

## The Impact of Naturalization Policy on National Football Team and The Economy

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**

Naturalization policy  
National football  
development  
Economic impact

*The purpose of this research is to obtain empirical information and solutions regarding the impact of naturalization policies on the national football team, the development of football in Indonesia, and the economic aspects. This research uses Mixed Methods, which is an approach to investigate issues related to behavior, social, and health by rigorously collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data is obtained from secondary data collected from various sources, while qualitative data is obtained from in-depth interviews with Experts Judgment related to the research issues. The quantitative data presents a comparison of the usage of naturalized players versus local players in the Senior National Team from 2011 to 2025. The Experts Judgment involved in the research includes three coaches who have managed the national team: Jackson F Tiago, Fakhri Husaini, and Widodo Cahyono Putro, along with a football agent from Indonesia, Gabriel Budi. This research also explores the responses from the public regarding PSSI's policy on the use of naturalized players, as well as data from economic aspects such as national team match ticket sales, broadcasting rights, and merchandise sales. Based on the results of research and discussions among experts, the conclusions of this study can be stated that the policy of naturalizing players: (1) can improve the performance of the national team; (2) has an impact on the economic sector; (3) decreases opportunities for local players to enter the national team; and (4) there is a need for improvement in the governance of national football.*

### INTRODUCTION

The term naturalization is currently a hot topic in national football due to the many foreign players of Indonesian descent representing the National Team. FIFA, as the governing body of world football, does not prohibit the use of naturalized players in the national team of a country. Similarly, the laws of the Republic of Indonesia do not pose issues regarding naturalization as long as the processes and requirements are met. Countries like Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Italy have also utilized naturalized players in official international matches. In the 2022 World Cup, the teams with the highest number of naturalized players were Morocco, with 61.5 percent, Senegal with 39 percent, and Switzerland with 34.7 percent. Morocco, with its naturalized players, successfully reached the semifinals after defeating Portugal 1-0 in the quarterfinals. Morocco became the first African country to reach the semifinals. However, their journey to the final was halted after losing to France 2-0. (Okezone.com, 10/8/2022).

Indonesia, in the third round of the 2026 World Cup Qualifiers, used 90 percent naturalized players in the starting XI when facing Australia in the second match. The naturalization carried out by the All-Indonesian Football Association (PSSI) is not only for the senior group, but also in the U23 national team. The women's national team, which recently won the 2024 AFF Cup, has also been strengthened by naturalized diaspora players. PSSI's pursuit of players of descent certainly has its own reasons, at least to improve the competitiveness of the national team at a higher level. The argument from some quarters, stating that Indonesian citizens of descent also have the right to represent the national team, apparently strengthens PSSI's resolve to implement this policy. According to PSSI Chairman, Erick Thohir, the general purpose of using naturalized players is to achieve the target of improvement. This policy does not contradict the regulations of the government of the Republic of Indonesia or the world football federation, FIFA, and many countries also do the same (Merdeka.com, 20/9/2024). Erick Thohir's statement was also mentioned by Luong (2024). In Thohir's plan submitted to FIFA, he emphasized two international goals: to break into the top 100 of the world ranking and to have at least 154 players capable of playing for the national team. Utilizing naturalized players of Indonesian descent

became a key strategy to realize Thohir's ambitions in a short period of time.

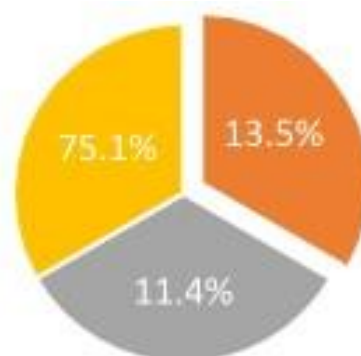
The naturalization program has actually not only occurred during the era of Erick Thohir, as the previous PSSI management also did it, but not as extensively as it is now. For instance, Cristian Gonzales, Irfan Bachdim, Beto Conshalves, Kim Jefry Kurniawan, Diego Michells, and Greg Nwokolo are a series of naturalized players who have strengthened the Indonesian National Team. Even in the 1952 era, there was already the name Arnold van der Vin, a Dutch descent goalkeeper who reinforced the national team. Recently, at least names like Rafael Struick, Ivar Jenner, Shyane Pattynama, Sandy Walsh, Jordy Amat, Jay Idzes, Thom Haye, Ragnar Oratmangoen, Nathan Tjoe-A-On, Justin Hubner, Cavin Verdonk, and Marten Paes have experienced playing for the national team in official matches. This phenomenon raises the question of what impacts the naturalization policy implemented by PSSI has? Based on that question, the purpose of this research is to obtain empirical information and solutions regarding the impact of naturalization policies on the national football team, the development of football in Indonesia, and the economic aspects that accompany it.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses Mixed Methods, which is an approach to investigate issues related to behavior, social, and health by rigorously collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data (Cresswell & Clark, 2017). Quantitative data is obtained from secondary data collected from various sources, while qualitative data is obtained from in-depth interviews with Expert Judgment related to the research issues. The quantitative data presents a comparison of the usage of naturalized players versus local players in the Senior National Team from 2011 to 2025. The Expert Judgment involved in the research includes three coaches who have managed the national team: Jacksen F Tiago, Fakhri Husaini, and Widodo Cahyono Putro, along with a football agent from Indonesia, Gabriel Budi. This research also explores the responses from the public regarding PSSI's policy on the use of naturalized players, as well as data from economic aspects such as national team match ticket sales, broadcasting rights, and merchandise sales.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pros and cons regarding the naturalization program arise from various segments of society. Some members of society provide positive support for the naturalization policy, although there are also those who express disagreement or do not support it. This is illustrated by the results of a survey conducted by the Indonesian Political Indicator Institution involving 1,200 respondents from across Indonesia.



