National Developing Planning, 2015). This means that the *tol laut* is expected to be viable in addressing the issue of income discrepancy between the western and eastern regions. Such a claim is not baseless. Empirically, the matter of transportation infrastructure is critical for the reconstruction of developing countries' economies (Leinbach, 1995), and in particular to Indonesia (Airriess, 1989; Kamaluddin, 2003).

Through the *tol laut*'s mode of water connectivity the cost of logistics can be reduced. The targeted reduction is related to the high cost of internal trade, which in many cases makes domestic transactions more expensive than those conducted in international commerce. For example, for local traders, the cost of transporting commodities from industrial centres in Java to Papua and Sulawesi is higher than shipping the same products for export to Japan and Europe. Hence, it is reasonable that business people complain about intraregional economic interactions being less profitable than those abroad. The cause of this irony may be complex. One cause which is exasperating for the business community is local cartels monopolizing the domestic logistical networks. Their activities have increased the costs and prices of basic necessities such as sugar, rice, oil, and gas in the country's outer areas (Noor, 2014: 1). For an archipelago like Indonesia, the poor connecting system has been a pervasive factor disallowing smooth transportation of people, goods, and services between the main ports, and between the main ports and the surrounding smaller ports. Nevertheless, it does not mean that allowing for heavier traffic flow will automatically generate more profit in domestic trade. The point is, by accelerating the development of marine transport for inter-island exchanges, more efficient arrangements of supply and demand can be accomplished (Wiranta, 2003).

How the *tol laut* copes with disparity issues is explicable through the positive relationship between product specialization and transportation. Operationally, the degree of specialization of a commodity determines demand, which in turn affects local prices. In the areas where product specialization is lower, the price of commodities tends to be higher. This is why in the cities, where more wide-ranging products are available, prices are cheaper than in villages where the degree of specialization is lower, coupled with a lower degree of labour specialization (Enwidodo, 1991; Kusreni, 2009). This logic applies to local economies with a different level of product specialization, associated with underperformance in certain elements of industrialization. The industrial centres in Java, in many respects, have more specialization of products than other regions, including areas in the main islands particularly Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. The state of imbalance in productivity has existed for decades on account of uneven distribution of production sites (Wattimena, 2014). Therefore it is imperative that the Widodo government employ policies to be the catalyst for the redistribution of industry to the eastern

regions. However, this will not boost local revenue unless the transportation system is improved. With this in mind, specialization of products that impact on prices is also dependent on how the movement of people, goods, and services from one place to another is managed (Kadir, 2006). The policy of construction of the *tol laut* is significant to broaden the reach of domestic trade of goods and services which will be practically effective in narrowing the discrepancy in local income.

The capacity of cities in the most populous islands, like Java and Sumatra as well as the archipelagic Nusa Tenggara, to serve as vital production sites and transit points for international and domestic trade has noticeably decreased by virtue of over-industrialization and urbanization. Meanwhile, the potential of other parts of the country are left unexploited, thus causing an unsustainable state of imbalance (Baiquni, 2002). This is exacerbated by the fact that the burden created by the uneven spread of physical infrastructure has unfavourable implications for the quality of the process of natural resource extraction (Henderson and Kuncoro, 1996). Alternatively, Indonesia needs to employ a progressive method of governance which enables the reorganization of economic resources to obtain benefits from the unexplored resources of the rest of the archipelago. The *tol laut* is intended to be the new basis of connectivity which fosters the growth of products and markets in the unexplored regions. The idea of the *tol laut* also suggests that an imbalance of national capacity and scarcity of resources happens because of the lack of efficient island connections. By emphasizing the prominence of the *tol laut* in the long-term planning of maritime development, the Widodo administration wants to pursue this line of political economic policy, prioritizing equalization and harmonization of local economic performance. The coastal areas are given more attention. They are interconnected with the objective of attaining a stable domestic environment which can be fertile ground for attracting foreign investment.

## Domestic challenges

The *tol laut* is a versatile megaproject. It offers useful solutions to advance Indonesia's economy on a large scale. Nonetheless, because construction requires the mobilization of enormous financial, social, and technological resources, it is likely to fall into, and be penetrated by, the current domestic political settings. There are two circumstances at work: the behaviour of political elites and the problems of local governance that have resulted from the policy of *desentralisasi dan otonomi daerah* (decentralization and local autonomy).

## Political elite

The recent political arena in Jakarta charts a volatile rivalry between two party coalitions. It brings into relief the process of political polarization which had been quietly minimized through the retired President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's accommodationist approach to power sharing (Mietzner, 2015: 117). The newly aligned party politics originated in the passionate 2014 presidential and vice presidential election with Widodo-Kalla vying head-to-head with Prabowo-Hatta. However, despite Widodo's victory, the political constellation did not alter. The defeated parties even consolidated their power base and pledged to become a permanent coalition, thus sustaining tensions. On the one side is the

pro-government coalition which calls itself *Koalisi Indonesia Hebat* (the Coalition of Great Indonesia/KIH), composed of four parties which obtained about 42 per cent of the seats in parliament. On the other side, the opposition, named the *Koalisi Merah Putih* (the Red and White Coalition/KMP), consists of six parties which gained the majority of 58 per cent of the seats in parliament, allowing them to dominate parliamentary procedures and chairmanship. From the outset, both the KIH and the KMP have tried to exert their respective influence on the state's rule-making, which on many occasions has expanded into debates and controversies over parliamentarian and public affairs.

