

## IMPLICATIONS OF NATURALIZATION OF INDONESIAN NATIONAL TEAM PLAYERS TO IMPROVE THE COUNTRY'S ACHIEVEMENT IN THE FIELD OF FOOTBALL

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### Abstract

#### Keywords:

*Player Naturalization,  
Football Achievement,  
Indonesian National Team,  
Policy Implications,  
FIFA Ranking.*

*This research is driven by the massive naturalization of football players to improve the performance of the Indonesian National Team, which had previously stagnated. Although effective in boosting FIFA rankings, this policy has sparked debate regarding its urgency compared to the development of local athletes. The research gap lies in the comprehensive analysis of the actual post-naturalization impact on national achievements, aiming to fill the evaluative void between legal regulations and technical results on the field. The objective of this study is to describe the implementation of the naturalization policy in the Indonesian National Team and its impact on enhancing national performance. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, while the data analysis technique utilizes Teun A. van Dijk's discourse framing analysis. The results indicate that the implementation of the naturalization policy in Indonesia complies with Law No. 12 of 2006, carried out selectively based on technical quality and team requirements. Significant findings show a positive correlation between the presence of naturalized players and the improvement of the National Team's achievements, as concretely evidenced by the rise in FIFA rankings (from 173 to 134) and securing runner-up positions in international events. While providing an instant impact on team performance, this study concludes that naturalization serves as a short-term acceleration strategy that must be accompanied by sustainable local athlete development.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Football has transformed into a global phenomenon that relies not only on physical skill but also as an instrument of a country's soft power *to* demonstrate its presence on the international stage. In Indonesia, football has very strong social roots, but the achievements of the National Team (Timnas) are often considered not commensurate with the extraordinary enthusiasm of its people. This phenomenon of stagnant performance prompted the All Indonesia Football Association (PSSI) to take swift strategic steps, one of which is through a player naturalization policy. According to (Amarante, 2024), sports migration and facilitated naturalization have become a global trend in which countries seek to strengthen their national teams by utilizing the mobility of professional players across national borders to achieve competitive performance targets.

The rationale behind Indonesia's naturalization policy is based on the urgent need to immediately improve the team's technical quality, especially in preparation for prestigious tournaments like the Asian Cup and World Cup Qualifiers. This measure is seen as a pragmatic solution amidst the ongoing structural challenges facing the development of local athletes. As explained by (Winarno et al., 2021). From a legal perspective, Indonesian citizenship is characterized by the granting of citizen status to individuals deemed to have rendered services or are necessary for the benefit of the state, in this case, to enhance the nation's prestige in the field of sport. However, this policy continues to spark debate regarding its long-term urgency for national identity and the fate of indigenous players.

The research *gap* in this study arises because most previous studies have focused more on the formal legal aspects of the naturalization process or merely on superficial media coverage. There remains a lack of comprehensive evaluation of the policy's real implications for technical achievements in the field, as measured by objective indicators such as FIFA rankings. (Jansen et al., 2018) argue that the phenomenon of "citizenship exchange" in sports often creates a dynamic citizenship market, but requires in-depth analysis of its impact on the national sports ecosystem as a whole to prevent it from becoming merely a short-term solution that ignores sustainability.

This research focuses on how the implementation of the naturalization policy is carried out in accordance with applicable legal corridors and the extent of its concrete impact on the country's achievements. Using a qualitative approach with Teun A. van Dijk's discourse framing model, this study attempts to examine how this policy is constructed and accepted in the public sphere. As emphasized by (Sugiyono, 2022) Qualitative research is highly effective for understanding complex and profound social phenomena, including the dynamics of sports policy. The ultimate goal is to provide a clear description of the effectiveness of naturalization as a strategy to accelerate performance. This research is expected to serve as a reference for policymakers in creating a harmonious synergy between the utilization of naturalized players and the strengthening of a sustainable early childhood development system in Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Citizenship*

Various experts have expressed their differing views on the meaning of citizenship. According to R. Parman, citizenship is the connection between humans as individuals and an association or state. Mr. Wiyanto Dwijo Hardjono, S.Pd. and Daryono

share the same view regarding citizenship, namely, a person's membership in a political party that gives them the right to participate in political activities. According to Wolhoff, citizenship is a group of people bound together by using the same language or having the same national consciousness. (Bima Sakti, 2023) .

### ***Principles of citizenship***

The principles of citizenship can be divided into three categories: by birth, by marriage, and through the naturalization process. The principles of citizenship based on birth are divided into two: *Ius Sanguinis* and *Ius Soli*. The *Ius Sanguinis principle* determines a person's citizenship based on descent, as seen from both parents. Meanwhile, the *Ius Soli principle* determines a person's citizenship based on their place of birth (Annas & Hazzar, 2023) .

