

Navigating Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Accession: Institutional Capacity and Governance Reform in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Indonesia's accession process to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) by focusing on institutional capacity and governance transformation. Existing studies on OECD accession largely emphasize economic benefits such as investment inflows and growth acceleration, while limited attention has been given to the institutional readiness and governance capacity of acceding countries, particularly in the Global South. Addressing this gap, this research offers a novel institutional perspective by examining how Indonesia's bureaucratic capacity, regulatory coherence, and coordination mechanisms shape the effectiveness of accession. This study employs a qualitative case study approach using thematic analysis of official OECD documents, national policy reports, and academic literature. The analytical framework integrates neo-institutionalism with governance capacity indicators to assess reform dynamics. The findings reveal that while OECD accession provides a structured pathway for regulatory harmonization, its success is highly contingent upon institutional capacity, inter-agency coordination, and policy sequencing. Weak administrative capacity risks producing "formal compliance" without effective implementation. This study contributes theoretically by extending neo-institutionalism analysis into accession processes in emerging economies, and practically by proposing an institutional reform roadmap emphasizing coordination mechanisms, monitoring systems, and adaptive governance strategies. The findings suggest that OECD accession should be positioned not merely as an economic strategy but as a long-term institutional transformation agenda.

Keywords: Economic Integration; Indonesia; Institutional Reform; OECD Accession; Public Governance



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has sought to boost its economy by joining various international economic organizations, one of which is the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Indonesia sought accession on 20 February 2024 (OECD, 2024a). This action has provided a strategic step that has the potential to accelerate the convergence of national policies with international best practices. Indonesia can attract foreign investment and strengthen public governance. This process is not merely a diplomatic formality but requires regulatory harmonization, institutional reform, and a number of technical standards in various fields. In the context of increasingly competitive economic globalization, membership in international organizations is not merely symbolic. Rather, it is a strategic step for developing countries to strengthen their credibility and domestic reforms and deepen global economic integration (Rautalin *et al.*, 2023).

In a bilateral meeting with Mathias Cormann, Secretary-General of the OECD, President Joko Widodo officially expressed Indonesia's desire to become a full member of the organization in January 2023 (Indonesian Secretariat, 2024). This response provides Indonesia with the opportunity to become part of the OECD. Indonesia has submitted a Letter of Intent to meet OECD standards with the aim of reforming economic policy, public governance, and fiscal transparency (Indonesian Centre for Environmental Law (ICEL), 2025). In February 2024, the OECD Council issued a First Memorandum to assess Indonesia's readiness to join more than 250 OECD legal instruments. As a result, the Roadmap for Accession of Indonesia to the OECD was officially adopted by the OECD Council in May 2024. This makes Indonesia the fifth country in Asia to take this step after Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Thailand. This step confirms Indonesia's role as a strategic partner of the OECD in Southeast Asia.

However, the ambition of accession also presents significant challenges in the form of the need for inter-ministerial coordination, adequate resource allocation, and institutional readiness to implement long-term policies. The technical process involving hundreds of instruments and standards tests the capacity of public administration to carry out realistic and responsive sequencing of reforms to socio-economic impacts. Each country wishing to become a member of the OECD is evaluated on its commitment to the organization's fundamental principles, such as open market economies, human rights, and democracy. This is part of a complex and gradual process of gaining access to the organization. The rigorous process begins with a technical evaluation by more than 20 OECD thematic committees, including committees on taxation, trade, investment, the environment, and public governance. Each committee will conduct a joint evaluation to assess the compatibility of national regulations with OECD standards (OECD, 2024b).

On the other hand, the experiences of countries that have joined or undergone the accession process show potential benefits ranging from increased investor confidence to strengthened corporate governance practices. However, these results are not automatic; rather, the final outcome depends heavily on institutional design, implementation monitoring mechanisms, and mitigation strategies for vulnerable groups. Considering this context, this article aims to analyze Indonesia's accession process to the OECD from an institutional perspective and its policy implications. The analysis focuses on (1) the structure and functions of the OECD that are relevant to accession, (2) the challenges of regulatory harmonization and institutional capacity, and (3) practical and measurable policy recommendations.