This stronger opposition was keen to hinder Widodo's proposal for large-scale maritime infrastructure projects which needed updated legislative output. This is obvious in, for example, the stalled legislation on the reform of the Transportation Act which is significant to the *tol laut* operation. A signal of opposition disapproval of Widodo's infrastructure policy had been shown by the KMP prior to the inauguration of the new government. The KMP's leader, who is also the deputy head of parliament, stood against the plan for constructing the *tol laut*. He claimed that the project would waste the state's financial resources, which could be more usefully allocated to supporting other pivotal sectors, namely education and health. More importantly, according to the KMP's figures, there had been no convincing empirical evidence provided by the *tol laut* planners on what would be the necessity and utility of the multitrillion rupiah project. Instead, from this opposing view, Widodo was urged to focus on sustaining the restrained and delayed infrastructure building, and retaining the positive achievements of the previous government under the programme called *masterplan percepatan dan perluasan pembangunan ekonomi Indonesia* (master plan of acceleration and expansion of Indonesia's economic development/MP3EI) (Detiknews, 2014). Although some important elements of the *tol laut* can be identified in the MP3EI document, such as the plan to build toll roads (Coordinating Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2011), Widodo's plan implied a moving away from the plan of the Yudhoyono government.

It is, however, well known that in post-Suharto Indonesian politics there is little tendency towards enduring collaboration among political parties. The parties' attitudes are changeable depending on particularistic bargaining, especially with regard to material rewards. The latest political episode has demonstrated that the prolonged fracas over the leadership succession which developed between the KMP parties has prompted defective actions of individual members of the opposition. This triggered anxiety about the future of the KMP, and the political terrain altered in 2016. The new leadership of the Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party/PAN) and the Golongan Karya Party, which possess about 10 per cent and 14 per cent respectively of the seats in the parliament, left the KMP and switched their perspective to one of endorsement of the government. This move subsequently brought more political weight to the government side. This further affects the ways the opposition deals with Widodo's *tol laut*. Given that KMP solidity is now weakening, it seems to lack confidence in confronting the president's progressive strides. The KMP's critical representatives just aim to display to the public that Widodo is incapable. They avoid fiercely criticizing Widodo's populist programmes. Instead, according to Lane (2015), most criticisms will only seek to problematize minor and technical problems.

Beyond the formal institutional environment, Widodo faces the oligarchic nature of the political system, which is the legacy of the New Order era (Winters, 2013: 11–13). The KIH

and the KMP are actually part of this system. The two coalition poles do not reflect clear ideological and agenda differences. The party elites resemble a combination of the elements of the collapsed authoritarian regime and the pro-democracy forces, which brings to light an identical pattern of political motive and objective, that is, according to Robison and Hadiz (2004), they do nothing but perpetuate the effort to accumulate personal wealth and power resources. The oligarchs—conglomerates and party bosses such as the Vice President Jusuf Kalla and the media tycoon Surya Paloh, as well as the liberals' favourite Minister of State Corporation Rini Soemarno—have managed to insert the capitalist scheme into Widodo's *tol laut*, and introduce their profit-oriented businesses into the project construction, including systematic strategies to halt their competitors. The ways the rent-seekers control the government's projects encompass a three-fold intrusive action: restructuring the bureaucracy agencies—the ministries, revising regulations, and placing loyalists in the strategic administrative and state-owned corporation positions.

Consequently, Widodo, who comes from outside the oligarchy linkages, has found that the formative stages of the maritime megaproject have been adversely interrupted. Here are three obvious examples. First, instead of establishing a constructive political milieu for the *tol laut*, almost all factions in the parliament (from the KIH and the KMP), directly and indirectly, proposed a formula of parliamentary project known as *dana aspirasi* (the aspiration fund). Through this fund, every member of the parliament receives approximately twenty billion rupiah worth of annual funding to be used for infrastructure development in their respective electoral areas (*Kompas*, 2015b). Although this proposal contravenes the law on state finance, the politicians have pressed ahead to pass it through the legislature programme, ready for realization in 2016. Widodo has expressed objection to the aspiration fund (*Kontan*, 2015: 1), yet the party leaders have green-lighted it. As a result, a compromise solution has been reached to satisfy the oligarchs. In return for the Widodo government's refusal of the parliament's initiative, the executive has agreed to divert about two to three trillion rupiah of the state budget for various consumptive parliamentary projects (*CNN Indonesia*, 2015). This episode illustrates that the party elites and politicians do not pay attention to Widodo's maritime development prioritization. Because more than 60 per cent of parliamentarians represent electorates based in Java, the main beneficiaries of the aspiration fund projects are people living on this island (*Tribunnews*, 2015). This certainly contradicts the essence of the *tol laut* to spur local economies outside Java.

