Verity: Jurnal Ilmiah Hubungan Internasional (International Relations Journal) Vol. 17 No. 1 (2025)
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
Universitas Pelita Harapan

TRADE BETWEEN INDONESIA AND LATIN AMERICA: INTEGRATION BY *DE JURE*

Rachmasari Nur Al-Husin[1]

[1)]*Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia, Depok*

Email: rachmasari.nur@ui.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Indonesia has formed *de jure* trade integration with Latin America, although exports to the region are relatively low and political will to integrate is still minimal. In addition, the low interest of Indonesian entrepreneurs in trade with Latin America further shows the lack of integration opportunities. In fact, ideally trade integration occurs after intense trade relations. This fact raises the research question: Why did Indonesia immediately form *de jure* trade integration with Latin America? In order to answer this question, this research used a qualitative method with descriptive analysis. Data were collected through interviews and literature studies, then it was analyzed by using an illustrative method. Moreover, this research used the concept introduced by Gamso and Postnikov (2021) regarding South-South Country Form Trade Integration which is encouraged by 2 matters. First, competition pressure to compete with fellow southern countries. Second, policy learning that the experience of trade integration with traditional partners is used as a reference in order to form something similar to fellow southern countries. This research shows that Indonesia formed *de jure* trade integration with Latin America because of policy learning. Experience in forming trade integration with traditional partners makes Indonesia accustomed to certain standards and negotiation patterns. A similar approach is applied to Latin America with an agreement format which has proven effective, accelerating and deepening trade integration. In the context of competition pressure, this step is not to compete with Latin America, but rather to maintain the consistency of trade integration as with traditional partners.

Keywords: Trade Integration, Non-Traditional Market, Traditional Market, Competition Pressure, Policy Learning

1. Introduction

International trade is currently implemented by various countries which causes an increase in global economic integration. Furthermore, conceptually, trade integration allows countries to strengthen and deepen cooperation in various sectors. In trade integration, there is integration through agreements or *de facto* and integration through markets or *de jure*. Both forms of integration contribute to the formation of increasingly close trade networks for the countries involved.

Regarding trade integration, Indonesia is a country which is currently forming it *de jure*; especially, with traditional partners. In general, traditional partners in trade are countries which already have historically strong and sustainable relationships in these activities. Some of Indonesia's *de jure* trade integrations with its traditional partners are ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA), ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement, ASEAN-China FTA (ACFTA), Indonesia-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (IJ-EPA), Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA), Indonesia-Korea CEPA (IK-CEPA), and others (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2025). Over time, Indonesia has formed *de jure* trade integration with non-traditional partner, one of which is Latin America. The form of trade integration which has been formed by Indonesia with countries in Latin America that has currently been implemented is Indonesia-Chile Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IC-CEPA) and one currently in process is the Indonesia-Peru CEPA (IP-CEPA) (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2024). It is even possible that other trade integrations will be formed with countries in Latin America.

If we look back before being integrated *de jure*, relations between Indonesia and Latin America were still minimal; especially, trade. Until it was integrated, trade between Indonesia and Latin America was still low. Compared to other regions, the average amount of Indonesian exports to Latin America during the period 2000-2015, only reached 0.43%. This value never reached 1% during that period (Ramana & Retnosari, 2018).This fact shows that diversification in Latin America is not optimal.

Table 1. Total Indonesian Exports in General and to Latin America (Per Billion USD)

Year	Total Indonesian Exports	Exports to Latin America
2019	167,682	3,278
2020	163,306	3,166
2021	231,587	4,940
2022	291,979	5,766
2023	258,797	5,896

Source: ITC, Trade Map (2025)

Table 1. shows Indonesia's total exports in general and to Latin America per billion USD in 2019-2023. This period coincides with an important moment when Indonesia signed a cooperation agreement with Chile and the process of establishing trade cooperation with Peru. Referring to the data in table 1, the amount of Indonesia's exports to Latin America is still very small when compared to the total exports as a whole. Although exports to Latin America have grown, their contribution to Indonesia's total exports is still relatively small, reflecting a market potential which has not been fully utilized.