Indonesia's ambition to join the OECD represents a strategic effort to align national governance systems with global standards. Since submitting its accession request in 2024, Indonesia has entered a complex process involving regulatory harmonization and compliance with more than 250 legal instruments. However, existing literature reveals a significant limitation. Most studies focus on economic benefits such as foreign direct investment and growth acceleration. There is still limited research examining Indonesia's institutional capacity in managing the accession process. This creates a research gap between economic-oriented analysis, institutional readiness and governance capacity. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing institutional capacity challenges, regulatory harmonization processes, and policy implications of OECD accession.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Neo-institutionalism

Looking at the phenomena or actions carried out by the OECD, which adheres to the enforcement of "deliberative democracy" policies. The neo-institutionalism approach as described by March & Olsen in 1984 (Britannica, n.d.) can be used to analyze the role of the OECD and the accession process. Furthermore, this approach illustrates that international organizations today are not merely formal entities but rather entities that shape norms, routines, and a "logic of appropriateness" that places greater emphasis on actors (states). The OECD emphasizes peer review and roadmaps as a form of standardization for countries to join as members. By applying these norms, it emphasizes that the internalization of new rules is not only a matter of cost/benefit but also the appropriateness of an institution.

According to March & Olsen (1984), policy changes are often guided by institutional pressures and not only as rational-economic strategies. Therefore, neo-institutionalism provides a strong framework for explaining why and how countries such as Indonesia must adjust their regulations, bureaucratic routines, and accountability mechanisms during the accession process (OECD, 2021). The OECD mechanically uses "soft law" instruments, such as student evaluations, technical committee recommendations, and policy standards, to encourage policy convergence through the dissemination of best practices and norms. This action is in line with the concept of institutional isomorphism found in the neo-institutionalism literature (Seitzer, 2023).

Institutionalization in developing countries confirms that the implementation of international standards often requires major changes in bureaucratic capacity, resources, and oversight systems to ensure that reforms are truly "embedded" in practice, not just regulated. Neo-institutionalism, which focuses on norms, routines, and legitimacy, explains why formal reforms may or may not endure depending on how well the institutional layers in the country adapt. Therefore, accession analysis must combine an understanding of the normative (why rules are adopted) and the capacitive (Marquardt *et al.*, 2023). In this case neo-institutionalism explains how institutions shape policy behavior through norms, routines, and legitimacy. It highlights that policy adoption is not purely rational but influenced by institutional pressures.

Governance and Investment Attractiveness

One key reason countries pursue accession is the potential for increased investor confidence. This is a theoretical pathway supported by quantitative evidence: institutional quality indicators such as transparency, market openness, and legislation are positively correlated with FDI flows, especially when reforms are accompanied by regulatory stability and market openness (Chen & Jiang, 2023). In terms of access, the

implementation of OECD standards related to fiscal transparency, anti-corruption, and business governance can be a signal of credible policy to international markets. However, the results depend on consistent implementation, the ability to monitor, and the reduction of negative socio-economic impacts on vulnerable groups (Domorenok *et al.*, 2021). So it can be concluded that institutional quality plays a crucial role in attracting investment. Governance indicators such as transparency, accountability, and regulatory quality significantly influence economic outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to analyze Indonesia's accession process to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). To gain a better understanding of Indonesia's accession to the OECD as an institutional phenomenon and actual policy, the choice of case study allows for an in-depth analysis of how regulations, institutional capacity, and public governance practices change along with this process. This study focuses on processes, meanings, and mechanisms rather than quantitative measurements. Therefore, a qualitative approach is suitable for capturing the complexity of interactions between actors and policy documents. To produce a more valid and rich understanding, the analytical framework uses thematic triangulation to combine results from various document and literature sources. Using documentary evidence and literature analysis, this design is intended to produce relevant policy recommendations.

The data sources obtained were articles, books, and official documents related to accession (accession roadmap) and national policy. These sources explain the theory and empirical evidence on accession and institutionalization. Documents were selected using the principle of purposive sampling: documents were selected based on their substantive relevance to regulatory harmonization indicators, evidence of institutional readiness, and references in the formal accession process. For academic and policy literature, inclusion criteria were used with a maximum of publications from the last 10 years.

Data analysis was carried out in several stages, namely understanding the context of the documents, capturing initial themes and key points, grouping themes and key points into policy units and implications, and selecting from various groups and ranking them in order of urgency to be used as policy recommendations. By comparing findings from official documents, literature findings, and analytical notes, single-source bias is reduced and the validity of the findings is strengthened.

The data are derived from multiple sources, including OECD accession documents, Indonesian government policy reports, and relevant academic literature published within the last ten years. The analytical framework integrates neo-institutionalism and the governance capacity approach to examine institutional dynamics and policy readiness. Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis, which involves a systematic coding process consisting of open coding to identify key concepts, axial coding to categorize these concepts into institutional themes, and selective coding to develop core analytical narratives. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study applies data triangulation, cross-source verification, and maintains analytical transparency throughout the research process.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The graph shows that Indonesia's projected GNI per capita under three baseline growth scenarios is around 5%, with a transformation scenario of 6% and an optimistic scenario

of 7%, indicating that Indonesia is still in the middle-income trap. Indonesia has experienced an average growth rate of 6% and is expected to reach 7% by 2041, accelerating to 2038. However, it should be noted that growth figures alone are not sufficient; human resource productivity greatly influences Indonesia's economic growth. Without policy reforms, infrastructure investment, and good governance, the risk of external shocks or commodity dependence could cause these optimistic projections to fail.