The principle of citizenship based on marriage can be divided into two: the principle of legal unity and the principle of equality. Based on the principle of legal unity, both parties, husband and wife, hold the same citizenship. If the husband and wife have different citizenships, the wife will generally adopt the husband's citizenship. Meanwhile, citizenship based on the principle of equality allows husband and wife to remain their respective citizenships, even after marriage.

The third is the principle of citizenship based on naturalization, where holders of other citizenships or foreign citizens (WNA) can apply for a change in citizenship status through a legal process.

### ***Naturalization***

Naturalization can be defined as the process of changing or acquiring citizenship for a foreign citizen by submitting an application to the relevant government. However, this application can only be granted if the applicant has been verified as meeting all the requirements set out in Law Number 12 of 2006 concerning Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia (Law, 2006) .

In general, naturalization in Indonesia can be classified into two main types. The first is regular naturalization, which is the process of applying for citizenship for foreign nationals through strict legal procedures. Prospective applicants must submit a written application in Indonesian to the Minister of Justice and meet several substantive requirements, such as being at least 21 years old, having resided in Indonesia for five consecutive years or ten non-consecutive years, and obtaining the consent of their spouse for those already married. Furthermore, applicants are required to be proficient in Indonesian, understand national history, be physically and mentally healthy, and be willing to pay state treasury contributions commensurate with their income.

The second type is special naturalization, granted to foreign citizens for extraordinary services rendered to the state or for reasons of urgent national interest. Unlike the regular route, recipients of special naturalization receive privileges in the form of exemption from the administrative requirements generally required for regular citizenship. This status can be granted if the individual expresses their desire or at the request of the state for the sake of national interest. Despite the ease of procedure, subjects of special naturalization are still required to take an oath and pledge full loyalty to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

### ***Legal framework regarding naturalization in Indonesia***

The legal framework for naturalization in Indonesia is based on applicable positive law, specifically through regulations in Law Number 12 of 2006 concerning Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia (Fauzi, 2019) . Based on Article 9 of the law, a foreign

citizen can apply to become an Indonesian citizen (WNI) by fulfilling a number of strict requirements. These requirements include a minimum age of 18 years or being married, having resided in Indonesia for 5 consecutive years or 10 non-consecutive years, and having good physical and mental health. In addition, applicants are required to be able to speak Indonesian, understand the state philosophy of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, have never been sentenced to one year or more in prison, have a job or a steady income, and be willing to pay the naturalization fee to the state treasury. Since Indonesia does not recognize dual citizenship, applicants must also renounce their original citizenship. Technical provisions regarding the administrative steps for obtaining and restoring citizenship are regulated in more detail in Government Regulation Number 2 of 2007 (Indonesia, 2007) .

### ***Naturalization procedures in Indonesia***

The systematic procedure for naturalization is regulated in Articles 10 to 18 of Law No. 12 of 2006. This process begins with the submission of an application addressed to the President through the Minister of Law and Human Rights. After the application is received, the ministry will conduct a thorough administrative examination before the Minister submits a recommendation to the President to decide whether the application is accepted or rejected. If the President gives approval, the applicant is required to take an oath or declare a pledge of allegiance to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. The final stage of this series of procedures is the issuance of a Naturalization Decree, in which the applicant is officially recognized as an Indonesian citizen with all the rights and obligations attached to it (Law, 2006) .

### ***Improved Performance***

Improvement comes from a meaningful level, effort, raising, enhancing, way, process, act of improving the quality of something (product and others). Improvement according to Umi Chalsum is raising the degree, raising the level, increasing and increasing production (Sri Ardani, 2019) . Achievement is the result of an activity that has been done, created either individually or in groups. According to Mas'ud Hasan Abdul Dahar quoted by Djamarah, achievement is what has been created, the result of work, with work tenacity. According to Purwodarminto, achievement is the result of something that has been achieved. Thus, it can be concluded that increasing achievement is an effort to raise something from a lower to a higher level or an effort to maximize something to a more perfect level in the results of efforts that have been successfully carried out or carried out individually or in groups.

### ***Football***

Football is one of the most popular sports games in the world. The game is played by two teams of 11 players each, each team defending a goal and trying to score goals against the opponent (Al-Muqsit, 2015) . Essentially, football is a team game played using a large soccer ball and is considered a large ball game. Although it is a simple game, it has many aspects or parts, each of which requires special attention (Nasution, 2018) .

Each team consists of 11 players facing each other, trying to score as many goals as possible to win. According to the rules, all parts of the body except the hands and arms are allowed to be used, except for the goalkeeper in his penalty area. The match lasts 2 x 45 minutes, which can be continued with *extra time* (2 x 15 minutes) or a penalty shootout if the score remains tied. The game is played on a field measuring 100-110 meters long and 64-75 meters wide, and is supported by infrastructure such as a ball and goals. (Dahlan et al., 2020) .

