

# INDONESIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL DIPLOMACY UNDER THE JOKO WIDODO ADMINISTRATION (2014–2024): A CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

In the past decade, environmental diplomacy has become one of the key agendas in international relations as threats from climate change and ecosystem degradation intensify. Amid these developments, Indonesia under the presidency of Joko Widodo has demonstrated active engagement through various global commitments, ranging from the ratification of international agreements to participation in climate change forums. However, this role raises questions about the extent to which Indonesia's environmental diplomacy reflects substantive commitment or merely representational efforts to project an image of a country responsive to global issues. This paper discusses how environmental norms are represented in Indonesia's diplomatic practices and how such representations are used to shape the country's position and legitimacy at the international level. Through an analysis of official statements and patterns of diplomatic engagement, the article shows that there is a disconnect between international narratives and domestic implementation, suggesting that environmental diplomacy functions more as a means of identity-building rather than as a driver of structural change. The paper concludes that greater consistency between diplomacy and environmental policy is needed so that Indonesia's role in global issues becomes not only symbolic but also produces tangible outcomes.

Keywords: Environmental diplomacy, Indonesia, norm representation, global environmental governance, one decade of Joko Widodo's administration

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Over the past few decades, environmental issues have assumed a central place in International Relations. Challenges such as climate change, ecosystem degradation, and transboundary pollution demand collective responses that exceed the capacity of individual states. In this context, environmental diplomacy has evolved into a key practice in international relations, one that not only mediates state interests but also shapes global norms and shared commitments in response to environmental crises (Chhatiawala 2025, 1). This growing prominence has generated a major academic debate over whether environmental diplomacy functions as a substantive instrument that genuinely drives domestic policy change, or whether it operates largely as a performative and symbolic

practice through which states signal alignment with global expectations without undertaking meaningful structural transformation (Hedling 2025, 5).

Environmental diplomacy is not merely a matter of technical negotiation; it is deeply infused with normative and symbolic meanings (Orsini 2019, 240). As a result, scholarly debates have crystallized around two main perspectives. The first views diplomacy as a mechanism for aligning commitments and strengthening global environmental governance. The second adopts a more critical stance, arguing that diplomacy often serves as a representational arena in which states project a “green” identity to secure international legitimacy, even when domestic implementation remains inconsistent. This tension forms the theoretical foundation of this study, which challenges the assumption that diplomacy necessarily leads to the internalization of norms, while examining how diplomatic performativity contributes to the construction of state image.

As a developing country endowed with vast natural resources, Indonesia occupies a strategic position in global environmental diplomacy. Its participation in various international forums has elevated environmental issues as an important instrument of Indonesian foreign policy. At the same time, this strategic role places Indonesia at the center of academic debate: does its active engagement reflect a substantive commitment to environmental governance, or does it function primarily as a symbolic effort to negotiate image and legitimacy amid rising global expectations? In this sense, Indonesia’s environmental diplomacy is not only an expression of ecological concern, but also a reflection of how the country navigates international pressures while shaping its identity and role within a global order increasingly oriented toward sustainable development.

During the decade of Joko Widodo’s administration (2014–2024), Indonesia’s environmental diplomacy intensified at the international level. The ratification of the Paris Agreement, the revision of its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), the commitment to FOLU Net Sink 2030, and active participation in various climate forums have positioned Indonesia as an engaged and cooperative actor within the global environmental regime. On the surface, this series of commitments appears to demonstrate alignment with global norms. Yet from a discursive perspective, these practices reveal representational dynamics that do not always correspond with substantive transformation in domestic policy.

**Table 1. Indonesia’s Environmental and Climate Commitments (2014–2019) and Their National Legal Bases**

No	Year	Type of Commitment	National Legal Basis
1	2014	ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP)	Law No. 26 of 2014
2	2015	Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 29% (41% with international support)	Law No. 16 of 2016

No	Year	Type of Commitment	National Legal Basis
3	2015	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development / Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Presidential Regulation No. 59 of 2017
4	2017	Minamata Convention on Mercury	Law No. 11 of 2017
5	2018	Commitment to reducing marine debris and plastic pollution	Presidential Regulation No. 83 of 2018

Source: Compiled by the author

**Table 2. Indonesia's Environmental and Climate Commitments (2019–2024) and Their National Legal Bases**

No	Year	Type of Commitment	National Legal Basis
1	2021	Establishment of the FOLU Net Sink 2030 target for the forestry and land-use sector	Minister of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. 168 of 2022
2	2022 (Bali G20 Summit)	Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) as an international partnership for a just energy transition	Comprehensive Investment and Policy Plan (CIPP), 2023
3	2022	Enhancement of greenhouse gas emission reduction targets under the Enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)	Presidential Regulation No. 98 of 2021 Law No. 7 of 2021
4	2023	Development of carbon economic value mechanisms through carbon taxation and a carbon trading market	Presidential Regulation No. 98 of 2021 Financial Services Authority (OJK) Regulation No. 14/POJK.04/2023