Second, since his first year in office, Widodo has witnessed a lot of counterproductive polemics raised by his cabinet, which is occupied by the political and professional affiliates of the KIH. Their debate revolves around the internal working of the ministries, particularly those responsible for governing economic affairs. Critical observers have observed that the contentiousness mirrors not only the disagreement regarding technical policies, but more substantially the conflicts of interest in relation to the government's project priorities. A clear case is the conflicting policies of the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of State Corporation over the building of new highways and railways connecting Sorong Papua and its surrounding towns as part of the *tol laut* system. As a consequence, the infrastructure planning has been put on hold until 2017 (*Detiknews*, 2015).

Third, Widodo has urged domestic and foreign investors to invest in the *tol laut* infrastructure in order to hasten the megaproject despite the government's limited financial resources. To this end, the president has promised to cut off bureaucratic hindrances



over private investments. In fact, until December 2015 private business involvement in the *tol laut* project was very insignificant. Widodo put the blame on the inability of the Badan Koordinasi Penanaman Modal (the Coordinating Agency for Investment/BKPM) to facilitate a better investment climate (Okezone, 2016). Ironically, unrelated projects, such as the super express train serving the route of Jakarta–Bandung, have attracted a large amount of foreign and domestic investment. Initially, Widodo did not approve the project because it was proposed to utilize the government’s funding (Tempo, 2015). Following intensive lobbying of the minister of state corporation and her business associates (Merdeka, 2015), Widodo has finally favoured it. This case shows that the lack of political elite support for the *tol laut* has affected Widodo. This impediment will continue to be in place so long as the connections between money, party, and politics dominate the state’s governance, which in turn produce a corrupt environment for the infrastructural projects.

### Local governance

Within the context of decentralization and local autonomy all strata of government, from the central government, provincial governments, to regencies/district governments, are obliged by *Undang Undang No. 32/2004 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah* (the Law No. 32/2004 on local governance) to work in a cooperative manner to achieve a set of national development objectives. Their main tasks and functions have been organized in accordance with the guidelines for administrative affairs under the auspices of *Dewan Pertimbangan Otonomi Daerah* (Advisory Council on Local Autonomy/DPOD). The central government is responsible for directing the state’s administration process, which includes the creation of norms, standards, and procedures employed on the national level, while the local ones are authorized to conduct administration in their respective region. Subsequently there are two sources of legitimate administrative power governing various aspects of private and public activities throughout the country. However, in day-to-day politics a thorny problem has arisen in relation to the entitlement to make and apply development policies. Even though local government remains the formal extension of central government, the instrument and mechanism of coordination, consultation, and supervision between each level of government do not operate well in the ostensibly smooth and flexible junctures of local governance institutionalization (Kartapraja, 2012). Now it is noticeable that many local governments work individually, and ignore the principle governing the hierarchical relationships between the central and local bureaucracies. As a result, powerful local leaders like to act as rulers who in many cases defy the authority and direction of the government in Jakarta (Zuhro, 2010). Although they do not indicate an intention of resistance or secession, the local authorities have translated the concept of decentralization and local autonomy into their own preferences. As a result, vertical conflict with regard to policy and interest is unavoidable (Chalid, 2005; Nirwanto, 2013), especially with respect to natural resource management (Setiawan and Hadi, 2007).

Widodo’s *tol laut* is actually a megaproject based on the model of concentration and centralization. The connecting system of water transportation is run by the central government’s agencies, passing through the existing and yet-to-be-developed infrastructure within the administrative area of the local governments. The weak function of coordination, consultation, and supervision in local administration restricts the viability of the

*tol laut* megaproject. Local governments are allowed by Law No. 32/2004 to regulate and manage circulation of goods and services passing through their region. Several local government leaders and figures have reservations about the functionality of Widodo's *tol laut*. The causes of their doubts vary from economic and political to cultural factors. For instance, the Governor of Yogyakarta Province is convinced that the *tol laut* development should be considerably reappraised, especially in terms of the plan to align it with the Chinese Maritime Silk Road (Ansyari, 2015). There is much to interpret from such expressive local hesitancy. Nevertheless, they send a message that the local governments and constituencies must be involved in the whole process of the megaproject construction.