In addition, the low political will is caused by Indonesia's orientation which is still focused on trade with traditional partners. As a result, Latin America as a non-traditional partner has not been a priority in Indonesia's trade policy (Tobing & Virgianita, 2020). This condition is in line with the perspective of Indonesian entrepreneurs who tend to be reluctant to actively participate, considering that the value of trade between Indonesia and Latin America is still relatively low (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2024). This situation indicates that formal and political relations between the two regions are not yet strong enough. In addition, the Indonesian and Latin American markets have not shown significant integration so that they cannot be a solid foundation for strengthening trade relations in the future.

Through the previous explanation, Indonesia formed *de jure* trade integration with Latin America, which is its non-traditional partner. If we look back, Indonesia's exports to Latin America were relatively low compared to the total. This condition, coupled with the lack of political will to integrate with Latin America since it is still oriented towards traditional partners and the low interest of Indonesian entrepreneurs in order to conduct trade activities with the region, shows that there is actually no opportunity to integrate relations. In fact, when forming *de jure* trade integration, at least the market between partners has conducted these activities intensively. This fact is not in accordance with what happened between Indonesia and Latin America. Therefore, through the explanation above, it can be stated that the question of this research is: **Why did Indonesia immediately form *de jure* trade integration with Latin America?**

2. Literature Review

Before exploring the literature review section, the definition of the trade integration concept will be explained. The first *de jure* trade integration is using formal trade agreements in order to connect with each other. *De jure* integration emphasizes legal instruments as a foundation which encourages trade activities. It is based on the fact that formal trade agreements provide certainty, transparency, and definite regulations for the actors in them. However, *de jure* integration can lose its effectiveness when the underlying economic conditions are not supportive (Nicolas, 2024).

The second *de facto* trade integration emphasizes that the economy is connected through markets in which the private sector plays an important role. Moreover, *de facto* integration occurs without the need for formal trade agreements, where the countries involved implement policies; such as, domestic deregulation and trade liberalization, infrastructure improvements, and customs simplification. Generally, *de facto* trade integration implements policies in order to facilitate the flow of trade between countries, even though no formal trade agreements have been agreed (Nicolas, 2024).

Ideal trade integration should start *de facto* and then *de jure* in order to strengthen the influence of outward-oriented economic groups, so that their bargaining power in trade policies increases. This condition will lead to the implementation of trade which is in line with the dynamics in the market. Therefore, the next step to integrate *de jure* is in accordance with economic conditions (Aminian, Fung, & Ng, 2008). As a result, the trade integration which occurs can be sustainable.

In the literature review section of this research, it will be divided into three categories. First, regarding trade integration in *de jure* and *de facto*. Second, regarding Indonesia's trade integration. Third, trade relations between Indonesia and Latin America.

The first category of previous literature review regarding trade integration in *de jure* and *de facto* has given rise to debate. Research which had been conducted by Ezzat and Zaki (2022) and Nicholas (2024) shows that in traditional markets in the *de jure* context, the greater the difference in institutional quality between countries, the less likely they are to sign trade agreements. Meanwhile, in the *de facto* context, the greater the difference in institutional quality between trading partners, the higher the trade volume. Therefore, trade integration in *de facto* has a deeper impact on strengthening cooperation. On the other hand, research which had been conducted by Adjei and Grega (2023); Bataka (2019); and Gopalan, Duong and Rajan (2020) show the opposite. Trade integration conducted by countries with their traditional markets *de jure* actually increases economic growth and strengthens cooperation, while if conducted *de facto* it actually hinders it. Even *de facto* trade integration is only implemented in the short term.

The second category of previous literature studies regarding Indonesia's trade integration, which also found debate in it. Furthermore, based on research which had reviewed by Pangestu, Ing, and Rahardja (2015); Patunru (2023); and Syarip (2020) it showed that Indonesia's international trade experienced complex dynamics since it had been influenced by many things ranging from liberalism, protectionism, international commitments, fluctuations in commodity prices, competition, and others. It causes Indonesia to have an international trade policy which is pragmatic and future-oriented, resulting in outward looking output. This form of Indonesia's international trade policy can be seen from increasing trade integration through agreements conducted *de jure* which have accelerated economic growth. In addition, the trade integration formed by Indonesia *de jure*; especially, with traditional partners such as ASEAN and China is relatively stronger in the negotiation and ratification stages even though it has not been effective when implemented.

