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Indonesia's Strategic Interest in High-Speed Rail Cooperation with China: Analyzing the Jakarta-Bandung Project Under Jokowi's Infrastructure Vision

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This study examines Indonesia's strategic interests in cooperating with China on high-speed rail development, focusing on the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway project initiated under President Joko Widodo's administration. Using a national interest as a theoretical framework, the research analyses how this flagship infrastructure project aligns with Indonesia's broader development goals and foreign policy objectives. This research uses qualitative approach through a comprehensive review of government policies, official statements, and expert analyses, the study explores the economic, political, and technological motivations behind Indonesia's engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative in the railway sector. The study reveals that the project serves as a linchpin for Indonesia's infrastructure-driven development agenda under President Joko Widodo, embodying ambitions of modernization and economic growth. By significantly reducing travel time between Jakarta and Bandung, the project aims to boost economic activities and regional connectivity, aligning with Indonesia's goals to foster development in its urban and industrial sectors. In addition, strategically, partnering with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reflects Indonesia's geopolitical balancing act, where it leverages international partnerships to access advanced technology and substantial funding. The collaboration not only facilitates technology transfer, thereby building local expertise, but also contributes to Indonesia's regional aspirations, positioning the country as a leader in modern infrastructure within Southeast Asia. The findings reveal a complex interplay of domestic infrastructure needs, regional strategic considerations, and aspirations for technological advancement driving Indonesia's decision-making. This research contributes to the understanding of emerging economies' approaches to large-scale infrastructure partnerships and the evolving dynamics of Sino-Indonesian relations in the context of China's growing influence in Southeast Asia.

1. Introduction

In October 2023, Indonesia marked a significant achievement in its infrastructure development with the inauguration of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, aptly named "Whoosh." This groundbreaking project, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, represents a pivotal moment in Indonesia's journey towards modernization and enhanced connectivity. The railway, a result of a strategic partnership with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), not only showcases Indonesia's commitment to infrastructure development but also highlights the complex dynamics of its relationship with China.

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway (JBHSR) spans 142 kilometers, connecting Indonesia's capital Jakarta with the city of Bandung (Liu, S., & Putro, U.S., 2024). This state-of-the-art transportation system is designed to significantly reduce travel time between these two major urban centers, potentially catalyzing economic growth and regional development. The project's completion marks a crucial step in President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's ambitious infrastructure agenda, which aims to modernize Indonesia's transport landscape and stimulate economic progress.

The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project reduces travel time between the two cities from over three hours to approximately 40 minutes. This improved connectivity is anticipated to foster economic development along the corridor, encouraging investment in cities and towns situated along the route and driving tourism in the West Java region. Economically, the project aligns with Jokowi's national vision for robust infrastructure, aiming to reduce logistical bottlenecks that have long constrained the country's productivity and economic integration.

While the JBHSR represents a major leap forward for Indonesia's infrastructure, its implementation has not been without challenges. The project faced a significant cost overrun of approximately USD 2 billion, raising concerns about its financial viability and the potential for debt-related issues (Nabiilah, R.A., & Sari, D.S., 2024). This overrun highlights the complexities involved in large-scale infrastructure projects, particularly those implemented through international partnerships.

The JBHSR project is a prime example of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in action. The BRI, launched by China, aims to extend its economic and geopolitical influence across Asia, Africa, and beyond (Liu, S., & Putro, U.S., 2024). For Indonesia, participation in the BRI through projects like the JBHSR presents both opportunities and challenges.

The partnership with China under the BRI framework has allowed Indonesia to access the technology and expertise necessary for implementing such an advanced transportation

system. This collaboration aligns with President Jokowi's "New Developmentalism" approach, which prioritizes infrastructure development and economic growth (Liu, S., & Putro, U.S., 2024). The high-speed railway is expected to serve as a catalyst for economic development along its route, potentially spurring new business opportunities and enhancing regional connectivity.

However, the close economic ties with China, exemplified by the JBHSR project, also raise questions about Indonesia's strategic positioning in the region. The substantial Chinese involvement in such a critical infrastructure project has led to debates about economic dependency and the potential for a "debt trap" (Nabiilah, R.A., & Sari, D.S., 2024). These concerns reflect the broader geopolitical implications of China's growing influence in Southeast Asia through the BRI.