In other cases of development engaging both the central and local structures of bureaucracy, problems occur due to the absence of both sides' concerted attempt to synchronize objectives regarding the application of policy to the supporting sector (Nurmandi, 2012: 69). The most common issue is related to the responsibility for realizing land purchases and concessions for the infrastructure projects (*Tempo*, 2016). In conducting the *tol laut* the government in Jakarta has spent a lot of energy to overcome the land provision problems. In addition, the local government is eager to impose additional taxes, longer bureaucracy for permits, and complicated regulations on the share of revenue of any megaproject carried out by external parties (Erfanie, 2007). This structural impediment has often created adverse impacts on the central government's policy apparently aimed to support the enhancement of local economy.

The political environment continues to be unsupportive of Widodo's *tol laut* implementation in local sectors. This is because decentralization and local autonomy fail to install accountability in local governments or produce significant grassroots participation. Amid the weakened central government, the decentralized administrative authorities serve as the medium for the ramification of the predatory politics in Jakarta into provincial and regency governance (Hadiz, 2005: 38). Local democratization is floundering. It is complicated by the fact that the local political landscape has been difficult to manage for the national coalition platform of both KMP and KIH, which has been crumbling into various new cross-cutting affiliations among their local political constituents, grounded on pragmatic foundations. The trend was quite obvious in the December 2015 and February 2017 local leader elections in which local politicians from the two contesting poles collaborated with each other to win votes, and ignored their central elite's line of political commitment. As a result, the space for Widodo to undertake a policy manoeuvre is shrinking. He is cornered, becoming a 'lonely' president who does not have a reliable local political basis. In 2014, Widodo was supported by the KIH both at national and local levels; now he cannot rely on their support, especially with regard to the execution of *tol laut* infrastructure programmes in the local administrative boundaries. As this tendency persists, Widodo must handle formidable local challenges.

## International challenges

This section illuminates external challenges to the *tol laut* and assesses Jakarta's diplomatic ability to manage them. Despite the fact that the *tol laut* project is focused on improving Indonesia's internal economic performance, it creates international consequences. First, the Indonesian economy and maritime affairs are interwoven with those of neighbouring countries. As such, mismanagement and incapacity to overcome any emerging interstate

issues possibly turn out to be severe foreign policy challenges to Widodo's domestic effort (Connelly, 2015: 1). Second, the challenges to the *tol laut* are complicated in the outside environments tied to the potent geopolitical implications of the so called 'Widodo Doctrine'. This constitutes an assertive outward-looking stance conceived as part of the concept of Indonesia becoming the *poros maritim dunia* ('world maritime axis'). This visionary idea means that Widodo wishes to centralize all governmental activities under his transformative platform to make Indonesia the bridge between the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Indo-Pacific) as well as making it a robust and unified territory wherein the people of the country will enjoy prosperity (Sambhi, 2015: 39).

Accordingly, the centrality of the promotion of Indonesia's maritime sphere and posture resonate with the Indo-Pacific strategic affairs beyond economy and business. This is because it emphasizes the attempt to cultivate the benefits from the country's strategically and economically advantageous location in the confluence of the great powers' interest in the Indo-Pacific region (Nabbs-Keller, 2014: 5–6). By developing its maritime economy Indonesia seeks to preserve its significant role in international relations of the Indo-Pacific countries (Piesse, 2015: 1–7). Following Widodo's declaration of the 'Indonesian maritime axis', certain inner foreign policy circles have argued that the building of *tol laut* needs to be accompanied by the formation of a new coastguard force, based in the eastern part of the country, as the basis for the navy's eastern armada (Sukma, 2014). In the geostrategic perspective, the development of the *tol laut* can be interpreted as an instrumental boon to advance Indonesia's international political economic policy. This is coupled with the modernization of military power, which is intended to pursue the national interest in respect of territorial integrity and resource security through the deployment of shipping infrastructure in the state's waters. Bearing this in mind, the establishment of a sea transport system entails a high degree of politicization (Iheduru, 1996).

### **Regional power competition**

Indonesia is leaning towards the restoration of its neglected position as a maritime power which had begun to take place under the Suharto government. The New Order regime's concern about the threats of internal splits, prompted by subversion and separatism, engendered national and regional policies focused on establishing stability. For this reason, Jakarta avoided provocative actions toward its neighbours in order to preserve regional order (Tan, 2007: 156–159). Now Widodo wants to revert to a maritime-centric policy appropriate to the conception of an archipelagic nation. However, the implementation of such strategic thinking can be perceived by other maritime powers as a challenge and a sign of Indonesia's rising global ambition. Although Indonesia's diplomatic officials have consistently stressed the peaceful nature of the 'world maritime axis', naturally in international politics the neighbouring maritime powers of the Indo-Pacific are likely to react.

This is the challenge for the Widodo government: to resolve the conflicting politico-economic and strategic interests of the neighbouring maritime powers. The *tol laut* system restricts the arrival of external commodities to three main points—west, central, and east. For instance, imports from the Pacific states can only enter Indonesia's markets through the port built in Sorong Papua (*Jawa Pos*, 2016). Consequently, the price of imported commodities will be higher than that of local ones. This could be

viewed by other countries, including trade partners such as Australia, Japan, and the United States (US) as a protectionist action, and is likely to provoke reciprocal responses which strain bilateral relations and regional ones further afield.