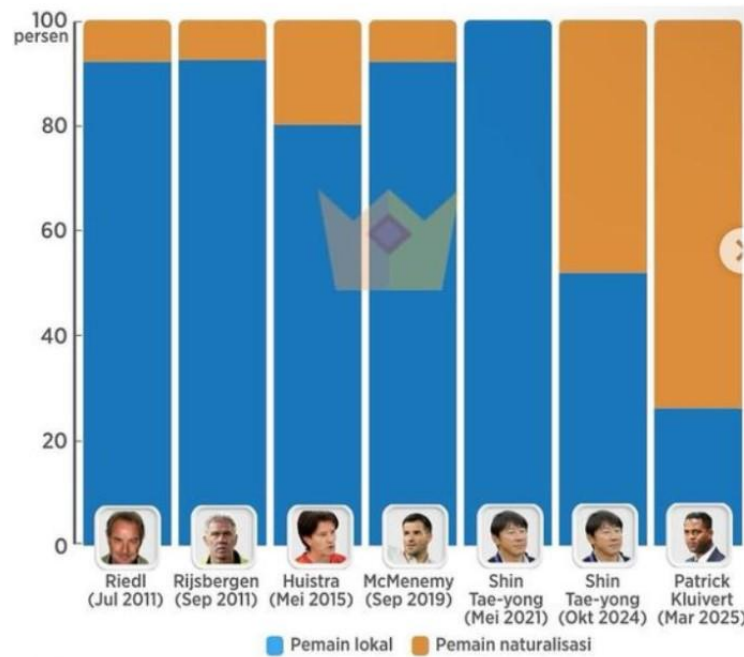
**Figure 1.** Percentage of Public Responses (IPI, 2024).

The results showed that 71.5 percent of respondents agreed with the naturalization policy for players. "There are 71.5 percent of national citizens who agree with the naturalization policy, but there are 13.5 percent who are less in agreement or disagree," said the Executive Director of Indonesian Political

Indicators (IPI) Burhanuddin Muhtadi in Jakarta (10/5/2024). The survey explained that those who support the naturalization policy believe it has proven to improve the performance of the Indonesian National Team, while those who disagree are concerned about the reduced opportunities for local players to strengthen the National Team.

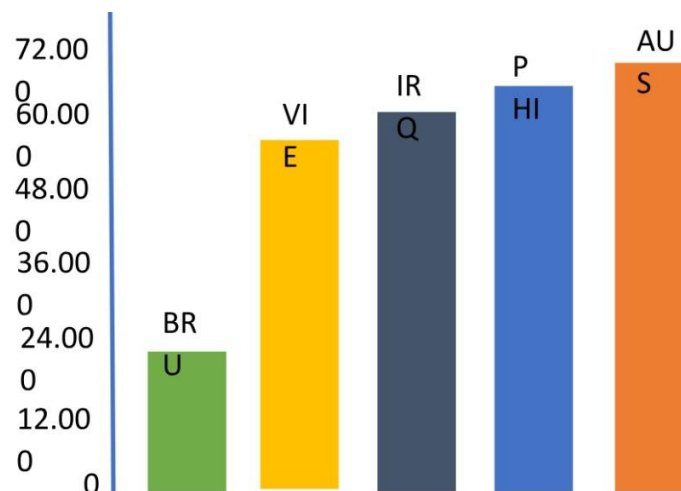
The Indonesia National Team has made rapid progress after being significantly strengthened by naturalized players. As a concrete example, Sinulingga (2024), a member of the Executive Committee and also the spokesperson for PSSI, stated that Indonesia has just made history by sending the U-17, U-20, U-23, and senior national teams to the final round of the Asian Cup. Indonesia is one of nine countries that sent four levels of national teams to the final round of the Asian Cup. Another fact is seen from the sharp increase in FIFA rankings, which surged dramatically. In December 2019, the Indonesian national team ranked 173, and in December 2024 it rose to 125. The senior national team's progress to the third round of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup is also an undeniable fact. Jay Idzes and his colleagues are able to compete with countries that have previously participated in the World Cup. Successfully holding Saudi Arabia to a 1-1 draw (away) and winning 2-0 (home) in the Group C matches of the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, then drawing against Bahrain 2-2 (away) and winning 1-0 (away), and drawing with Australia 0-0 (home) and losing 1-5 (away) further strengthens the success of the naturalization program.