Source: Compiled by the author

However, most studies on Indonesia's environmental diplomacy continue to focus on formal policies and institutional achievements, thereby tending to frame diplomacy as a technocratic instrument within international relations (Robertua, Oktavian, and Sigalingging 2022, 9). This dominant approach leaves limited space for analyses that view environmental diplomacy as a normative and representational practice, in which global environmental norms are not merely adopted, but interpreted, negotiated, and reproduced by states. As a result, diplomacy is often reduced to questions of policy compliance and forum participation, without sufficient attention to how symbolic and discursive

processes shape Indonesia's position, image, and identity within the global environmental arena.

Yet, despite Indonesia's high level of engagement in various international environmental regimes and its frequent recognition as an ecologically responsible actor, a significant conceptual tension remains underexplored. This tension emerges when environmental leadership is constructed primarily through symbolic representation and normative alignment at the international level, while the internalization of environmental norms into domestic policy practice proceeds in a partial and uneven manner. Such a condition challenges constructivist assumptions that portray environmental diplomacy as a linear process leading to norm internalization, and instead opens space for a critical analysis of diplomacy as an arena of meaning-making, legitimacy production, and identity formation that does not always translate into substantive transformation at the national level.

This article adopts a critical constructivist perspective to understand environmental diplomacy as a practice of meaning-making and norm representation. Within this framework, environmental norms are not treated as entities that are automatically internalized by states, but rather as discourses that can be selectively represented through diplomatic practice. This approach makes it possible to examine how environmental diplomacy operates as a mechanism for constructing international image and identity, without reducing the analysis to assessments of policy success or the effectiveness of technical implementation alone.

From a theoretical standpoint, this condition points to the limitations of constructivist approaches that conceptualize environmental diplomacy as a linear process leading to norm internalization (Taufik 2017, 7). In the norm life cycle model developed by Finnemore and Sikkink, as well as in the domestic internalization approach discussed by Checkel, active state participation in international environmental regimes is generally interpreted as an indication that global norms have been internalized and translated into national policy (Azzahra 2024, 101; Kaarbo 2015).

From a critical constructivist perspective, environmental diplomacy is understood not as a channel for the diffusion of norms, but as a discursive practice through which meaning, image, and state identity are constructed. Global environmental norms are treated as interpretive frameworks that can be selectively mobilized and represented in diplomatic practice to generate international legitimacy and recognition (Setiyaningsih 2021, 43). Within this framework, environmental diplomacy becomes an arena in which states present themselves as ecologically responsible actors through language, symbols, and narratives projected to global audiences.

It is at this point that the urgency of this research becomes evident. Amid growing global expectations regarding environmental responsibility, the Joko Widodo administration has consistently projected Indonesia as a proactive, cooperative, and norm-aligned state through its participation in various international forums. Yet the narratives and images constructed in these diplomatic arenas reveal representational dynamics that are neither fixed nor uniform, as different environmental norms are selectively mobilized according to

the forum, the audience, and specific diplomatic objectives. While previous studies have largely interpreted Indonesia's environmental diplomacy in terms of policy commitments, institutional participation, or norm internalization, they provide limited explanation of how diplomatic discourse itself constructs Indonesia's image, legitimacy, and environmental identity. This gap raises a central question: How has Indonesia's environmental diplomacy during the Joko Widodo era been used to represent global environmental norms and to build Indonesia's image and legitimacy as an environmental actor in the international arena?

In line with this question, the article aims to analyze Indonesia's model of environmental diplomacy under the Joko Widodo administration by conceptualizing it as a normative and discursive practice in international relations, rather than merely as a technocratic policy instrument. The primary focus of the study is to examine how global environmental norms are represented through Indonesia's diplomatic practices and how these representations contribute to the formation of Indonesia's position, image, and legitimacy within the contemporary international order. Unlike the analysis by Kinanti Kusumawardhani Taufik in "Indonesia's Environmental Diplomacy under Yudhoyono," which frames diplomacy as a boundary institution bridging global norms and local practices, this article deliberately sets aside questions of implementation. Instead, it views environmental diplomacy as an arena of normative representation, in which global norms are interpreted, constructed, and projected to shape Indonesia's identity as a global environmental actor.

In accordance with these objectives, the article makes a theoretical contribution in three main respects. First, it advances a theoretical reading that situates environmental diplomacy as a representational and discursive practice, rather than as a linear process leading to norm internalization. Second, the study develops a conceptual model of representational environmental diplomacy to explain how legitimacy, moral authority, and claims to international leadership are constructed through normative alignment and symbolic practices in the global arena. Third, through an empirical analysis of Indonesia's environmental diplomacy during the Joko Widodo era, the article offers a reinterpretation of environmental leadership in the Global South by demonstrating that leadership can also be formed through a state's capacity to manage meaning, narratives, and image within global environmental governance.