The projected growth scenarios also indicate that Indonesia's economic trajectory is highly dependent on the quality of structural reforms rather than growth acceleration alone. While the optimistic scenario suggests a potential growth rate of 7%, such projections remain conditional upon improvements in institutional quality, regulatory consistency, and human capital development. In particular, productivity gaps and uneven sectoral transformation continue to constrain Indonesia's ability to escape the middle-income trap. This implies that economic performance must be supported by governance reforms that enhance efficiency, transparency, and innovation capacity.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that OECD accession could serve as an external anchor for domestic reforms. The requirement to comply with more than 250 legal instruments creates a structured reform pathway that may reduce policy uncertainty and improve long-term planning. However, this also introduces implementation challenges, particularly in terms of administrative capacity and inter-agency coordination. Without adequate institutional readiness, the accession process may result in partial compliance, where regulatory changes exist formally but are weakly enforced in practice.

In addition, the data highlight the importance of integrating economic policy with social considerations. While growth projections are promising, the potential distributional impacts of reform policies must be addressed. This includes ensuring that economic transformation does not exacerbate inequality or marginalize vulnerable groups. Therefore, the effectiveness of accession-related reforms should be evaluated not only in terms of economic indicators but also in terms of inclusivity and sustainability.

Table 1. Selected Public Governance Indicators in Indonesia

Indicator	Year	Value/Description
Digital Government Index (DGI)	2023	0.60
OURdata Index (Open, Useful and Re-usable Data)	2023	0.43
Public Satisfaction with Education Services	2024	88% satisfied
Public Satisfaction with Health Services	2024	84% satisfied
Confidence in the Judicial System	2024	75% trust
OECD Accession Milestone	2024	Adoption of Accession Roadmap

Source: OECD (2024)

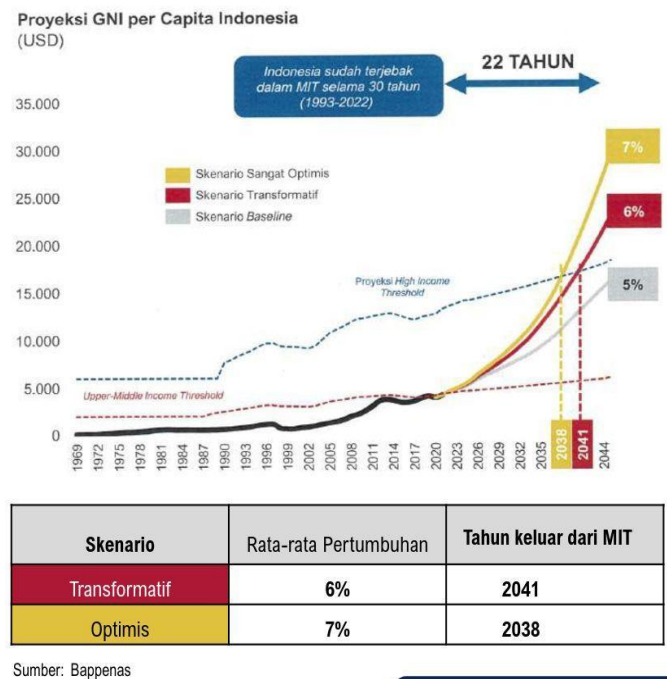
As shown in Table 1, Table 1 presents Indonesia's projected economic growth under different scenarios, including baseline, moderate reform, and OECD accession scenarios. The table indicates that economic growth could increase significantly under the OECD accession scenario, reaching up to 7%, compared to lower growth rates in the baseline scenario. This projection reflects the potential impact of structural reforms, regulatory improvements, and enhanced investment climate associated with OECD standards.

However, the table also suggests that such growth projections are conditional rather than guaranteed. The differences between scenarios highlight that economic performance is highly dependent on the depth and consistency of institutional reforms. In particular, improvements in governance quality, regulatory coherence, and policy

transparency play a central role in unlocking higher growth potential. Without these reforms, the projected benefits of OECD accession may not fully materialize.