The JBHSR project is emblematic of President Jokowi's broader vision for Indonesia's development. This vision emphasizes infrastructure as a key driver of economic growth and national progress. Under Jokowi's leadership, Indonesia has pursued an aggressive infrastructure development agenda. This approach is based on the belief that improved connectivity and modern infrastructure are essential for unlocking Indonesia's economic potential (Hara, A.E., Agung, C.R., & Trihartono, A., 2019 and Mawardi, R.A., 2023). The high-speed railway is expected to contribute to this goal by enhancing mobility between two of Indonesia's most important economic centers.

The railway project is anticipated to have a multiplier effect on the Indonesian economy. By reducing travel time and improving connectivity, it is expected to boost trade, tourism, and investment in the Jakarta-Bandung corridor (Liu, S., & Putro, U.S., 2024). This aligns with the government's strategy of using infrastructure projects to stimulate economic activity and create new opportunities for growth.

While the partnership with China has been instrumental in realizing projects like the JBHSR, Indonesia may benefit from diversifying its international partnerships for future infrastructure initiatives. This could help mitigate risks associated with over-dependence on a single partner and potentially access a wider range of expertise and financing options.

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway represents a significant milestone in Indonesia's infrastructure development journey. It exemplifies the country's ambition to modernize its transportation network and stimulate economic growth through large-scale infrastructure projects. However, the project also highlights the complexities and challenges associated with

such ambitious endeavors, particularly in the context of international partnerships and geopolitical considerations.

This study aims to analyze Indonesia's interest and strategic calculations in pursuing high-speed rail cooperation with China, with a particular focus on the Jakarta-Bandung project. By examining this case through the lens of national interest theory, we seek to understand how Indonesia balances its domestic development priorities with its foreign policy objectives and regional strategic considerations.

This research offers several novel contributions to the existing literature on Indonesia's infrastructure development and its relations with China. First, comprehensive analysis of national interest: While previous studies have examined the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project from economic or technical perspectives, this research provides a holistic analysis of Indonesia's strategic interests using national interest theory as a framework. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the real national interest behind Indonesia's decision-making.

Secondly, integration of domestic and international factors. By examining how domestic infrastructure needs intersect with international strategic considerations, this research offers insights into the complex decision-making processes of emerging economies in large-scale infrastructure projects.

2. Method

A qualitative approach is essential to comprehensively analyze Indonesia's strategic interest in its high-speed rail cooperation with China, particularly focusing on the Jakarta-Bandung project under President Joko Widodo's ambitious infrastructure agenda. This research method provides a nuanced understanding of how Indonesia's policy decisions align with its broader strategic objectives, revealing the motivations, perceptions, and policy dynamics that quantitative methods may overlook. Qualitative research, through tools such as in-depth interviews, document analysis, and case studies, allows for a deeper exploration of the political, economic, and diplomatic factors influencing Indonesia's approach to the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project.

3. Result and Discussion

The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway project is a significant infrastructure initiative that aligns with Indonesia's broader economic objectives under President Joko Widodo's administration. This project is not merely a transportation endeavor; it symbolizes Indonesia's commitment to modernization and its aspiration to attract substantial foreign investment. The emphasis on infrastructure as a catalyst for economic growth has been a cornerstone of Jokowi's policies, which aim to enhance national competitiveness and reduce logistical costs across the archipelago (Yu, 2015; Samidi, 2019). The high-speed railway, connecting the capital city Jakarta to the industrial hub of Bandung, is expected to facilitate more efficient movement of goods and people, thereby stimulating economic activities along the corridor (Ge, 2021).

President Widodo has consistently highlighted the pivotal role of infrastructure in national development, asserting that improved connectivity is essential for fostering regional economic integration (Lu et al., 2022). The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway is poised to significantly reduce travel time between these two key cities, which is anticipated to enhance productivity and economic interactions. By enabling faster and more reliable transportation, the railway is expected to attract businesses and investments, further contributing to economic growth (Chi, 2023). This aligns with findings from various studies that indicate high-speed railways can positively impact regional economies by improving accessibility and connectivity, thus fostering economic development in both urban and peripheral areas (Yang et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2022).