At the same time, however, Indonesia has attempted to significantly elevate its ties with China, especially with regard to maritime technology, infrastructure investments, and industry cooperation intended to follow up the project of creating sea interconnectivity between the two countries (Tiezzi, 2015). This clearly exhibits the increasingly crucial position of China in Widodo's foreign policy oriented to maritime interests. During the first year of Widodo's leadership, an agglomeration of megaproject commitments has been reached by the two sides, slated for construction beginning in 2016 and 2017, including 24 seaports, 15 new airports, 1,000 km of highways, 8,700 km of railways, and 25,000 megawatt power plants (*Harian Nasional*, 2015). Two of these megaprojects are the first trans-Kalimantan toll road linking Balikpapan and Samarinda, which is planned to be completed by 2019 (*Republika*, 2015), and the harbour in Sorong Papua (*Media Indonesia*, 2015). They are set up to serve as an important supporting infrastructure for the *tol laut*. Widodo succeeded in gaining China's commitment to assist Indonesia's infrastructure projects with funding amounting to US\$ 50 billion which would be created by the China Development Bank and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (*GIVNews.com*, 2015).

The closer moves toward China become clearer in the case of the competition between China and Japan for the Jakarta–Bandung high speed railways. Beyond the context of domestic technical, political, and economic debates on the project importance associated with the provision of an affordable mode of transportation for the public, Widodo might see complementarity with China's international interest areas as an important factor to his infrastructural ambition. The final decision to choose the Chinese financial consortium to build the Jakarta–Bandung high speed railways is related to the effort to obtain more access to China's investments (Salim and Negara, 2016). Widodo's China policy is endorsed by the head of the House of Representatives, who is from the Golkar Party (*ANTARANews*, 2015), indicating that the closer Indonesia–China moves toward maritime collaboration have gained formal domestic political legitimacy.

The strengthening of the Jakarta–Beijing maritime infrastructural initiative is taking place amid regional maritime powers' lukewarm response to the progress of the Chinese Maritime Silk Road. India, which was invited by China to enlist in the Indian Ocean section of the maritime routes, appears to be reticent. The Indian attitude stems from the recognition that the Chinese cross-regional connectivity Beijing has prepared a grand strategy to impose its political and economic order upon the Indo-Pacific countries, which to a large extent have been courted by US interests. Accordingly, New Delhi envisages a problematic position for itself, either to be taking part in the Silk Road project or pursuing its own defined economic interests by aligning itself with the US and Japan (Singh, 2014: 133–140). Meanwhile, most South Asian and Southeast Asian governments, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) members except for the Philippines, have affirmed their participation within the Chinese-led Maritime Silk Road project.

The regional states' manoeuvres clarify the strategic contours of the new Indo-Pacific geo-economics. In response to China's progressive economic multilateralism, the US are expanding their trans-Pacific partnership agreements. By 2015 they had embraced

12 countries from the original four, including Asian maritime countries such as Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. The Chinese government perceives this enlargement as Washington's effort to restrict China's sphere of influence over the Indo-Pacific region (Hearn and Myers, 2015: 2–3). The perception is confirmed when India decides to lean towards the US' trans-Pacific cooperation. The Modi government has signalled its intention to invigorate India's strategic roles in East Asia, traditionally aimed at balancing China (Rajendram, 2014). Strategic analysts claim the enduring gap in policies and perceptions of the preponderant powers in the Indo-Pacific region—especially China, India, and the US—with regard to each other's maritime build-up tends to spark an environment characterized by a competitive dynamic and tensions, even though overt military clashes between the countries are less likely to occur (Jakobson and Medcalf, 2015; Till, 2015). Against this backdrop, the Widodo government seeks to fortify bilateral relationships with the US. On a visit to Washington in October 2015, Widodo stated his interest in the trans-Pacific partnership for economic, investment, and historical reasons (BBC Indonesia, 2015). Although under the Trump administration the agenda of multi-lateral partnership seems to be dim, Jakarta–Washington military and security cooperation remains as a tight bond between the two sides. Meanwhile, Jakarta and Beijing are still unable to forge concrete items for bilateral military and security field collaboration.

This means that in conducting foreign policy, including the diplomacy for supporting the *tol laut* project, Widodo is attempting to balance Indonesia's relations with China and the US. Although such an international standpoint is normatively correct in accordance with the state's foundational principle of *bebas aktif* (free and active) in its external affairs, whereby Jakarta does not aim to forge a formal alliance with any great power, but plays pro-active and independent roles with both China and the US (Hamilton-Hart and McRae, 2015), it has serious consequences for infrastructure interests. This is because, as Ispahani (1989) critically argues, foreign policy as regards infrastructural assistance and investments can have far-reaching geostrategic implications, pursuant to either economic or security interests, depending on the geographic location of the anticipated access. The *tol laut*, therefore, is caught within the external great power politics of facilitating their individual concerns.