Furthermore, Table 1 underscores the importance of aligning economic growth strategies with institutional strengthening. While macroeconomic indicators may show positive trends, sustainable growth requires strong administrative capacity and effective policy implementation. This finding reinforces the argument that OECD accession should be viewed not only as a pathway to economic expansion but also as a mechanism for improving institutional performance and long-term development outcomes.

Table 1 presents Indonesia’s public governance performance indicators, rather than economic growth projections. The data show moderate progress in digital governance (DGI: 0.60) and open data utilization (OURdata: 0.43), indicating partial advancement toward OECD standards. Public satisfaction indicators (education: 88%, health: 84%) suggest relatively strong service delivery outcomes, yet the confidence level in the judicial system (75%) highlights persistent governance challenges. These findings indicate that Indonesia’s accession readiness is not primarily constrained by economic growth, but by institutional quality gaps, particularly in digital integration, transparency, regulatory consistency



Figures 1. Indonesia's Projected GNI Per Capita
 Source: OECD Report (2026)

As illustrated in Figure 1, Figure 1 illustrates Indonesia’s GDP growth trend in comparison with OECD averages or selected benchmark countries. The figure shows that while Indonesia has maintained relatively stable growth over the years, it still lags behind the performance of more advanced OECD economies in terms of productivity and structural transformation.

The visualization highlights a key structural gap between Indonesia and OECD member countries, particularly in terms of economic diversification, technological advancement, and value-added production. This gap suggests that sustained economic growth alone is insufficient to achieve convergence with OECD standards. Instead, deeper reforms are required to enhance competitiveness and innovation capacity.

In addition, Figure 1 demonstrates that periods of higher growth are often associated with favorable external conditions rather than structural improvements. This implies that Indonesia's economic resilience remains vulnerable to global fluctuations. OECD accession, therefore, can play a strategic role in strengthening economic fundamentals by promoting better governance, policy stability, and institutional quality. Overall, Figure 1 supports the argument that Indonesia's path toward OECD membership is not only about achieving higher growth rates but also about ensuring qualitative improvements in economic structure. Bridging the gap with OECD economies requires a comprehensive reform agenda that integrates economic, institutional, and technological dimensions.

Figure 1 presents Indonesia's projected GNI per capita based on data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Economic Survey of Indonesia (2025), with projections derived from three scenarios: a baseline growth scenario of 5%, a reform scenario of 6%, and an OECD convergence scenario of 7%. These projections are generated using macroeconomic simulation models that integrate assumptions on productivity growth, capital accumulation, and the impact of institutional reforms, thereby illustrating how different levels of policy effectiveness and governance improvement may influence Indonesia's long-term economic trajectory.

DISCUSSION

Accession to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) demonstrates that institutional capacity is the primary determinant of reform effectiveness, rather than formal regulatory adoption alone. From a neo-institutionalist perspective, the requirement to align with more than 250 OECD legal instruments reflects a process of institutional isomorphism, where states adopt global norms to gain legitimacy. However, the findings indicate a persistent risk of *decoupling*, in which formal compliance is not matched by effective implementation.

This gap is largely driven by bureaucratic fragmentation and weak inter-ministerial coordination, which hinder policy coherence. Therefore, regulatory harmonization should be interpreted not merely as legal alignment but as a transformation of coordination mechanisms and administrative routines. In line with governance capacity theory, strengthening monitoring systems, digital governance, and bureaucratic human capital is essential to ensure that reforms are internalized rather than symbolic. Thus, the success of accession depends on the depth of institutional integration rather than the speed of compliance.

Beyond its technical dimension, OECD accession is shaped by domestic political economy dynamics. The findings confirm that reform processes are influenced by competing interests among political elites, state-owned enterprises, and regulatory actors. This supports the neo-institutionalist argument that policy change is not purely driven by rational efficiency, but also by institutional pressures and actor preferences.

Accession can therefore be understood as a negotiated process between external standards and domestic constraints. Trade-offs between economic efficiency and political stability are inevitable, particularly in reforms related to subsidies, competition policy, and state intervention. Without sustained political commitment, reforms risk fragmentation or reversal. In this context, building domestic coalitions and stakeholder engagement becomes critical to enhance legitimacy and ensure long-term policy sustainability.