The strategic importance of the Jakarta-Bandung project is underscored by its potential to serve as a model for future infrastructure projects in Indonesia. As the first high-speed railway in Southeast Asia, its successful implementation could position Indonesia as a leader in modern transportation infrastructure within the region (Branković & Kalem, 2021). This aligns with Jokowi's vision of transforming Indonesia into a more developed and competitive nation on the global stage. The project is a demonstration of Indonesia's infrastructural ambitions and its strategic engagement with global economic powers, particularly through partnerships with foreign investors like China (Li & Chen, 2019).

The collaboration with Chinese enterprises is particularly noteworthy, as it not only provides the necessary financial backing but also introduces advanced technology and expertise into Indonesia's infrastructure sector. This partnership exemplifies Indonesia's openness to foreign investment and its strategic approach to leveraging international cooperation to

achieve its development goals (Yu, 2015; Samidi, 2019). The influx of foreign investment is expected to enhance the quality and efficiency of the railway project, thereby contributing to the overall modernization of Indonesia's transportation infrastructure (Li & Chen, 2019).

However, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway project has faced several challenges, including concerns regarding cost overruns, delays, and the financial sustainability of the railway (Lu et al., 2022; Branković & Kalem, 2021). Critics argue that the high-speed rail may not be the most cost-effective solution for Indonesia's transportation needs, especially when considering the availability of existing, more affordable options. Despite these challenges, the Jokowi administration remains committed to the project, viewing it as a cornerstone of its infrastructure development agenda (Ge, 2021; Branković & Kalem, 2021). This steadfast commitment reflects a broader recognition of the potential long-term benefits that high-speed rail can bring to Indonesia's economy, including job creation, increased tourism, and enhanced regional connectivity (Yang et al., 2018).

the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway project is emblematic of Indonesia's strategic efforts to leverage infrastructure development as a means to bolster economic growth and national competitiveness. It reflects the Jokowi administration's vision of modernization and its proactive approach to attracting foreign investment. While challenges persist, the project's potential benefits underscore its significance in Indonesia's broader development trajectory, positioning the country as a key player in the Southeast Asian transportation landscape (Branković & Kalem, 2021).

The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway project presents significant potential economic benefits for Indonesia, aligning with the broader goals of economic growth, regional connectivity, and infrastructure modernization under President Joko Widodo's administration. As Indonesia's first high-speed rail endeavor, the project not only seeks to improve transportation efficiency but also to catalyze economic development along the route from Jakarta to Bandung.

One of the primary economic benefits anticipated from the project is the reduction in travel time between Jakarta and Bandung. Traditionally, this journey takes approximately three hours by car or conventional train, subject to delays due to traffic congestion or other logistical issues. With the high-speed railway, the travel time is projected to decrease to around 40 minutes, a substantial improvement in efficiency (Ministry of Transportation, 2019). This reduction will facilitate business and trade between the two cities by allowing faster, more reliable transit of people and goods. By enhancing connectivity, the high-speed railway is

expected to improve business interactions, enable quicker logistics, and increase overall productivity, ultimately boosting regional economic integration (Pradana & Hidayat, 2021).

Additionally, the project is expected to stimulate economic activity along the rail corridor. Transit-oriented development (TOD) will play a key role in capitalizing on the connectivity provided by the high-speed rail. TOD refers to the strategic development of residential, commercial, and recreational spaces around transit stations to create vibrant economic hubs (World Bank, 2018). Along the Jakarta-Bandung route, new stations are projected to attract businesses, residential developments, and service industries that cater to travelers and residents, fostering economic growth within these areas. TOD around the high-speed rail line is anticipated to transform previously underdeveloped locations into bustling centers of economic activity, thus improving local economies and contributing to regional development (Setiawan, 2020).