### Framework of Thinking

In order for the discussion in this research to be sharper and more meaningful, in accordance with what is expected, the author provides several research limitations regarding the meaning and intent of the title "Implications of naturalization of Indonesian national team players to improve the country's achievements in the field of football" as follows:

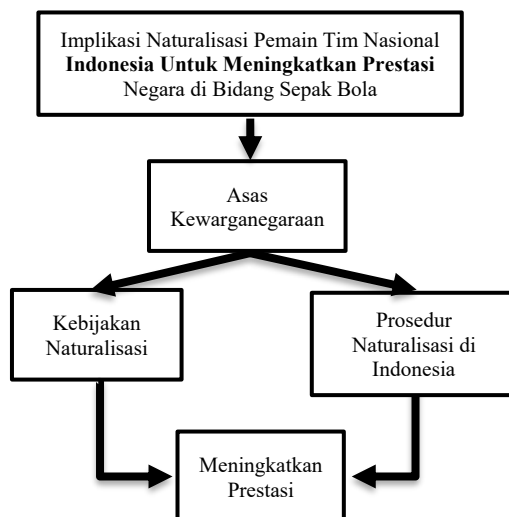


Figure 1. Framework of Thought  
Source: Researcher, 2024

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Approach

This research uses a qualitative research approach with a case study approach.

### Research Sample

This study used *purposive sampling*. The sample consisted of five news stories about the naturalization of Indonesian National Team players from August 31 to October 1, 2024.

### Operational Definition

The Naturalization of National Team Players referred to in this study is the process of changing the citizenship status of foreign football players or players of descent (*diaspora*) to Indonesian Citizens (WNI) based on the provisions of Law No. 12 of 2006. Operationally, this variable refers to the PSSI policy in recruiting players through special naturalization routes (Article 20) to strengthen the Indonesian National Team squad to cover the shortage of certain technical positions.

National Achievement in Football is defined as the tangible achievements or results achieved by the Indonesian men's national football team in official international competitions. Operationally, this achievement is measured through two main indicators: the FIFA *World Ranking* and positions such as runner-up or champion in regional or international tournaments (AFF Cup, SEA Games, or World Cup Qualifiers).

Policy implications are the impacts or consequences arising from the naturalization policy. In this study, implications are examined from both a technical perspective (improved team performance on the field) and a sociopolitical perspective (public acceptance and debate over the sustainability of local player development).

### ***Data Collection Technique***

The data collection technique for this research is through text observation or observations made on the text to be researched and literature review.

### ***Data Analysis***

This data analysis uses Teun A's discourse *framing* model analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Research Result***

This research shows that there is a fundamental difference between nationality and citizenship, where citizenship is understood as the formal status of being a citizen of a particular country (Aneboa et al., 2024) . In Indonesia, obtaining this status is strictly regulated in Law Number 12 of 2006, which states that citizenship can only be obtained through certain requirements, and Indonesia explicitly does not recognize dual citizenship. This principle presents a challenge for the naturalization program for soccer players, as every foreign athlete is required to renounce their original citizenship to become an Indonesian citizen (WNI).

The implementation of the naturalization policy in football has sparked significant public debate. Supporters believe naturalization is effective in adding depth to squads and providing local players with the transfer of knowledge and professional experience. Conversely, opponents worry about reduced opportunities for local players, which could lead to a decline in the motivation of young national talent. This concern is compounded by the fact that not all naturalized players are able to make maximum contributions, as evidenced by the U-22 national team's success in winning the gold medal at the 2023 SEA Games without any naturalized players.

Technically, the research findings highlight that the effectiveness of naturalization is not yet fully established. Despite its goal of accelerating performance, trial results leading up to major tournaments like the 2023 Asian Cup often show fluctuations in performance. This phenomenon suggests that the naturalization policy in Indonesia still requires in-depth evaluation to ensure it is not merely a quick fix but truly contributes to improving the ranking and performance of Indonesian football on a sustainable basis.

### ***Discussion***

#### ***Implementation of the naturalization policy for the Indonesian national team***

The implementation of naturalization policy in Indonesia is legally based on Law Number 12 of 2006 concerning Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia. Based on research findings, the most frequently taken path for soccer athletes is "Special Naturalization" as regulated in Article 20. This path allows the granting of Indonesian Citizen (WNI) status to individuals deemed to have extraordinary services or urgent state interests, without having to fulfill all the residency requirements as with regular naturalization. This policy is a form of state discretion to strengthen national interests in the field of sports through the utilization of talent from descent ( *diaspora* ) and pure foreign players.