On the other hand, Luqman and Falianty (2024); Nasurdin, Sinaga, and Walujadi (2015); also Suyatna (2019) see that the trade integration formed by Indonesia *de jure*, especially with traditional markets, shows a negative impact. It is because the trade integration formed *de jure* only provides benefits for Indonesia's traditional markets, where they continue to export their commodities while Indonesia only becomes a recipient. Indonesia even finds it difficult to export its commodities to partner countries due to quality constraints. Using quantitative methods, these studies evaluate the effects of Indonesia's trade performance that after trade integration was implemented, the conditions became worse. This phenomenon is caused by highly competitive pressure and rigidity of domestic producers.

The last category of literature review to complete this section is the trade relationship between Indonesia and Latin America. Research which had been conducted by Sterzer and Pakkanna (2020); Al-Husin and Virgianita (2024); and Tobing and Virgianita (2020) found that trade relations between Indonesia and Latin America have never shown significant activity, each focusing on traditional markets. Empirically, factors which hinder trade between Indonesia and Latin America include geographical distance, differences in business culture, lack of information and market access, and minimal political will between countries. In addition, trade between Indonesia and Latin America is pragmatic so that the relationship will increase if there is something that benefits all, otherwise it will stagnate or tend to decline. Different from previous studies, several other literature reviews which had been conducted by Ramana and Retnosari (2018) and Sidabutar (2017) showed that there are opportunities to improve trade relations between Indonesia and Latin America. Using quantitative methods, these studies show that complementary commodities between Indonesia and America can increase trade, including animal oil, fats, wax, manufactured commodities, chemicals, copper, wine, and footwear.

Furthermore, previous literature reviews have highlighted that trade integration in the context of *de jure* and *de facto* has its own advantages and disadvantages. In the context of Indonesian trade, the current trade integration focuses more on *de* jure; especially, with traditional markets. Regarding trade relations between Indonesia and Latin America, there are obstacles in it even though there are opportunities which can be utilized. Through previous literature reviews, it can be seen that the research focuses more on studying trade integration in *de jure* and *de facto* towards traditional markets. Literature reviews that discuss Indonesia's trade integration *de jure* also focus more on relations with traditional markets. No one has discussed the trade integration formed by Indonesia *de jure* with non-traditional partner. Therefore, this research will fill the gap in previous literature reviews by focusing on trade integration formed by Indonesia with non-traditional partners; specifically, Latin America.

2.1. The Rationale of South-South Trade Agreements (Gamson & Postnikoy, 2021)

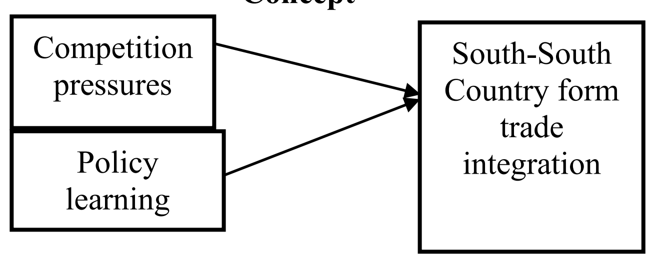
In order to answer the research questions, a concept is needed which functions as a guide in data collection and analysis so that the process is more focused. This research adopted the concept written by Gamso and Postnikov (2021) in their article entitled "Leveling-up: explaining the depth of South-South trade agreements." Gamso and Postnikov (2021) explain two main reasons why southern countries form trade integration even though there is no pressure from northern countries. This concept was used since Indonesia and Latin America are part of southern countries which do not show pressure from anywhere so that they are in accordance with the concept.

The first reason is **competition pressures**, southern countries that already have trade integration with northern countries usually have to follow stricter rules; such as, environmental standards or protection of workers' rights, which can make their production costs more expensive. In order to stay competitive with other southern countries which may have looser rules and cheaper production costs, they try to apply the same rules in trade integration with other southern countries. Therefore, they can ensure that other countries do not benefit from having lower standards (Gamso & Postnikov, 2021). This condition was created as a kind of strategy in order to keep the competition fair.

The second reason is **policy learning**, where southern countries that have formed trade integration with northern countries learn a lot from the process. They are accustomed to the format and content of more in-depth agreements, which include various rules other than simply eliminating import tariffs. When forming trade integration with other southern countries, they tend to use the same format since they are comfortable with this model (Gamso & Postnikov, 2021).

