

POLICY REVIEW

# @jokowi tweets yet to comprehensively capture his foreign policy

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**T**witter is a daring and bold new world for foreign policy that most world leaders happily or reluctantly embrace.

While several world leaders have verified Twitter accounts to share upcoming engagements, pictures, and campaigns, some have taken Twitter a step further by conducting diplomacy in 280 characters.

Those big names in politics not only share their beliefs or policies on the platform but sometimes also flex their muscles, creating the so-called conflict and are blamed for few controversies in diplomatic circles. For instance, the US President Donald Trump's tweet on the US-China trade dispute.

A research conducted by Statista.com showed that on January 2019, the eight most-followed Twitter accounts of world leaders were @realDonaldTrump, the US President's personal account; @Pontifex, Paus Francis/the Vatican account; @NarendraModi, the Indian PM's personal account; @PMOIndia, the Indian PM's institutional account; @POTUS, the US President's institutional account; @WhiteHouse, the US Presidency account; @RTerdogan, the Turkish PM's account; @Jokowi, the Indonesian President's account; @QueenRania, the account of the Queen of Jordan; and @imrankhanpti, the Pakistani PM's account.

Since being elected as Indonesian president in 2014, Joko Widodo is known as an active Twitter user. His @jokowi account, followed by over 12.4 million people has distributed around 2,108 tweets since he opened it in September 2011. He earlier had in place a team that ran his accounts, and he would add his signature, jkw, to any tweet he sent personally for the audience to know. However, recently, it seems all tweets are his despite no signature on them. He tweets cover a plethora of topics, ranging from economics to politics to his fondness for his beloved grandson, Jan Ethes.

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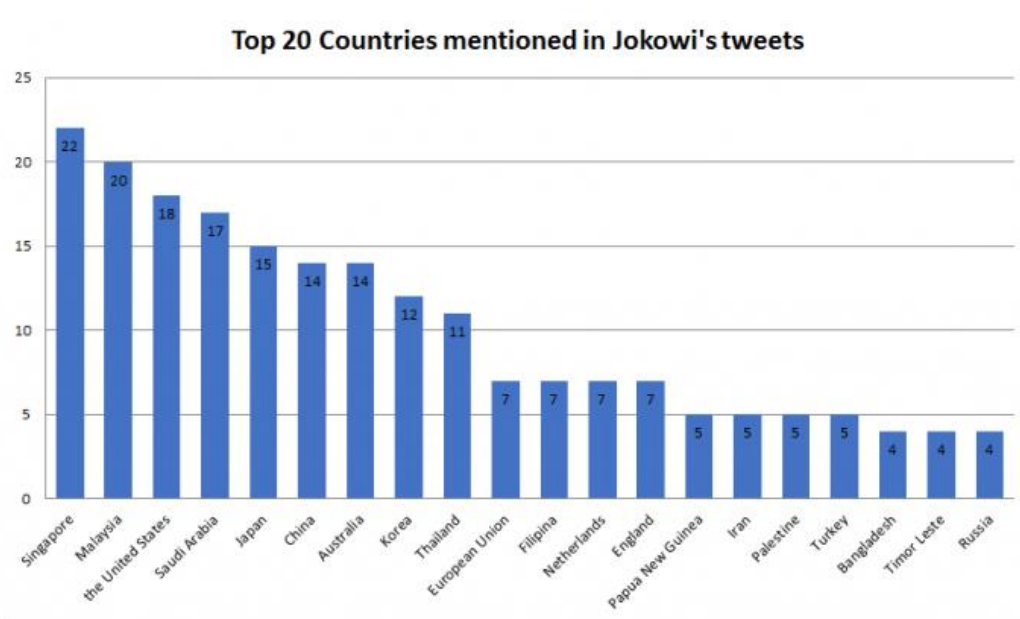
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Although the president is known for his inward policy, since the start of his presidency, some did cast doubts over his interest in foreign policy. However, President Widodo did immortalize several of his diplomatic moves on his Twitter account.