While much of the existing literature positions Indonesia's environmental diplomacy as a process of policy alignment with global norms, this article intervenes in that debate by highlighting the limitations of norm internalization assumptions within constructivism. Rather than treating Indonesia's engagement in environmental regimes as evidence of substantive norm adoption, the article shows that diplomacy operates as a representational practice that produces particular images, forms of legitimacy, and identities in international space. This intervention is important for addressing a gap in the literature that has largely emphasized formal achievements, policy compliance, or institutional participation, while giving limited attention to how states strategically mobilize

environmental language, symbols, and narratives to shape their international position and role.

## 1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background outlined above, the research question of this article is: how has Indonesia's environmental diplomacy during the Joko Widodo administration (2014–2024) functioned as a representational practice through the selective mobilization of global environmental norms to construct Indonesia's image, legitimacy, and identity within the contemporary international environmental order?

## 1.3 Purpose and objective

In line with this question, the article aims to analyze Indonesia's environmental diplomacy during the Joko Widodo, how global environmental norms are interpreted, selectively represented, and strategically mobilized through Indonesia's diplomatic engagements in international forums, as well as how these representational practices contribute to the construction of Indonesia's international image, legitimacy, and environmental identity amid growing global expectations regarding sustainability and climate governance.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Critical Constructivism in International Relations

The study of international relations was initially shaped by the dominance of realism and liberalism, both of which position the state as a rational actor with stable material interests (Dugis 2016, 149). These approaches have been effective in explaining state compliance and the design of international institutions, but they are insufficient for capturing the dynamics of environmental issues, which are deeply embedded in meaning and symbolism. Scholars later recognized that environmental issues are not solely about rule compliance, but are also reproduced through identities, narratives, and representational practices enacted by states (Dale et al. 2025, 3). The limitations of these materialist frameworks prompted a search for approaches that are more sensitive to social and discursive contexts. This marked the starting point of a shift toward theories grounded in social construction.

Constructivism emerged by offering the insight that state identities and interests are not fixed, but are shaped through processes of interaction and shared meaning-making (Rosert 2024, 22). In the environmental domain, constructivism demonstrates that state commitments do not always stem from material interests, but rather from how states understand their moral roles and normative obligations at the global level. This opens analytical space to examine how states construct particular roles, such as guardians of the Earth or climate leaders through their engagement in environmental regimes. From this perspective, climate politics is not merely about technical negotiation, but also about contests over identity. Nevertheless, constructivism retains limitations in explaining variations in state behavior (Zehfuss 2004, 264).

Developments in the literature indicate that constructivism continues to rely heavily on assumptions of normative stability and linear causal relationships (Winston 2023, 5). The norm life cycle model proposed by Finnemore and Sikkink, for example, conceptualizes norms as progressing through fixed stages toward internalization (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). In environmental politics, however, norms frequently encounter resistance, reinterpretation, or strategic manipulation for domestic political purposes. Numerous studies show that states do not always internalize norms fully, but often adopt them selectively for strategic ends. These critiques underscore the need for an approach capable of capturing conflicts of meaning, ambivalence, and tensions between international representation and domestic implementation (Acharya 2004, 245).

In the field of global environmental governance, a parallel theoretical shift has occurred from regime theory toward polycentric governance and transnational climate governance (Morin, Dür, and Lechner 2018). Ostrom highlights the existence of multiple centers of action that are not necessarily hierarchical (Ostrom 2010), while Betsill and Corell emphasize the significant role of non-state actors in shaping global agendas (Betsill and Corell 2001). These developments indicate that governance can no longer be understood through a single formal arena, but rather as a multilayered network shaped by discourse. This perspective reveals that who speaks, how they speak, and where they speak become crucial factors in shaping policy outcomes. As a result, representational logics have become increasingly important (Robertua and Bainus 2018, 174).

Discursive and postcolonial critiques further argue that global environmental norms are not neutral, but often reflect the interests of developed countries. They emphasize that narratives of sustainable development and energy transition are frequently shaped by actors with disproportionate epistemic and political power (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015). Consequently, developing countries must navigate norms that have been constructed by centers of global power. This body of literature highlights the importance of examining how states negotiate their positions within unequal discursive structures. From this perspective, environmental issues are understood as arenas of contestation over meaning, rather than merely matters of rule compliance.

Critical constructivism emerges as a corrective to conventional constructivism by centering attention on the production, negotiation, and struggle over meaning (Setiyaningsih 2021, 152). This approach rejects linear causal logic and views norms as dynamic discursive practices. The guiding question thus shifts from “are norms internalized?” to “how are norms used, represented, and interpreted?” Norms are no longer understood as rules, but as resources that states can mobilize to project particular identities. This perspective opens a sharper analytical space for examining the politics of state representation.