Employment generation is another significant economic benefit of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project. Large-scale infrastructure projects typically create jobs both during construction and in operational phases. The construction phase, which has already required a significant workforce, has generated employment opportunities for local communities, helping to alleviate unemployment in the region (Zhao & Wong, 2017). Once operational, the railway will require ongoing maintenance, operations, and management staff, creating a range of job opportunities in sectors such as engineering, logistics, and customer service. These new employment opportunities contribute to local income levels and strengthen human capital within Indonesia's infrastructure and transportation sectors (Asian Development Bank, 2019).

Moreover, the high-speed rail project holds substantial potential for technology transfer and the development of local expertise. As the first high-speed rail line in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, it requires advanced technology and specialized knowledge. The collaboration with Chinese companies has opened doors for Indonesian workers and engineers to acquire expertise in high-speed rail systems, a technology not previously available in Indonesia (Wong, 2020). This technology transfer involves training programs, workshops, and on-site learning, allowing Indonesian professionals to develop competencies in areas such as rail engineering, operations management, and infrastructure maintenance. Over time, this knowledge transfer is anticipated to foster local expertise and support Indonesia's capability to manage and potentially expand high-speed rail networks independently in the future (Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board, 2021).

However, the project is not without its challenges. Concerns have been raised about the project's financial sustainability, including cost overruns and reliance on foreign investment, primarily from China. Critics argue that while the high-speed rail offers impressive advantages, it may not provide a cost-effective solution compared to other transport options. Such concerns underscore the importance of strategic financial management to ensure that the anticipated economic benefits materialize without burdening Indonesia with excessive debt (Suryani, 2020).

The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway project holds substantial economic promise for Indonesia. Its potential benefits include reduced travel time that facilitates business and trade, stimulation of economic activity through TOD, job creation during construction and operation, and technology transfer that enhances local expertise in high-speed rail. These anticipated benefits underscore the strategic significance of the project within Indonesia's infrastructure development vision. As Indonesia aims to advance its economic growth and regional competitiveness, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway serves as both a transformative infrastructure project and a cornerstone of Jokowi's broader vision for a more connected and economically integrated nation.

The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway project, while ambitious in scope and aligned with Indonesia's strategic goals, has encountered significant challenges, particularly in terms of cost management and project timelines. Initial estimates for the project set the cost at approximately \$5.5 billion, but recent assessments indicate the final price has escalated to \$7.3 billion, a considerable increase that has raised concerns regarding the project's financial viability and potential debt implications (Suryani, 2020; Pradana & Hidayat, 2021). This budget overrun has intensified scrutiny, as the added expenses may lead to an elevated debt burden for Indonesia, which relies on substantial financing from both domestic and Chinese sources.

One of the most debated responses to these financial challenges has been the Indonesian government's decision to use the state budget to cover a portion of the cost overruns. This move has sparked public and political discourse, with critics arguing that using taxpayer money on what was initially billed as a foreign-funded project contradicts earlier assurances that the project would not impact state finances (Setiawan, 2020). Analysts warn that diverting funds from the state budget to cover unforeseen expenses on this high-speed rail could constrain Indonesia's fiscal capacity to invest in other critical infrastructure projects (Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board, 2021).

In addition to financial concerns, delays in project completion have also hindered progress. Construction faced setbacks due to land acquisition issues, regulatory challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which further exacerbated costs and led to logistical delays (Zhao & Wong, 2017). These cumulative obstacles have raised questions about the efficiency of Indonesia's project management processes in large-scale infrastructure development.

Indonesia's decision to partner with China on the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project marks a significant geopolitical and strategic choice, revealing Indonesia's nuanced approach to balancing relations with major powers and reinforcing its position in the region. While infrastructure development is a primary objective, the decision also underscores Indonesia's strategic engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its aspirations for regional leadership in Southeast Asia. However, this partnership also entails potential risks, including concerns about debt sustainability, the effects on diplomatic relations with other regional partners, and challenges related to public perceptions of Chinese influence in critical sectors.