This research, conducted by Paramadina Public Policy Institute and Corporate Information Research and Development Department of ANTARA News Agency, observes how the personal Twitter account of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, @jokowi, conducted his foreign diplomacy, chiefly in terms of bilateral relations, by analyzing how often he mentioned certain foreign countries. The analysis was conducted by capturing @jokowi tweets on Twitter from June 20, 2015, to October 30, 2019.

Using the NodeXL social media conversation network analysis tool, the research collected the entire script and analyzed the most mentioned countries in his tweets.



*The list of 20 countries that @jokowi oftentimes mentioned. (ANTARA/Dyah Sulistyorini)*

The analysis of @jokowi showed that he oftentimes mentioned 20 countries. The big five are Singapore, Malaysia, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Japan.

Three out of the five countries are located in Asia that could signify the focus of the president's foreign diplomacy. The rest are the United States, one of the UN Security Council veto rights holders, and Saudi Arabia, one of the most important countries in the Muslim world.

Singapore and Malaysia, the two countries frequently mentioned in @jokowi, are Indonesia's neighboring countries and closest allies. The three countries belong to the Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN) and mostly have the same cultural roots.

Singapore is one of Indonesia's biggest investors, so it comes as no surprise if President Widodo, who is known for his interest in boosting economic cooperation with foreign countries, mentioned Singapore the most in his tweets. It definitely was not going out randomly.

The diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Malaysia can be traced back to over six decades. Despite several stumbling blocks, often pertaining to border and cultural disputes, both countries maintain sound relations as neighbors through thick and thin.

In his tweets on those countries, the president showed his followers his close relations with both countries' leaders. He frequently shared details of his fruitful meetings or intimate moments with Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong and Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohamad during both bilateral and multilateral meetings, such as the ASEAN annual leaders' summit.

For instance, once he had shared his experience of being driven by Prime Minister Mahathir in his personal car, a red Proton Persona. Another time @jokowi shared details of Prime Minister Lee showcasing his beautiful hybrid orchid collections.

However, the president rarely elaborated on the agenda or his views on certain topics discussed during the meetings in @jokowi. The president used the words "economic cooperation", "jobs opportunity", "industrial park", and "start-up" to personify his bilateral policy with Singapore.

In the meantime, "border", "cooperation", and "democracy" are common terms that the president often uses in his tweets concerning Malaysia.

The only two instances he tweeted the meetings' most important agenda with Singaporean leaders were on October 08, 2019, wherein he highlighted the Flight Information Region and both countries' commitment to boosting development of the Kendal Industrial Park in Central Java Province and Nongsa Digital Park in Batam.

The most prominent tweets related to Malaysia on @jokowi were when he conveyed gratitude for the release of Siti Aisyah, an Indonesian woman on trial for the assassination of the North Korean leader's half-brother, Kim Jong Nam, who was once viewed as heir apparent to the North Korean leadership.

Although he offers his followers an insight into his bilateral diplomatic policies with both countries, yet his most re-tweeted tweet on Singapore recited his experience of hunting for Indonesian food in Singapore in which he teased his youngest son on how he could not locate "Sang Pisang," the desserts' outlet owned by his youngest son, in Singapore. Far from diplomacy or foreign policy.

His most re-tweeted and liked tweet related to Malaysia pertained to the visit of 25-year-old Malaysian sports minister to the Jakabaring Sports Stadium in Palembang, South Sumatra Province.

The third most mentioned country in President Widodo's tweets is the US with which Indonesia has shared a long-standing history of sound relations. President Widodo had taken to Twitter on January 22, 2016, to congratulate President Donald Trump on his victory in the 2016 election.

The words related to the US used by the president in his tweets are "investment", "trade-partnership", "peace and security". Despite the president highlighting the need to boost trade relations between both countries in the wake of the US-China trade war, peace and security in the region and democracy in his tweets on the US, his most shared tweet is not directly related to the US-Indonesia bilateral relationship.