Critical constructivism also reshapes how diplomacy is understood as a representational process. Diplomacy is not merely a forum for technical negotiation, but an arena in which states construct images through language, symbols, commitments, and narratives. States may present themselves as green leaders, responsible actors, or guardians of the global commons even when domestic implementation does not fully support such claims. Environmental

identity thus becomes performative and strategic, rather than a direct reflection of objective conditions. It is within this arena that symbolic politics plays a significant role in international relations.

This approach is particularly relevant for examining Indonesia's trajectory during the Joko Widodo era. Indonesia has appeared proactive in international forums through the ratification of the Paris Agreement, the enhancement of its Nationally Determined Contribution, and its active roles in COP meetings and the G20. The narratives constructed in these spaces portray Indonesia as a responsible state aligned with global norms. Yet numerous studies show that domestic policies often exhibit variation, ambivalence, and inconsistency. It is precisely this tension between international image and domestic practice that calls for a new analytical framework.

This gap is difficult to explain through constructivist approaches that assume norm acceptance will lead to substantive behavioral change. Instead, the phenomenon is better understood as a form of symbolic environmentalism or performance diplomacy, in which representation is decoupled from practice. Indonesia appears to use diplomacy to build international legitimacy and positioning, while domestic policies continue to operate according to different political and economic logics. The literature addressing this dynamic remains limited, particularly in the context of developing countries. For this reason, analyses that conceptualize diplomacy as a representational practice are especially important.

This study employs critical constructivism to analyze how Indonesia produces identity and legitimacy through environmental diplomacy. The framework allows for a more nuanced reading of the tensions between international performance and domestic implementation. By focusing on representational practices, the study fills a theoretical gap that has received limited attention in the literature on global environmental politics and Indonesian studies. The approach also offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating how discourse analysis can uncover the structures of meaning that shape state action. In this way, the study provides original contributions at both the theoretical and empirical levels.

### 3. Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to examine how Indonesia's environmental diplomacy is represented in the speeches of President Joko Widodo. CDA is chosen because it understands language not merely as a medium of communication, but as a social practice through which meaning, identity, and political positioning are produced and negotiated (Fairclough 1997; Van Dijk 1997a, 1997b, 2015). This approach is consistent with critical constructivism, which conceptualizes diplomacy as a representational arena in which global norms are mobilized, strategically selected, and deployed to construct a state's image within the international order.

Within the CDA framework, language is regarded as non-neutral, as it is embedded with interests and power relations. Accordingly, CDA is employed to

examine how terms such as climate justice, sustainable development, and energy transition are framed in presidential speeches, and how these framings represent Indonesia's position within the global environmental regime. Fairclough's CDA model is used to analyze the relationship between the textual content of the speeches, the context of international forums, and the broader structures of environmental norms.

The research data consist of eight speeches and official statements delivered by President Joko Widodo at various international forums throughout his presidency, including COP21 Paris (2015), the International Maritime Organization Assembly in London (2016), COP23 Bonn (2017), COP24 Katowice (2018), the East Asia Summit in Bangkok (2019), Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (2020), the Climate Summit (2021), the G20 Bali Summit (2022), and COP28 Dubai (2023). Data units were selected based on strict criteria: the speech had to (1) be delivered directly by the President, (2) take place at a high-level international forum, (3) contain explicit articulation of environmental, climate change, or energy transition issues, and (4) be available through official government sources or the organizing institutions of the forums.

The analytical technique follows Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, which consists of (1) textual analysis, (2) discursive practice, and (3) social practice. The analysis began by compiling data according to the established selection criteria and time frame, followed by repeated readings to identify initial representational patterns. Thematic coding was conducted manually using a coding sheet structured around three main categories: (1) narratives, including storylines, metaphors, and moral claims; (2) normative meanings, encompassing justice, sustainability, carbon neutrality, and green leadership; and (3) Indonesia's positioning, articulated through representations as a developing country, a maritime power, and a green industrial leader. Each finding was then interpreted contextually by linking it to the specific forum, audience, and relevant global normative structures. The analysis concluded with a cross-period comparison to trace consistency, shifts in meaning, and representational strategies that shape the construction of Indonesia's identity in environmental diplomacy.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

##### 4.1 Indonesia's Environmental Diplomacy during the First Term of the Joko Widodo Administration (2014–2019)

**Table 3. Key Presidential Statements on Environmental Issues in International Forums (2014–2019)**

No	Year	Data Source	Text Excerpt
1	2015	Speech of the President of the Republic of Indonesia at COP21, Paris	<i>“The Paris Agreement must reflect balance and fairness, and be aligned with national priorities and capacities. It must be binding, long-</i>