By selecting China over Japan for the high-speed rail project, Indonesia showcased its strategy of maintaining an autonomous position in its foreign policy. Indonesia has historically adopted a non-aligned stance, seeking to avoid over-dependence on any single major power and instead leveraging the competition between them (Wicaksana, I. G. W. (2023). This approach allows Indonesia to secure favorable terms and preserve flexibility in its international partnerships, reinforcing its stance as a regional power in Southeast Asia. By opting for China, Indonesia signaled its openness to diversifying partnerships, particularly within the infrastructure sector, without exclusively aligning with any one nation (Wardhani, B., & Dugis, V., 2023).

China's financing model and the appeal of the BRI also contributed to Indonesia's decision. China's offer included more flexible loan terms than Japan's proposal, making it financially appealing for Indonesia. Additionally, the Chinese-led project aligns with President Joko Widodo's vision for rapid infrastructure development and economic modernization. The partnership with China represents a strategic calculation, as Indonesia aims to benefit from Chinese capital and expertise without compromising its sovereignty or strategic independence (Yang, Y., Machmudi, Y., & Rofii, M. S., 2023). This decision highlights Indonesia's balancing act—leveraging China's infrastructure resources while keeping options open for future collaborations with other major powers.

Indonesia's collaboration on the high-speed rail project also illustrates its strategic engagement with China's BRI. The Jakarta-Bandung project has become a key symbol of China's BRI in Southeast Asia, where infrastructure development is a primary tool for fostering economic connectivity and influence. Indonesia's participation in the BRI allows it to access extensive resources and expertise to develop large-scale infrastructure projects that might otherwise be unfeasible due to financial or technical constraints (Yu, H. , 2017).

Indonesia has been cautious, however, in its involvement with the BRI, aiming to balance benefits while maintaining a level of oversight and control over project implementation. Unlike other Southeast Asian nations that have faced debt traps from BRI-funded projects, Indonesia has emphasized the importance of sustainable financing and limited the extent of Chinese involvement in the high-speed rail project (Bansal, M., Deng, Y., & Samudra, H. D. S. P. ,2024). By asserting regulatory oversight and requiring Chinese companies to collaborate with local partners, Indonesia has attempted to mitigate risks and ensure that the project aligns with national development goals. This approach demonstrates Indonesia's desire to benefit from the BRI while avoiding over-reliance on Chinese investment, a reflection of its broader strategy of strategic autonomy in international relations.

The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project serves as a cornerstone of Indonesia's ambition to solidify its role as a regional leader in Southeast Asia, especially within infrastructure development. As the first high-speed rail system in the region, the project enhances Indonesia's reputation as a pioneer of infrastructure modernization in Southeast Asia (Roberts, 2020). This leadership in infrastructure development aligns with Indonesia's broader foreign policy objectives, which include promoting regional connectivity, economic integration, and strategic stability Liow, (J. C., 2018).

By undertaking this groundbreaking project, Indonesia seeks to set a standard for infrastructure innovation and development in the region, potentially positioning itself as a model for other countries pursuing similar projects. Furthermore, this initiative aligns with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) goals of improving regional connectivity, creating economic opportunities, and fostering integrated transport systems. Indonesia's leadership in this area strengthens its voice within ASEAN and underscores its commitment to regional progress and development.

Despite the potential benefits, Indonesia's partnership with China on the high-speed rail project also brings notable risks. One primary concern is the issue of debt sustainability. China's financing of the high-speed rail project, although appealing in the short term, has

raised concerns about Indonesia's long-term debt burden. Debt sustainability is a critical consideration, particularly as other countries involved in BRI projects, such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia, have faced challenges in repaying Chinese loans, resulting in dependency on Chinese financing and influence (Hurley, J., Morris, S., & Portelance, G. (2019). Although Indonesia has implemented measures to manage this risk, the potential economic dependency remains a concern, especially if project costs continue to rise.

The project also has implications for Indonesia's relations with other regional partners, particularly Japan. Japan has been a long-standing ally and economic partner of Indonesia, and it initially competed for the high-speed rail contract. Japan's loss in securing this project, despite its close ties with Indonesia, could influence future diplomatic relations and cooperation in other sectors (Trissia, W. , 2019). Indonesia must navigate this diplomatic terrain carefully to maintain positive relations with Japan while engaging with China on infrastructure projects.