The involvement of naturalized players has seen a very massive increase during Erick Thohir's era as president of PSSI. When compared to previous administrations, the difference is striking. Table 1 below illustrates that the use of naturalized players has continued to rise since 2011. When Alfred Riedl coached the National Team in July 2025, out of 25 players included, there were only two (8%) naturalized players, while the remaining 23 (92%) were local players. Local players dominated the National Team during the coaching era of Shin Tae-yong in May 2021, when Indonesia used 100% local players. However, in October 2024, the South Korean coach utilized 48% naturalized players and 52% local players. The usage of naturalized players increased significantly when Patrick Kluivert was appointed as the coach of the Indonesian National Team. During the match against Australia in the second qualifying match for the 2026 World Cup at the Sydney Football Stadium on March 30, 2025, Kluivert brought 23 players with a proportion of 17 (74%) naturalized players and six players (26%) local players (Ahdiat, 2025). In that match, Indonesia only played one local player, namely Marselino Ferdinan in the Starting XI.



**Figure 2.** Proportion of Naturalized Players and Local Players (Ahdiat, 2025)

The improvement in the performance quality of the national team has caused the public to be very enthusiastic about coming to the stadium to watch every national team match. In the 2026 World Cup qualifying match, the number of spectators present at the stadium continued to experience a very significant increase. When facing Brunei Darussalam (BRU), the number of spectators in the stadium was 49,985, then against Vietnam it increased to 57,696. This increase continued in the following matches against Iraq (IRQ) and the Philippines (PHI), reaching its peak when Indonesia faced Australia (AUS) at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta (09/10/2024), with 70,059 spectators, making it the highest attendance in Asia. This number surpassed the attendance of the match between Iran and Oman (63,720 spectators) and South Korea against Palestine (59,579) (Soccer. Indozone.id, 11/09/2024). If the average ticket price for the match between Indonesia and Australia is Rp. 825,000 (processed from From various sources), the income from ticket sales during the match between the Indonesian National Team and Australia amounted to  $70,059 \times \text{Rp. } 825.00 = \text{Rp. } 57,798,675,000$ . This is a very fantastic financial revenue.



**Figure 2.** Number of Spectators National Team (Soccer.Indonesia.id, 2024) (data.goodstats.id, 2024)

The presence of naturalized players has also been able to impact other sectors, namely the media rights

received by PSSI. The report from PSSI Chairman, Tohir (2024), on the official PSSI website stated that in 2023, PSSI earned 56 billion from media rights, which then increased to 75 billion in 2024. This increase is not separate from the endorsement from other parties regarding the achievements of national football. Sales of clothing related to the national team, such as jerseys, hats, jackets, and scarves, experienced a very significant increase. Sadad (2025), Chairman of Espro, PSSI's partner in providing national team apparel, stated that there was an extraordinary surge after Indonesia defeated Saudi Arabia in Jakarta. Compared to the initial launch in March 2024, the sales of the garuda-logo jerseys increased by dozens of times.

Indonesia has good market potential for a football industry. The public's enthusiasm for watching matches, both for the Indonesian League and the national team, is very high. Nielsen Sport states that 77% of the Indonesian population is part of the football fan base (Mahfud, 2022). Furthermore, Pilang (2025), an observer of international affairs, states that football, especially the World Cup, has an inclusive spectrum that can massively drive various economic sectors. The positive impact is a domino effect on various sectors, such as tourism, merchandise trade, television broadcasting rights, product sponsorship, and even the transportation sector. The income of micro, small, and medium enterprises is also likely to increase due to the many watching events.