No	Year	Data Source	Text Excerpt
			<i>term, and ambitious, yet not hinder the development of developing countries. To achieve the Paris Agreement, all parties—I repeat, all parties—must contribute more to mitigation and adaptation efforts, particularly developed countries, through the mobilization of USD 100 billion in financing by 2020 and increased support in the years thereafter, as well as through the transfer of environmentally friendly technology and capacity building.”</i>
2	2016	Speech of the President of the Republic of Indonesia at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Assembly, London	<i>“We recognize that the use of marine resources must be carried out sustainably for the welfare of our people. We also recognize that it is our responsibility as global citizens to preserve the oceans. And as a power located between two oceans, we have an obligation to contribute to maritime safety.”</i>
3	2017	Statement by Minister Siti Nurbaya at the 23rd UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP23), Bonn, Germany	<i>“Indonesia has set a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 29 percent through its own efforts (unconditional), and up to 41 percent with international support (conditional), compared to a business-as-usual scenario by 2030.”</i>
4	2018	Statement by the Minister of National Development Planning at the 24th UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP24), Katowice, Poland	<i>“The Government of Indonesia is fully committed to integrating concrete climate action through a low-carbon development pathway into the country’s 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan, by mainstreaming the principles and approaches of low-carbon</i>

No	Year	Data Source	Text Excerpt
			<i>development and the green economy.”</i>
5	2019	Speech of President Joko Widodo at the 14th East Asia Summit, Bangkok	<p><i>“Certainly, none of us wants Southeast Asia to become a dumping ground for hazardous and toxic waste.”</i></p> <p><i>“We are also enforcing the law against those involved domestically. Indonesia expects cooperation from countries around the world, including those in the East Asia region, to prevent the illegal shipment of hazardous and toxic waste in accordance with international agreements.”</i></p>

Source: Compiled by the author

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Indonesia's environmental diplomacy during the first term of President Joko Widodo (2014–2019) reveals that official speeches at international environmental forums were not merely used to communicate policy commitments but also to construct Indonesia's international identity through language. Across different diplomatic settings, recurring lexical choices, moral claims, and identity markers functioned as representational resources that positioned Indonesia within the global environmental order. Rather than presenting a fixed environmental identity, the speeches demonstrate that Indonesia selectively mobilized different environmental norms according to the audience, institutional setting, and diplomatic objectives of each forum. This finding supports the critical constructivist argument that diplomacy operates as a discursive arena in which state identity and legitimacy are continuously produced and negotiated through representation rather than simply reflecting pre-existing national interests.

This pattern of normative selectivity is particularly visible in President Joko Widodo's speech at COP21 in Paris. The repeated use of expressions such as *"balance," "fairness,"* and *"all parties"* frames climate governance as an issue of differentiated responsibility rather than universal obligation. Instead of emphasizing Indonesia's own emission reduction commitments, the discourse repeatedly directs attention toward the obligations of developed countries to provide financial support, environmentally sound technology, and capacity building. Through these lexical choices, Indonesia is represented not primarily as a major emitter, but as a developing country entitled to climate justice within the

global environmental regime. The speech therefore performs more than a policy statement; it constructs a normative identity grounded in fairness, equity, and developmental rights while simultaneously legitimizing Indonesia's position in international climate negotiations.

A different representational strategy emerges in Indonesia's address to the International Maritime Organization. Unlike the justice-oriented discourse employed at COP21, the speech relies on expressions such as "*global citizens*," "*responsibility*," and "*power between two oceans*" to construct Indonesia as a morally responsible maritime actor. The phrase "*power between two oceans*" is particularly significant because it transforms Indonesia's geographical position into a source of international authority rather than merely a physical characteristic. Likewise, describing Indonesia as part of a community of "*global citizens*" universalizes the country's environmental obligations beyond narrow national interests. These linguistic choices reposition Indonesia from a recipient of international support into a contributor to global environmental governance, illustrating how diplomatic identity is reconstructed according to the normative expectations of different international forums.

Furthermore, the study identifies a tension of roles, referring to the strain between two dominant identities that Indonesia alternately projects: its identity as a developing country demanding justice, and its identity as a maritime state asserting leadership in maritime security. At COP21 and COP23, Indonesia emphasized its position as a developing country in need of financial and technological support from developed states. By contrast, at the 2016 IMO Assembly, the narrative shifted markedly. Indonesia described itself as a "global citizen" and a "power between two oceans," a position that reflects a claim to moral authority more commonly associated with leading states. This tension between identities demonstrates that Indonesia's diplomatic representation is neither singular nor consistent, but instead varies according to the structure of the forum and the international audience.