Additionally, Indonesia faces challenges in managing public perceptions of Chinese influence in strategic sectors. Chinese investments in Indonesia have at times been met with skepticism and resistance from the public, who view these investments as a potential threat to national sovereignty and economic autonomy (Peterson, D. (2024).. Concerns about job opportunities for local workers, environmental impact, and the security implications of Chinese involvement in critical infrastructure projects have fueled public debates. The high-speed rail project, as a high-profile partnership, has intensified these sentiments, requiring the Indonesian government to address concerns about transparency, local employment, and the potential impact on national interests.

As the project progresses, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail serves as both a test and a symbol of Indonesia's ability to navigate the complex dynamics of global power competition. How Indonesia addresses these challenges will not only shape the outcome of the high-speed rail project but will also influence its broader foreign policy and economic strategies in the coming years.

Indonesia's cooperation with China on the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project reflects a strategic interest in technological advancement and capacity building. This collaboration includes provisions for technology transfer, enabling Indonesian personnel to gain expertise in high-speed rail construction and operation (Hurley, Morris, & Portelance, 2019). Such initiatives align with Indonesia's long-term objectives to build domestic capabilities in advanced transportation technologies, which are essential for national economic

modernization and infrastructure development (Peterson, 2024).

Key benefits of this partnership include access to Chinese expertise and the opportunity for Indonesian companies and workers to engage in cutting-edge rail technology (Bansal, Deng, & Samudra, 2024). Additionally, the experience gained from this project could pave the way for expanding high-speed rail to other parts of Indonesia, leveraging the skills and knowledge developed through this cooperation (Yang, Machmudi, & Rofii, 2023).

Nevertheless, challenges persist, particularly in ensuring effective technology transfer and fostering a sustainable domestic high-speed rail industry. Addressing these issues requires strong regulatory frameworks and consistent support for local industries to maximize the benefits of this technological collaboration (Wicaksana, 2023).

The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project carries profound implications for Indonesia's domestic political landscape, particularly as a centrepiece of President Joko Widodo's agenda to drive infrastructure modernization and economic growth. Jokowi has strategically positioned the project as a symbol of his administration's vision for advancing Indonesia's transportation sector and enhancing national competitiveness, a move intended to solidify his legacy as a champion of development (Liow, 2018). The inauguration of the railway in October 2023 was widely celebrated, with the administration presenting it as a major milestone in Indonesia's infrastructure achievements (Peterson, 2024).

A central political dimension of the project involves public perceptions regarding its benefits relative to costs. While the high-speed rail promises to reduce travel time, boost economic activities along the corridor, and stimulate local employment, concerns about cost overruns have fueled debates on the project's fiscal prudence. The government's use of state funds to address budget shortfalls has been controversial, with critics arguing that such expenditures could strain public finances and divert resources from other pressing needs (Wardhani & Dugis, 2023).

Further, the project's outcome is likely to influence Jokowi's political legacy and his party's standing in upcoming elections. The success or perceived shortcomings of this flagship initiative will shape public opinion on Jokowi's broader infrastructure policies, potentially affecting his party's political capital and electoral prospects (Hurley, Morris, & Portelance, 2019). Consequently, the high-speed rail project serves as both a testament to Indonesia's infrastructure ambitions and a critical factor in Jokowi's domestic political narrative.

Environmental and sustainability concerns, though secondary in the initial planning of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail, have increasingly come to the forefront as its long-term impact is assessed. The project offers significant potential to reduce carbon emissions by shifting traffic from road and air travel to rail. High-speed rail can produce up to 90% fewer emissions per passenger mile compared to automobiles and airplanes (IEA, 2019), making it an attractive option in addressing climate goals for both Indonesia and the broader ASEAN region (Wardhani & Dugis, 2023). However, concerns persist about the project's environmental footprint, encompassing land use changes, energy consumption, and ecosystem disruptions due to infrastructure development along the rail corridor.