The policy of using naturalized players shows a positive impact on the performance of the Indonesian National Team, as well as on the economic aspect. Eric Thohir (TVonenews.com, 2024), as the President of PSSI, stated that the existence of pros and cons in society is a natural dynamic. One thing that needs to be understood by the public is that Indonesian football is currently in the process of improving its quality to compete at the world level and in fact there are already signs pointing in that direction. The improvement in FIFA rankings, the national team's advancement from various age groups to the Final Round of the Asian Cup, the national team's progress to the World Cup qualifying round, the increased public enthusiasm in attending matches, and the rise in sales of national team merchandise are all evidence that can be taken into account regarding the governance of Indonesian football. Ramadhan (2024) assesses that the achievements of Indonesian football at present will strengthen the brand value of Indonesian football and create significant economic opportunities. This includes tourism, infrastructure investment, as well as businesses and sponsorships that lead to the implementation of specific events. Therefore, support for the Indonesian National Team is a long-term investment in the advancement of national sports economy. If this potential is maximized, Indonesia has a great opportunity to become a major force in the world of sports, which not only honors the name of the nation but also provides wide economic benefits for the society.

In a Depth Interview with Jacksen F Tiago (7/12/2024), the former national coach shared his views regarding the presence of naturalized players. According to him, the world is now in a global era. The movement of people across countries has become increasingly unrestricted, as has the case with football players. Not only Indonesia, but Germany, France, Italy, and other countries also utilize players from other countries with naturalized status. The presence of naturalized players will enhance the image of Indonesian football in the eyes of the world. Now there are many clubs and talent scouts from abroad paying attention to the performance of Indonesian players in the national team. Regarding the concerns of many parties that the naturalization program will reduce the chances of local players to enter the national team, Jacksen stated that it is a consequence of the struggle to achieve achievements. "The spirit of competition among players must be instilled in the players, as evidenced by Rizky Ridho Ramadhani and Marselino Ferdinan who can compete with players from other countries. Others should follow their example," said Jacksen.

Meanwhile, Fakhri Husaini, who is also a former national player and coach, stated that he disagrees with the continuous implementation of the naturalization program because it would have a negative impact on the development process of Indonesian football. If it's only for short-term interests, such as facing World Cup qualifications and improving Indonesia's ranking in FIFA, there is no problem. As

someone involved in youth development, he feels disappointed with the use of naturalized players, especially in the youth National Team. 'What is the point of holding the Soeratin Cup and the Elite Player Academy if the results are not maximized for the National Team?' he complained. Fakhri realizes that our development has not been able to produce players and teams that can compete at the Asian and World levels. This issue should focus on finding the root of the problem and then making improvements as necessary. 'Don't just think about the senior national team, while internal development, especially youth development, competitions, and coaching resources are neglected,' complained the A-Pro licensed coach.

The opinion of Widodo Cahyono Putro (12/8/2024) is not much different from Fakhri Husaini, but the former national player emphasizes the importance of youth development. More training centers should be established, especially in areas with good football potential. Players with potential must be given attention by providing training facilities. If this facility is managed correctly, then the availability of players for the national team will not face difficulties and will not have to rely too much on naturalized players. Meanwhile, Gabriel Budi (12/9/2024) believes that as long as it is in accordance with the law of the game, it is acceptable for short - middle impact purposes. However, for the long term, there must still be training from an early age with clear goals and programs, like those of South Korea and Japan, which are now achieving great success in Asia.

Taking into the views of various experts and the study of the naturalization policy on the impact it causes, it is necessary to emphasize that the program in the short term is not in question. The naturalization program must be aligned with the national football coaching so that more local players are able to compete with naturalized players. PSSI, the Government and all stakeholders to improve the quality of national football governance towards the achievement of global Indonesian football. Quality improvement leads to aspects related to the coaching process, such as curriculum, grassroots and young age coaching, competitions, coaches, match equipment, infrastructure and work ethic. The key to the success of early childhood football development lies in its curriculum methods. By adjusting all the factors involved, the right curriculum will produce a good team and a generation of young players in its time (Komarudin, 2021). According to the AFC (2006) grassroots is an important support for the national team and clubs competing at various levels. The quality of the national team and clubs greatly depends on the quality of their grassroots development and youth age. Indonesia will continue to rely on naturalized players if these important aspects are not a concern. The crucial problem at the moment is that the quality of local players is still inferior to naturalized players. The advantage of naturalized players is that they come from a more advanced training program than Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussions among experts, the conclusions of this study can be stated that the policy of naturalizing players: (1) can improve the performance of the national team; (2) has an impact on the economic sector; (3) decreases opportunities for local players to enter the national team; and (4) there is a need for improvement in the governance of national football.

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