The discourse analysis also shows that Indonesia's environmental diplomacy employs strategic silence, a practice of downplaying or omitting certain issues in order to maintain narrative coherence within specific forums. For example, in the IMO context, emission reduction was not addressed in any significant way, despite the shipping sector's contribution to global emissions. Instead, Indonesia's focus was directed entirely toward maritime safety and marine conservation. Similarly, at the 2019 East Asia Summit, hazardous and toxic waste was framed as an issue of structural injustice, yet there was no discussion of national capacity for waste management. The management of such silences reflects another form of representational strategy that has received limited attention in the literature on Indonesia's environmental diplomacy.

In addition, environmental diplomacy was used to build international legitimacy through narratives of global morality. At the 2016 IMO Assembly, claims of Indonesia as a "power between two oceans" and as an actor "responsible for safeguarding marine sustainability" indicate that Indonesia mobilized its geographical configuration as a source of moral authority. This representation differs from the discourse in COP forums, which places greater emphasis on the

need for international support. These findings suggest that environmental legitimacy is constructed not only through climate commitments, but also through representations of moral responsibility and global stewardship.

At COP24 in 2018, another representational shift emerged through the integration of development and climate discourses via the narrative of low-carbon development. Unlike the earlier focus on climate justice, this narrative positioned Indonesia as a progressive developing country that integrates climate concerns into the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan. This reflects a more complex dynamic of identity construction, in which Indonesia not only aligns itself with global norms but also frames itself as an actor contributing to the production of a green development agenda.

These findings are consistent with the analysis of Ciptet, Roberts, and Khan (2015), who emphasize that countries in the Global South often deploy justice-based discourse as a diplomatic strategy within the global climate regime. However, unlike their focus on COP negotiations, this study shows that Indonesia's use of justice discourse is forum-specific: dominant in climate forums, but transformed into narratives of maritime morality in the IMO and into discourses of environmental sovereignty in regional summits. In this way, the study extends existing understandings of strategic justice framing by demonstrating that it is not a singular practice, but a flexible strategy that adapts to audiences and the normative structures of international forums.

Overall, the findings from the 2014–2019 period demonstrate that Indonesia's environmental diplomacy cannot be understood merely as the promotion of justice narratives or low-carbon development agendas. Rather, it operates as a representational practice that is selective, strategic, and marked by identity tensions. Indonesia's representations shift across forums, mobilizing different norms to strengthen its international position while managing strategic silences to maintain narrative coherence before global audiences. These findings make an empirical contribution to the literature on environmental politics in the Global South and a theoretical contribution to critical constructivism by showing that environmental norms are produced, negotiated, and mobilized as sources of legitimacy rather than simply internalized as rules. In this sense, Indonesia's environmental diplomacy during the first term of the Joko Widodo administration illustrates the complexity of how a developing state performs its identity in pursuit of global recognition through language, symbols, and representation, rather than solely through technical commitments or emission targets.

#### **4. 2 Indonesia's Environmental Diplomacy during the Second Term of the Joko Widodo Administration (2019–2024)**

**Table 4. Key Presidential Statements on Environmental Issues in International Forums (2019-2024)**

No	Year	Data Source	Text Excerpt
1	2020	Statement by President Joko Widodo at Abu	<i>“As the world's largest nickel producer, Indonesia is ready to supply the rapidly</i>

No	Year	Data Source	Text Excerpt
		Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW) 2020, Abu Dhabi	<i>growing and increasingly important lithium-ion battery industry.”</i>
2	2021	Speech of President Joko Widodo at the Climate Summit	<i>“Indonesia is very serious about addressing climate change and calls on the world to take concrete actions—to lead by example. We must advance green development for a better world. Indonesia has updated its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to enhance climate adaptation capacity and resilience. Indonesia is accelerating net-zero emission pilot projects, including the development of the Indonesia Green Industrial Park covering 12,500 hectares in North Kalimantan, which will become the largest in the world.”</i>
3	2022	Opening Remarks by President Joko Widodo at the G20 Summit, Session I: Global Economic Conditions, Food Security, and Energy, Bali	<i>“The world is facing extraordinary challenges. Crisis after crisis has unfolded. The COVID-19 pandemic has not fully ended, rivalries continue to intensify, and wars have broken out. The impacts of these multiple crises on food, energy, and financial security are being felt globally, especially by developing countries. As President of the G20, Indonesia has made every effort to bridge very deep and wide differences. However, success can only be achieved if all of us, without exception, commit, work hard, and set aside our differences to deliver something concrete—something beneficial for the world.”</i>
4	2023	Speech of President Joko Widodo at the World Climate Action Summit (WCAS), COP28, Dubai	<i>“Indonesia’s position is clear: to build a resilient, prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive economy. We are committed to working hard to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060 or earlier, while sustaining strong economic growth, significantly reducing poverty and inequality, and continuously creating jobs.”</i>

Source: Compiled by the author

A Critical Discourse Analysis of President Joko Widodo's speeches between 2020 and 2024 reveals a noticeable shift in Indonesia's representational strategy. While the first presidential term primarily relied on the discourse of climate justice and maritime responsibility, the second term increasingly employed the language of industrial transformation, green development, and strategic resources. Across different international forums, these lexical choices function not merely as descriptions of national policies but as discursive resources through which Indonesia constructs legitimacy, projects leadership, and negotiates its position within the global energy transition.