Economically, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail aligns with Indonesia's vision of infrastructure-led growth. As President Joko Widodo has emphasized, the project is expected to generate substantial economic activity along the corridor, fostering new business opportunities and regional integration (Peterson, 2024). According to projections from Indonesia's Ministry of National Development Planning, the high-speed rail could contribute up to 0.4% to the nation's GDP over the next decade by enhancing productivity and creating thousands of jobs (Hurley, Morris, & Portelance, 2019). However, the project's escalating costs, now totaling approximately \$7.3 billion, have raised concerns about fiscal prudence and sustainability, as state funding has been necessary to cover significant budget overruns. This reliance on state resources has sparked debate on the long-term financial sustainability of such high-cost infrastructure projects, especially if anticipated economic returns fall short.

Geopolitically, Indonesia's decision to partner with China on this project reflects its efforts to strike a balance between maximizing benefits from major powers and maintaining strategic autonomy. The high-speed rail serves as a symbol of Indonesia's engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), leveraging China's technical expertise and financial resources while signaling a broader shift toward multi-aligned diplomacy (Liow, 2018). While China's involvement has facilitated access to advanced rail technology and infrastructure financing, it has also heightened sensitivity regarding potential dependency on Chinese investments. This relationship requires careful management to mitigate geopolitical repercussions, particularly in maintaining strong ties with other partners, such as Japan, who initially competed for the project.

The technological aspect of the high-speed rail offers Indonesia substantial opportunities for capacity building and knowledge transfer, which align with the country's goal of fostering domestic expertise in advanced transportation technologies (Bansal, Deng, & Samudra, 2024). Through training programs and joint operations with Chinese counterparts, Indonesian

workers and engineers gain valuable skills that could catalyze further infrastructure developments within Indonesia. However, the effectiveness and depth of this technology transfer remain to be assessed, as concerns persist about whether local industries will sufficiently benefit or if reliance on foreign expertise will prevail.

Domestically, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail has become emblematic of President Jokowi's infrastructure agenda, embodying both the promise and risks associated with ambitious developmental projects. The project's successful inauguration in October 2023 has been heralded as a milestone, reinforcing Jokowi's legacy as a proponent of modernization. However, the project's reliance on Chinese funding and expertise has stirred public debate, reflecting mixed perceptions of foreign influence on strategic national projects (Yang, Machmudi, & Rofii, 2023). Consequently, while the high-speed rail is a testament to Indonesia's infrastructure ambitions, its reception by the Indonesian public and its long-term impacts on domestic politics and public opinion are still evolving.

In conclusion, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail exemplifies Indonesia's strategic balancing act, with potential advantages in economic growth, technological advancement, and geopolitical influence. However, it also embodies the complexities and challenges inherent in large-scale partnerships with major powers. As Indonesia moves forward, the lessons learned from this project will undoubtedly inform future policy decisions regarding high-cost infrastructure, sustainability, and international cooperation.

4. Conclusion

This study offers several significant contributions to the understanding of Indonesia's strategic interests and decision-making in large-scale infrastructure initiatives. By analyzing the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project through the framework of national interest theory, it presents a comprehensive perspective on Indonesia's motivations, extending beyond economic and technical factors. The incorporation of recent developments following the railway's inauguration in October 2023 enables this research to provide the most up-to-date analysis of the project's implications and early performance, capturing the evolving impact of the collaboration.

Moreover, the study illuminates Indonesia's strategic balancing between major powers and its approach to leveraging international partnerships to achieve domestic development goals. These findings offer policymakers and analysts critical insights into the multifaceted considerations underlying infrastructure diplomacy and strategic partnerships, particularly within the context of emerging economies. By applying national interest theory to an in-depth

case study of infrastructure cooperation, this research makes a valuable contribution to the broader literature on how developing nations navigate the complexities of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

The insights gained from Indonesia's experience with this high-profile project can serve as an essential reference for other countries contemplating similar large-scale infrastructure collaborations with China or other global powers. Through the integration of economic, political, technological, and environmental perspectives, this research provides a nuanced, interdisciplinary analysis that informs discussions across academic and policy-oriented disciplines, offering a robust foundation for future studies in international development, infrastructure policy, and regional diplomacy.

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