The difficulties stemming from the rivalry between external powers are discernible. They are related to the evolving competition between China and the United States for natural resources and access to natural resources in the Indo-Pacific, centred on the South China Sea (Buszynski, 2012) on the one side, and Indonesia's economic dependence on both China and the United States on the other. This creates a situation of uncertainty in which Widodo's infrastructure programmes are overshadowed by the conflicting foreign economic and security objectives of China and the US.

China's significant involvement in Indonesia's ambitious infrastructure projects is focused on multibillion-dollar investments in the construction of prospective economic facilities in the country's natural resource-rich regions, such as East Kalimantan and Papua. National media have reported that a Chinese state corporation has begun to appeal to the Indonesian government for cooperation in undertaking explorations in the large mining sector of Papua. The initiative received a positive response from Jakarta (Okezone, 2011). It followed up the success of China's infrastructure projects such as the Suramadu Bridge in East Java and the Asahan Dam in North Sumatra.

Since 1993, three of China's energy companies have received exploration rights in Indonesia, and have been able to produce a large quantity of oil and gas products (Kosandi, 2013: 195). In the aforementioned two provinces the US, through their multinational corporations, has long dominated mining and natural resource industries related to oil, gas, and minerals.

China's aggressive investments are perceived by the US as Chinese economic penetration into their sphere of interests, which subsequently leads Washington to ponder the threat to American power from an economically expansionist China. Seen from this perspective, the American policy of pivot to Asia has been designed to contain China (Beeson, 2016: 205). The reality is complicated by other pressing factors, such as military campaigns and projection in the immediate region. As Mearsheimer (2006; 2010) predicts, China's rise will not happen peacefully, since the US cannot let it be a regional hegemon in the Asia Pacific. This situation affects the regional states where the superpowers are in competition over access to natural wealth.

### *Diplomatic capacity*

Indonesia's diplomatic capacity is the key factor which influences its success in dealing with the international challenges confronting Widodo's infrastructural vision. The history of Indonesia's foreign relations demonstrates that diplomacy has contributed much to the pursuance of the state's national interests. Indonesia's engagement with various multilateral fora with a regional and global scope helps bolster its external political power although this is not really buttressed by powerful armed forces, particularly the navy and air force. The military services over the last 50 years have been heavily oriented towards domestic matters, primarily responding to insecurity caused by unconstitutional activities in the country's main islands. Their international roles are limited to participation within peacekeeping operations organized by the United Nations (UN). As a result, the Indonesian military does not have enough experience and capability to influence regional power politics. Observers believe that the situation will not change until at least the next decade. The major problem is related to the inability of successive post-Suharto governments to provide the required budget of 1.8 per cent GDP for achieving strategic goals such as procurement acquisition and personnel capacity upgrading (Fealy and White, 2016: 96–98).

ASEAN, which was founded in 1967 by Indonesia and four other Southeast Asian states, has long been Indonesia's most favoured regional institution and diplomatic vehicle to achieve its external priorities, namely a stable and peaceful region (Anwar, 1997: 20–21). ASEAN's role has developed from being an anti-Communist alliance to acting as the mediator in intra-state conflict, as well as the driver for extra-regional affairs in East Asia and the Pacific through the ASEAN Regional Forum. Recently, however, strategic thinkers in Indonesia have debated the saliency of ASEAN for Indonesia's future foreign policy. On the one side, ASEAN is no longer considered useful for Indonesia because it limits Indonesia's global activism to mere Southeast Asian level, while other member countries fail to show sufficient appreciation of Jakarta's heartfelt contributions to the organization. The proponents of this thinking have begun to raise the rhetoric of a post-ASEAN foreign policy paradigm. On the other side, ASEAN is viewed as still highly relevant for Indonesia's regional and global relations for historical,

political, and strategic reasons. Essentially, Indonesia and ASEAN continue to complement each other (Tan, 2015: 287).

In relation to the *tol laut* project, and the wider priorities of maritime development, the Widodo government seems not to pay much attention to the hitherto meaningful existence of ASEAN. The ministry of foreign affairs follows the president's instruction without adding any strategic contents for ASEAN. Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi emphasizes that the chief goal of Indonesian international diplomacy is to attract as many investments as possible to support the government's project of economic development. Therefore, diplomats are encouraged to proactively approach foreign investors to encourage them to come to Indonesia (Marsudi, 2015: 5). For diplomatic staff, Marsudi's statement implies that their main job is to market the country's economic potencies for mobilizing external financial resources (*Berita Satu*, 2015).