Through this explanation, if competition pressures are the main reason, then southern countries which have formed trade integration with northern countries will impose strict rules on other southern countries, even though these countries have not had similar experiences. However, if policy learning is more dominant, then a deeper trade agreement will only occur if both countries have experience with north-south trade integration (Gamso & Postnikov, 2021). The concept which has been explained will be interpreted in this research as follows:

Figure 1. Operationalization of the Concept



Source: Author's processing based on Gamso and Postnikov (2021)

3. Research Method

This research used a qualitative method which produces descriptive answers (Lamont, 2015). Data collection techniques in this research consisted of interviews as primary data, which were conducted with the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia. On the other hand, this research use documents by Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia such as Fact Sheet, Joint Study Group, Partnership Agreement, Presidential Regulation, and others documents that related to Indonesia's trade integration. The data is also obtained through literature studies which include journal articles, books, official websites, and credible news. The data obtained were then analyzed by using an illustrative method, namely by placing variables from theories or concepts in an empty framework, then filled with relevant empirical data and analyzed (Neuman, 2014). In order to ensure the validity of the data, triangulation was conducted to check its validity.

4. Results and Discussion

Referring to the concept used, in order to find out the reasons why Indonesia immediately formed *de jure* trade integration with Latin America, it is necessary to look at the patterns of experience which affected it. The results and discussion section would be divided into two sub-sections according to the variables contained in the concept proposed by Gamso and Postnikov (2021).

4.1. Competition Pressures

The competition pressure mechanism explains that countries which have formed trade integration with northern countries tend to apply the same standards in agreements with other countries. It is conducted in order to maintain their competitiveness in global trade and avoid losses due to differences in regulations which can benefit countries with looser standards (Gamso & Postnikov, 2021). This mechanism is becoming increasingly relevant in the era of globalization, where economic linkages between countries are increasingly close, and differences in regulations can have a direct impact on a country's competitiveness in the international market.

This research sees that in the context of Indonesia and Latin America, the competition pressure mechanism is not competition but rather Indonesia's strategy in order to maintain its competitiveness in the global market. When forming trade integration with northern countries or traditional partners; such as, Australia, the European Union, Japan, and South Korea, in both bilateral and multilateral contexts, Indonesia is required to apply various strict standards related to labor protection, the environment, and investor rights (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2024). These standards are not only administrative requirements, but they are also part of Indonesia's strategy in order to ensure that its access to the global market remains open and competitive. Therefore, when Indonesia expands its trade relations with Latin American countries, its main focus is not on outselling products from the region, but rather on maintaining regulatory consistency so as not to disrupt its position in the broader international trade system. This fact can also be seen from Central Statistics Agency through table 2 below.

Table 2. Total Indonesian Exports to Traditional Partners and Latin America (Per Billion USD)

Country's Destination	Indonesia's Export Value	Percentage of Total Exports
European Union	20,3	10,2%
Japan	24,8	12,5%
South Korea	13,5	6,8%
Latin America	5,2	2,6%

Source: Reprocessed based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (2023)

Table 2. presents data on Indonesia's total exports to traditional partners and Latin America per billion USD in 2023. Table 2 displays the overall value of Indonesia's exports, including the distribution of exports to each region and the percentage contribution to total exports. The data in Table 2 shows that the value of Indonesia's exports to traditional partners is much greater than to Latin America. Thus, if Indonesia lowers its regulatory standards in

agreements with Latin America, it could risk its relations with traditional partners which have been integrated for a longer time, even having long-standing trade relations.

One of the things which affects the relationship between Indonesia and traditional partners is creating a negative perception. Traditional partners may consider that Indonesia is not fully committed to the high standards which have been previously agreed upon, which could ultimately affect existing trade relations (Alaoui & Omari, 2022). In addition, regulatory imbalances can create uncertainty for investors and business actors, which can ultimately impact long-term economic stability (Patunru, 2023). This condition causes long-term complex problems since it affects various aspects. Therefore, maintaining uniform standards in various trade integrations is a strategic step for Indonesia in order to remain trusted as a credible and competitive trading partner at the global level.