Procedurally, the implementation of this naturalization involves strategic collaboration between the Indonesian Football Association (PSSI), the parent organization of football, the Ministry of Youth and Sports (Kemenpora), and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. The selection process begins with the identification of technical needs by the National Team head coach, followed by verification of parentage

documents and other administrative requirements. As explained by Winarno et al. (2021), the legal character of Indonesian citizenship law does provide space for individuals needed for the benefit of the state to enhance the nation's dignity, but it still requires strict oversight by the House of Representatives (DPR) until a Presidential Decree is issued.

From a technical perspective, research has found that the implementation of this policy has been much more selective in recent years. The primary focus has shifted to players with a track record of playing in elite European competitions, with the hope of transferring professionalism to local squads. Amarante (2024) argues that state-facilitated sporting migration is a global trend aimed at achieving instant results in international competition. In Indonesia, this is a pragmatic solution to address fundamental weaknesses in crucial positions such as center-back, midfielder, and striker, which have historically struggled to be filled by domestic talent.

However, the implementation of this policy is not without fundamental challenges, namely the Indonesian legal system, which does not recognize dual citizenship. This requires every naturalized player to completely renounce legal allegiance to their home country and swear an oath of allegiance to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Researchers found that this commitment aspect is crucial because it influences public perception and player integration within the team. By relinquishing their old passports, the naturalized players demonstrate significant professional sacrifice, which then lays the foundation for their full dedication when wearing the Red and White uniform on the field.

#### ***Naturalization policy to improve the performance of the national team***

The impact of the naturalization policy on national performance can be seen clearly through fluctuations and significant improvements in the FIFA *World Ranking*. Research data shows very impressive success, where Indonesia managed to rise from 173rd in 2020 to 134th in April 2024. This increase of more than 30 places is concrete evidence that the presence of naturalized players with international standard standards can provide stable team performance. Success in gaining points in matches against higher-ranked teams in the World Cup Qualifiers and Asian Cup is a major contributor to Indonesia's rise in position at the global level.

Beyond ranking indicators, this policy also has implications for achieving targets in international tournaments. The Indonesian National Team made history by advancing to the round of 16 of the 2023 Asian Cup, an unprecedented achievement in the modern tournament format. Naturalized players played a significant role in the tournament, particularly in providing physical strength in defense and composure in possession. Their presence on the field instilled confidence in local players, creating a more competitive team synergy when facing the giants of Asian football.

Despite providing immediate results, this study underscores that improved performance through naturalization is inherently "short-term acceleration." An interesting finding emerges when examining the U-22 national team's gold medal win at the 2023 SEA Games without using naturalized players. This provides important insight into the potential for successful development of local talent at the regional level. Therefore, the naturalization policy discussed here is not viewed as a substitute for local development, but rather as a stimulus to raise the "standard" of the national game, encouraging local players to match the professionalism of their naturalized counterparts.

As a conclusion to the discussion of achievements, this study emphasizes that naturalization policies must be managed within the framework of sustainability. The

positive implications for national achievements should not lead policymakers to neglect grassroots development. As emphasized by Jansen et al. (2018) regarding citizenship exchange in sports, the effectiveness of this policy depends on how the state balances instant talent and the development of a healthy national sports system. Current achievements should be used as momentum to improve domestic competition, so that in the future, Indonesia will no longer rely entirely on naturalization, but will instead be able to produce world-class players from within the nation's football community.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn: First, the implementation of naturalization of football players in Indonesia is carried out through the legal framework of Law Number 12 of 2006, specifically through a special naturalization pathway for individuals who have made meritorious contributions or are in the national interest. This process is carried out selectively by the PSSI and the Government, considering two main aspects: administrative legality and the technical needs of coaches. This strategy is used as an acceleration method to instantly improve the competitive quality of the Indonesian National Team amidst the ongoing long-term development process. And second, the naturalization policy has had significant positive implications for Indonesian football achievements. Quantitatively, this is evidenced by the drastic increase in Indonesia's FIFA ranking from 173 (2020) to 134 (April 2024). Qualitatively, the presence of naturalized players has improved the level of play, competitive mentality, and team achievements in international tournaments, such as becoming *runners-up* in the 2020 AFF Cup and successfully reaching the knockout stage at the Asian level.

This research has practical implications as validation that the naturalization policy effectively improves the FIFA ranking and the national team's competitiveness instantly. Therefore, it can serve as a strategic reference for the Indonesian Football Association (PSSI) in formulating accountable player recruitment policies. However, this study is limited by its interpretive, qualitative approach and its limited scope to the performance of the senior men's national team for the 2020-2024 period, thus failing to capture the long-term impact on the domestic league ecosystem as a whole.

As a recommendation, future research should use quantitative methods to measure the correlation between naturalization and sports economic variables and conduct comparative studies with other countries to find the best balance between naturalized players and local talent. Furthermore, it is important to explore the psychological impact of this policy on the motivation of young athletes in various national football academies to ensure sustainable future achievements.

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