At the 2020 Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, nickel was framed not only as an economic commodity but as a strategic element of Indonesia's identity in the global energy transition. President Jokowi emphasized Indonesia's status as the world's largest nickel producer to construct an identity as a resource-based green actor a country possessing strategic value within clean energy infrastructure. This framing reflects a form of selective green identity, in which specific material assets are highlighted to strengthen bargaining power in environmental diplomacy. From a critical constructivist perspective, this process demonstrates that state identity does not emerge automatically, but is actively shaped through the reinterpretation of material resources that are then assigned symbolic functions within global discourse.

The statement "the world's largest nickel producer" performs more than an economic description. The superlative expression "world's largest" functions as a linguistic resource that elevates Indonesia's strategic significance within the global energy transition. Rather than emphasizing environmental protection directly, the discourse links Indonesia's natural resources with the future of clean technology through references to the lithium-ion battery industry. This lexical association transforms nickel from a conventional mining commodity into a symbol of green industrial modernity. Consequently, Indonesia is represented not merely as a resource-rich developing country but as an indispensable actor in the emerging global green economy.

At the 2021 Climate Summit, Indonesia's representation shifted toward a green leader identity, articulated through expressions such as "to lead by example." The government reinforced this representational legitimacy by showcasing concrete projects, such as the Indonesia Green Industrial Park, as performative evidence of climate commitment. Within the CDA framework, this discourse functions to build credibility through the presentation of policies that are visually and technically verifiable. This strategy illustrates that Indonesia's environmental diplomacy no longer relies solely on normative arguments, but increasingly employs infrastructure-based symbolic instruments to consolidate its position as a leader in the green transition.

This representational strategy becomes more explicit through the expression "to lead by example." The use of this phrase constructs Indonesia as an active norm-setter rather than a passive participant in global climate governance. Similarly, references to the "Indonesia Green Industrial Park" operate as symbolic evidence supporting the leadership claim. Instead of relying solely on normative language, the speech combines aspirational vocabulary with references

to concrete infrastructure projects, thereby strengthening the credibility of Indonesia's projected identity as a green leader. Through this discourse, environmental commitment is represented as both a moral responsibility and a developmental achievement.

At the 2022 G20 Summit, Indonesia projected a collective crisis leader identity through narratives about “bridging very deep differences” amid multiple global crises. This discourse was not intended to demonstrate technical policy capacity, but rather to assert Indonesia’s symbolic role as a mediator of international stability. By linking energy, food, and geopolitical crises to the climate agenda, Indonesia expanded the representational scope of its environmental diplomacy into the domain of global crisis governance. From a CDA perspective, this strategy illustrates the use of crisis as a source of identity-based legitimacy, positioning Indonesia as an inclusive actor capable of uniting global stakeholders under conditions of uncertainty.

The G20 address employs a different rhetorical pattern. Expressions such as "crisis after crisis" intensify the perception of global instability, while the repeated collective pronouns "all of us" construct a shared sense of responsibility among world leaders. Most notably, the phrase "bridge very deep and wide differences" positions Indonesia not through material capability but through its capacity to facilitate dialogue and cooperation. Rather than emphasizing national achievements, the discourse constructs Indonesia's legitimacy as a mediator capable of fostering consensus during periods of global uncertainty.

At COP28 in 2023, Indonesia constructed the identity of a developmental green state by emphasizing that the transition toward net-zero emissions must proceed alongside economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction. This identity integrates development and sustainability within a broader narrative of modernity. At the same time, this discourse reveals a tension of roles between Indonesia’s identity as a provider of strategic resources and its identity as a leader in green development. This tension underscores that Indonesia’s green identity is not fixed, but continuously negotiated in relation to forum-specific contexts and international audiences, such as COP, ADSW, and the G20.

The discourse at COP28 is characterized by the repeated juxtaposition of environmental and developmental objectives. Terms such as "net-zero emissions," "economic growth," "job creation," and "poverty reduction" appear within the same narrative sequence, suggesting that environmental sustainability and economic development are represented as mutually reinforcing rather than competing goals. This linguistic construction challenges the conventional dichotomy between growth and climate action. Instead, Indonesia projects an identity as a developmental green state in which environmental responsibility is framed as compatible with national prosperity and social inclusion.