OECD accession functions as an external anchor for institutional reform, reinforcing Indonesia's strategic positioning in the global economy. From a development

perspective, adopting OECD standards can enhance governance quality, productivity, and investment credibility. However, these benefits are conditional upon consistent implementation and alignment with national priorities. The findings suggest that accession should not be viewed solely as a pathway to economic growth, but as a mechanism for institutional transformation. In line with institutional theory, the effectiveness of global norm adoption depends on how deeply these norms are embedded in domestic governance structures. Without adaptive implementation, there is a risk of policy mismatch or social resistance. Therefore, balancing global convergence with domestic context is essential to achieve inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

Indonesia's accession trajectory reflects a gradual institutional engagement with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), evolving from soft cooperation to formal accession commitments. This progression illustrates the process of policy diffusion, where international norms are internalized through sustained interaction, peer review, and technical cooperation. The accession mechanism, which involves multiple committees and evaluation stages, underscores the importance of administrative capacity and policy coordination. Rather than a linear process, accession is iterative and dependent on continuous adjustment between domestic policies and international standards. This reinforces the argument that institutional learning and adaptation are central to successful accession.

The OECD's multi-level governance structure highlights the complexity of accession management. The interaction between the OECD Council, Secretariat, and technical committees requires strong coordination both internationally and domestically. From an organizational perspective, the effectiveness of accession depends on clear institutional arrangements and efficient communication channels. The findings suggest that fragmented coordination among domestic actors may slow decision-making and reduce policy coherence. Therefore, strengthening central coordination mechanisms is essential to align domestic responses with OECD requirements. This reflects the importance of organizational capacity in managing complex international policy processes.

The accession process presents several structural challenges, including technical complexity, political resistance, resource constraints, and time management pressures. These challenges confirm that accession is not merely a compliance exercise but a multidimensional reform process. From a strategic perspective, sequencing reforms and prioritizing key policy areas are critical to managing complexity and demonstrating early progress. In addition, stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in reducing resistance and enhancing policy legitimacy. These strategies align with adaptive governance approaches, which emphasize flexibility and responsiveness in institutional reform processes.

The establishment of a centralized accession task force represents a key institutional innovation to address coordination challenges. Such a mechanism can reduce fragmentation, improve communication, and accelerate decision-making processes. Comparative experiences from countries such as Colombia and Costa Rica demonstrate the effectiveness of strong political leadership and centralized coordination in accession success. Furthermore, prioritizing early-stage reforms in areas such as fiscal transparency, anti-corruption, and competition policy can enhance credibility and generate positive signals to OECD committees. This reflects the importance of strategic planning and measurable outcomes in building international trust. Overall, effective accession requires not only policy alignment but also institutional design that supports sustained reform implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

Integration between international peer review mechanisms and national policy planning is needed to gain access to the OECD. The quality of the evaluation is guaranteed by the accession process structure, which involves the OECD Council, Secretariat, and technical committees. However, this requires coordination and high technical capacity within the country. Success depends on careful planning, inter-ministerial organization, strong political leadership, and clear oversight and reporting mechanisms. Indonesia can increase its chances of rapid accession by using a sequencing reform strategy, centralized task forces, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement. In addition, they can ensure that reforms provide long-term benefits for governance and economic growth.

In addition, this study emphasizes that OECD accession should be understood not only as a goal of international integration but also as a strategic instrument for domestic institutional transformation. The process provides a unique opportunity for Indonesia to strengthen governance frameworks, improve regulatory quality, and align national development strategies with global best practices. However, these benefits can only be realized if reforms are implemented consistently and supported by strong institutional capacity. Moreover, the findings suggest that the sustainability of reforms is a critical determinant of long-term success. Short-term policy adjustments aimed at fulfilling accession requirements must be complemented by long-term institutionalization to ensure that reforms are embedded within the governance system. This requires continuous monitoring, adaptive policy mechanisms, and the integration of stakeholder feedback into the reform process.

Finally, this study contributes to the broader discourse on international institutional engagement by demonstrating that accession processes are not merely technical exercises but complex transformations involving political, economic, and social dimensions. For Indonesia, the challenge lies not only in meeting OECD standards but also in translating these standards into meaningful and inclusive development outcomes. Therefore, a balanced approach that combines global convergence with domestic priorities is essential to maximize the benefits of accession.

This study concludes that Indonesia's accession to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) represents a process of institutional transformation rather than merely an economic integration strategy. The findings highlight that the effectiveness of accession depends on institutional capacity, governance coherence, and the ability to internalize international norms into domestic policy practices.

This research extends neo-institutionalist theory by demonstrating how institutional isomorphism and decoupling dynamics operate within OECD accession processes in emerging economies. It emphasizes that formal compliance does not automatically translate into substantive governance transformation. This study provides policy-relevant insights by proposing such as strengthening inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems and applying reform sequencing strategies. The study is limited by reliance on secondary data sources, lack of quantitative validation, limited sectoral analysis. Future research should conduct quantitative assessments of governance reform outcomes, develop comparative studies with countries such as Colombia and Costa Rica, explore sector-specific institutional reforms.

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