Ignoring ASEAN as Indonesia's strategic foreign policy tool can have three implications for the *tol laut*. First, amid the increasingly serious impact of the regional powers' competition for resource reserves, followed by the challenges of intensifying unilateralism against each other, Jakarta cannot rely on its immediate neighbours to ensure a consensus mechanism on how to mitigate the adverse effects of national and Indo-Pacific insecurity. An accommodative framework for Indo-Pacific friendship and cooperation to be signed by the regional states concerned, such as China, India, Japan, and the US, was proposed by former Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa to avert the prospect of conflict between regional big players (Ram, 2015: 22). Although the Widodo government does sustain the initiative, it necessitates a solid groundwork with regard to the active role of ASEAN to advance confidence-building measures for Southeast Asian regional stability. Indeed, past experience indicates that regional stability is the common denominator of Indonesia's economic development.

Second, connected to the first implication, none of Jakarta's extra-Southeast Asian multilateral instruments serves as a reliable diplomatic forum which the Indonesian government may be able to use for seeking assistance to resolve incompatibilities arising from issues of energy and infrastructural projects. Indonesia's most recognized participation within global institutions, such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the UN, and the Group of 20, has given Jakarta a large amount of international prestige (Hermawan, 2014). However, they have done little to improve Jakarta's leverage with its major economic partners. Since the Widodo government wants to construct the *tol laut* as the infrastructural pillar of the 'world maritime axis', these three global institutions will not be helpful in easing the potential uncertainties in the Indo-Pacific region.

Finally, the overstated and pragmatic focus on the function of diplomacy as a marketing activity has not been accompanied by significant changes to the foreign policy bureaucracy. This is important to note because Widodo delegates foreign policy authority to his trusted circle, including the Foreign Minister (Weatherbee, 2016: 6–9). In post-Suharto governments the role of the Foreign Minister and the Foreign Ministry has been central in the state's external relations. The foreign ministry acts as a source of fresh ideas and innovative practices so that abstract concepts can be translated into creative actions (Nabbs-Keller, 2013: 7). However, this does not appear to have happened in Widodo's foreign policy office. Foreign Minister Marsudi has not performed the role of diplomatic entrepreneur. Moreover, she is not experienced in Asian strategic and economic affairs. This is evident from the lack of clear direction from Jakarta with regard to engaging its

ASEAN partners in its maritime plans and outlook (see for example Marsudi's policy brief in *Republika*, 2016). Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to claim that the Widodo government lacks sufficient diplomatic capacity necessary for safeguarding the country's national interests.

## Conclusion

This study has tried to demonstrate how domestic politics and international relations have become important factors in the development of economic infrastructure in Indonesia, especially in the case of the *tol laut*. At the domestic level, the behaviour of the political elite and the practice of local autonomy have an evident effect on the *tol laut* construction since they determine the effectiveness of the Widodo government's policy application. At the international level, the dynamics of regional power politics of economic and resource access, as well as Indonesia's diplomatic capacity, set the context of uncertain environments in which the *tol laut* and Jakarta's maritime ambition can be disrupted.

This style of analysis represents a way of understanding Indonesia's political economy which allows for the juxtaposition of political and international relations factors as its framework of thinking. The application of the two-level approach produces a more comprehensive view of the relationship between politics and economy in the era of democracy whereby political actors in the legislative and executive branches of administration compete to influence public policy. Additionally, as a consequence of local autonomy and decentralization, local governments have important voices in policy making and implementation ostensibly falls within the central government's authority.

Beside the domestic developments, this study is able to show that regional dynamics shaped by the interactions of powerful political economic actors, mainly China and the US, create potential obstacles to the implementation of Indonesia's *tol laut*. The situation becomes pressing when Jakarta is unable to mobilize sufficient diplomatic resources to prevent unfavourable effects of the geopolitical settings.

## Note

1. The Indonesian archipelago consists of over 17,000 islands spreading from Aceh in the western part to Papua in the eastern part of the country. The legal status of Indonesia's territorial boundaries was first acknowledged in the 1957 Djuanda Declaration. In 1982 this was strengthened by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), according to which the state's jurisdiction extends to 12 nautical miles from the baselines of its outermost islands. From the same points the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone is measured. Inside these boundaries are archipelagic seas, considered to be the national waters of Indonesia (Schofield and Arsana, 2009).

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The author does not have conflict of interests with third parties.