CDA analysis also reveals the presence of strategic silence in Indonesia’s environmental diplomacy during this period. Despite the strong emphasis on energy transition and green industrialization, issues such as deforestation, palm oil expansion, and forest fires were largely absent from international speeches. The omission of these issues reflects a representational strategy aimed at maintaining a coherent green identity by foregrounding sectors associated with

modernity (nickel, batteries, industrial parks), while sidelining elements that could undermine legitimacy. Thus, environmental diplomacy in this second period is characterized not only by selective norm mobilization, but also by the deliberate management of silence to sustain a consistent green image.

Taken together, the speeches analysed in this period reveal that Indonesia's environmental diplomacy increasingly relies on carefully selected linguistic frames—industrial capability, leadership, mediation, and inclusive development—to construct different dimensions of environmental legitimacy across international forums.

Overall, the 2020–2024 period demonstrates a representational pattern that remains strategically consistent with the first period in its reliance on discourse to construct identity, mobilize norms, and negotiate Indonesia's global position, even as the themes and symbols employed underwent significant transformation. Whereas the first period was dominated by normative selectivity centered on climate justice discourse, the second period shifted toward a selective green identity that highlights energy transition and material capacity as sources of legitimacy. The identities being negotiated also evolved, from tensions between developing country and maritime leader identities to tensions between strategic resource provider and green leader identities. This continuity in representational strategy, alongside shifts in symbolic foundations, illustrates how Indonesia's environmental diplomacy in its second period continued to function as an arena for meaning-making and legitimacy construction, in which green discourse is mobilized to strengthen international standing and bargaining power.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

This study set out to answer the question of how Indonesia's environmental diplomacy during the Joko Widodo administration has been used to represent global environmental norms and construct Indonesia's image and legitimacy in the international arena. The findings demonstrate that Indonesia's environmental diplomacy functions primarily as a representational practice through which environmental norms are selectively mobilized to construct international legitimacy, negotiate state identity, and strengthen Indonesia's positioning within global environmental governance.

The findings also reaffirm the central representational argument advanced in this article. Rather than viewing Indonesia's environmental diplomacy as a linear process through which global environmental norms are internalized into domestic policy, the analysis demonstrates that diplomacy functions primarily as a representational practice. Across different international forums, environmental norms are selectively mobilized, interpreted, and communicated to construct Indonesia's international identity, strengthen its legitimacy, and negotiate its position within global environmental governance. In this sense, diplomatic discourse should be understood not merely as a reflection of environmental commitments but as an active mechanism through which state identity and authority are continuously produced and reconstructed.

Empirically, the study identifies a consistent pattern characterized by normative selectivity, strategic silence, and tensions of roles among identities as a developing country, a maritime leader, and a green actor. These practices indicate that Indonesia's environmental identity is performative, flexible, and highly dependent on the context of international forums. Shifts in narrative between the first and second terms of the Joko Widodo administration further illustrate that diplomacy is used to frame Indonesia as different types of actors in response to changing demands for global legitimacy, rather than as a reflection of changes in domestic behavior.

Taken together, these findings strengthen critical constructivism within International Relations by advancing the concept of representational diplomacy, understood as diplomacy that functions as an arena for meaning-making rather than merely as an instrument of technical negotiation. The study opens avenues for future research on how developing countries employ representational practices to negotiate global identity and legitimacy. Accordingly, this conclusion affirms that Indonesia's environmental diplomacy during the Joko Widodo era constitutes a discursive practice through which state identity is shaped in a performative and strategic manner.

## **5. 2 Recommendations**

### **1. For Government and Policy Makers**

The Indonesian government needs to ensure that environmental diplomacy does not remain limited to international representation and symbolic commitments, but is followed by consistent and measurable domestic policy implementation. Aligning global narratives on sustainability, energy transition, and green development with national practices is essential so that the international legitimacy constructed through diplomacy can produce substantive impacts at the domestic level. In addition, the government is encouraged to strengthen transparency and accountability in the implementation of environmental and green industrialization agendas, particularly in energy transition projects, so that Indonesia's environmental diplomacy reflects not only symbolic ambition but also tangible policy transformation.

### **2. For Academics and International Relations Scholars**

Research on Indonesia's environmental diplomacy should be expanded beyond policy and institutional approaches toward more critical analyses of representation, identity construction, and legitimacy production within international forums. Scholars are encouraged to further examine how Global South countries strategically mobilize environmental narratives as diplomatic instruments to negotiate their international position amid global inequalities. Such efforts would contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between discourse, power, and state identity formation within global environmental governance.

### **3. For Media and Civil Society**

Media institutions and civil society organizations are expected to continue acting as critical observers of the consistency between Indonesia's

international environmental commitments and domestic implementation. Furthermore, the media should broaden public discussions on environmental diplomacy so that it is not perceived solely as an elite global agenda, but also as an issue that directly affects domestic social, economic, and environmental conditions. Collaboration among journalists, academics, and civil society actors is also important in translating the technocratic language of environmental diplomacy into narratives that are more inclusive, critical, and accessible to the wider public.

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