His most re-tweeted tweet about the US was in fact a critique to the US policy on Palestine. Palestine independence has always remained Indonesia's main priority in foreign policy regardless of the president.

When the President Trump administration decided to move the US Embassy for Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, it created an uproar in the international community,

and President Widodo took to Twitter to highlight his standing on the issue, which drew tremendous response from his followers.

Apart from his critique to the US policy, his other most liked tweet that mentioned the US pertained to the launch of SpaceX Falcon 9 from Cape Canaveral Florida. The rocket was carrying Indonesia's sixth and highest capacity satellite to date – the Nusantara Satu satellite – that promises to help bridge Indonesia's digital gap and thereby boost economic activity in regions outside Java.



*The screen capture of @jokowi tweet on Palestine issue. President Joko Widodo has reasserted Indonesia's stance in opposing the United States' decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, saying it would hamper peace in the disputed area. (ANTARA/Dyah Sulistyorini)*

The fourth country he frequently mentioned in his tweets is Saudi Arabia, one of Indonesia's main economic partners. Both countries also shared common concerns regarding several issues in the Muslim community, including Palestine, the Syria war, and radical terrorism. Indonesia also has the biggest hajj quota.

His tweets regarding the Middle East country is dominated by the events during the visit of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz to Bogor Presidential Palace, Indonesia, and his visit to Saudi Arabia, in which he applauded the warm welcome from his counterpart.

He had once also shared his concern about the deteriorating relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, in which he claimed to have tasked Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi with helping to solve the problem.

His tweet on Saudi Arabia that garnered the most likes was when he visited the country, lauding the warm welcome extended by King Salman. The president brought along his wife and two sons during the visit in April 2019.



*The screen capture of @jokowi tweet about President Joko Widodo visit to Saudi Arabia. The President lauded the warm welcome extended by King Salman during his visit to the country. The president brought along his wife and two sons during the said visit in April 2019. (ANTARA/Dyah Sulistyorini)*

The last big five country that @jokowi had frequently mentioned about was Japan that has traditionally maintained sound relations with Indonesia, both in the areas of politics and economics, apart from the dark history during the World War II.

Japan is one of Indonesia's main investors in the manufacturing sector. Apart from a big demonstration in 1974 to protest the visit of then Japanese prime minister Tanaka Kakuei, the relationship between both countries can be summarized as calm and steady.

Regarding Japan, @jokowi also shared details regarding the meeting between President Widodo and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on several occasions. He also specifically expressed his highest appreciation for Emperor Akhithito's contribution in the wake of the announcement of the emperor's abdication. The rest of his tweets are regarding sports championships in which the president showcased his support for Indonesian athletes.

His most liked tweet is when he congratulated Anthony Sinisuka Ginting for his victory over Japanese athlete Kento Momota in the China Open 2018. Ginting is immensely popular among the Indonesian public.

However, although @jokowi mentioned several countries in the tweet, most content did not pertain to foreign policies and focused more on the national concern or issues. For instance, the president demonstrated his support for Indonesian athletes, who competed abroad, his meetings with the Indonesian community abroad, or Indonesian activities abroad.

The rest of his tweets are largely about his programmes or agendas during his visit abroad. The president rarely expressed his opinions or views on international matters, except when he directly commented on Palestine and the Saudi Arabia-Iran dispute.

Overall, it appears that President Widodo has yet to optimally utilize Twitter as one of the foreign policy channels and offer the public an insight into his government's foreign policy on bilateral matters. As Twitter increasingly becomes a tool to seamlessly engage other countries in a novel way, there is a pressing need for President Widodo and his team to utilize it to intensify bilateral relations. (\*)

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- Conduct anti-corruption movements and promote the value of integrity by working with law enforcement institutions and civil society organizations across Indonesia.



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