## Notes on contributor

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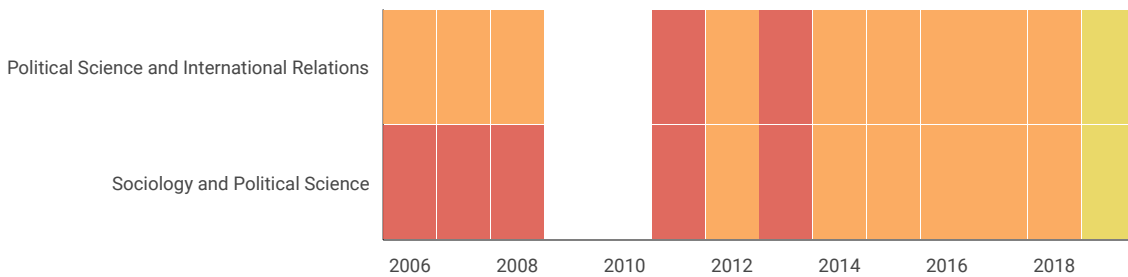
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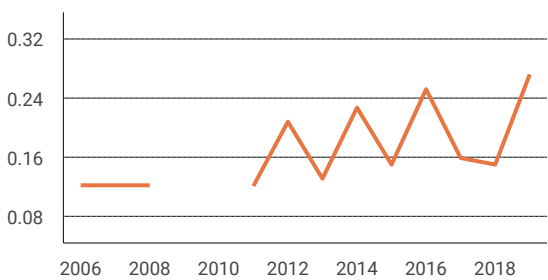
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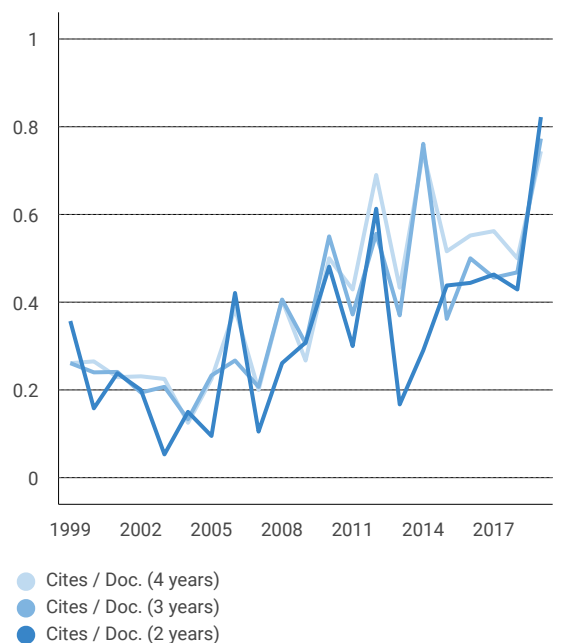
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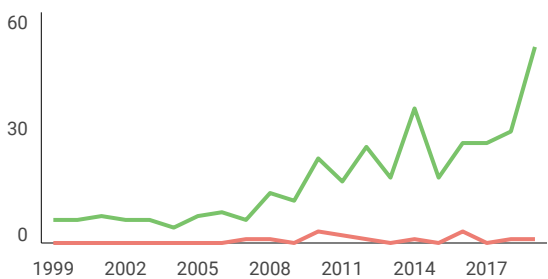
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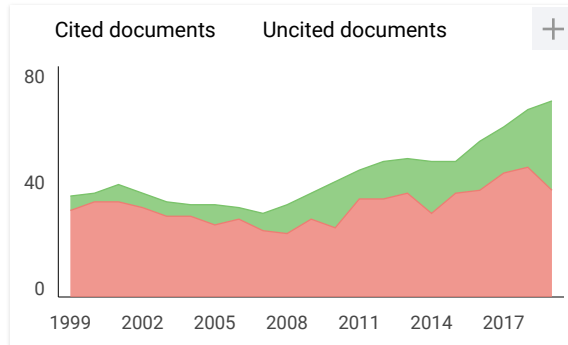
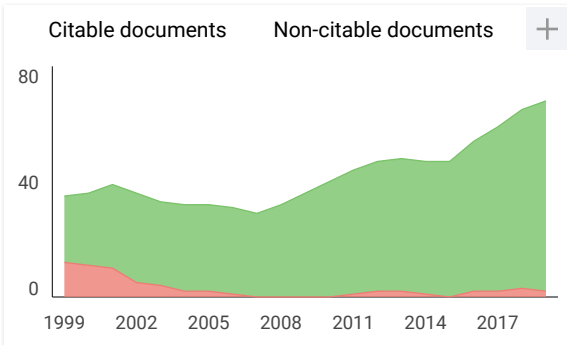
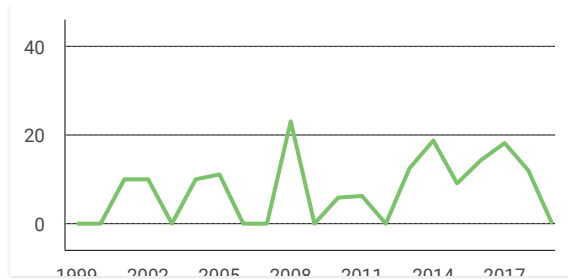
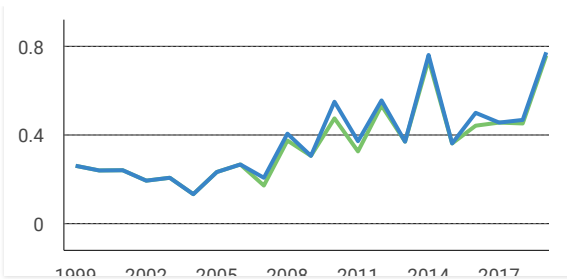
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