Furthermore, this approach does not mean that Indonesia intends to restrict the entry of Latin American products or create trade barriers. On the contrary, by ensuring regulatory alignment, Indonesia can build closer and more sustainable cooperation with countries in the region. A deeper agreement will not only cover aspects of trade in goods, but also investment, labor protection, and sustainability standards that can benefit both parties (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2019) In addition, with the harmonization of regulations and increased standards in trade integration, business actors from both regions can more easily navigate export-import requirements, reduce policy uncertainty, and increase product competitiveness in their respective markets.

Another fact which needs to be emphasized is that in the context of IC-CEPA, the party that first invited to form trade integration is not Indonesia, but Chile (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2024). Therefore, it shows that the initiative for cooperation in trade integration comes more from Chile, while Indonesia tends to be in a position which responds to the invitation. This condition indicates that the competition pressure that is usually a driving factor in the dynamics of international trade is almost invisible from Indonesia's side, or at least is not a major consideration in making decisions in order to establish this cooperation. In other words, Indonesia does not face significant competition pressure in encouraging trade integration with Chile or even Latin America, which may indicate that this cooperation is more strategic than reactive to market pressures or global competition.

Therefore, trade with Latin America is not only seen as a competitive challenge, but it also as a strategic opportunity in order to expand Indonesia's economic network and create mutually beneficial collaborations in various sectors. Thus, the competition pressure mechanism in Indonesia's trade policy focuses more on efforts to maintain global competitiveness and strengthen Indonesia's position in the evolving international trade architecture. It reflects Indonesia's strategic approach in building a trade ecosystem which not only prioritizes short-term profits, but it also ensures economic sustainability which is more inclusive and adaptive to global dynamics. Through this approach, Indonesia is not only a passive player in international trade, but it also proactive in forming a more equal and mutually beneficial economic relationship pattern.

4.2. Policy Learning

The policy learning mechanism explains that countries which have participated in trade agreements with northern countries will learn and become accustomed to certain negotiation patterns. This process allows these countries in order to adopt the strategies they have learned when negotiating with other countries (Gamso & Postnikov, 2021). This negotiation experience provides an advantage for Indonesia in navigating the complexity of trade agreements, including in understanding the various causes related to tariffs, regulations, and standards imposed by partner countries (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2025). In this context, Indonesia, which has experience in forming more complex trade negotiations with northern countries or traditional partners, tends to use the same patterns and templates when conducting trade negotiations with Latin American countries.

Indonesia is one of the countries which has been heavily involved in trade integration with traditional partners; such as, through the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the European Union (IEU-CEPA) and Australia (IA-CEPA). In this integration, Indonesia does not only focus on tariffs, but it also covers various other aspects; such as, investment protection, environmental regulations, and workers' rights (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2024). As Indonesia began to establish closer trade relations with countries in Latin America, the negotiation patterns learned from previous negotiations became references which are reused in forming agreements with this region.

One example of this phenomenon is the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement IC-CEPA, which was signed in 2017 and valid in 2019. In this agreement, Indonesia not only negotiated on tariffs on trade in goods, but it also included provisions related to trade in services and investment (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2019). Previously, these elements were more often found in trade integration with traditional partners. Thus, IC-CEPA is an example of how Indonesia's experience in negotiating with traditional partners has influenced the negotiation strategies applied when discussing with other southern countries, in this case countries in the Latin American region.

Furthermore, this phenomenon shows that Indonesia's trade policy develops not only from external pressures, but also from internal factors related to previous negotiation experiences. Indonesian negotiators who are accustomed to more complex negotiation patterns than traditional partners tend to bring the same standards to other trade integrations (Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2024). It means that Indonesia does not only focus on eliminating or reducing tariffs, but it also pays attention to other aspects which are increasingly becoming standard in global trade integration. As a consequence, Indonesia has begun to adopt a more strategic approach in structuring trade integration with various countries, including partners in the Latin American region.

More broadly, this tendency reflects a shift in the way Indonesia structures trade integration. If in the past, trade negotiations were more oriented towards tariff aspects, now Indonesia has begun to include other elements; such as, protection of workers' rights, investment standards, and environmental regulations (Pangestu, Ing, & Rahardja, 2015). This change occurred not only because of pressure from trading partners, but also because of the increasingly mature experience and understanding of Indonesian trade negotiators. This policy also reflects the increasing capacity of Indonesian negotiators in understanding the complexity of international trade negotiations. Experience in negotiating with traditional partners who have high standards in various aspects of trade makes Indonesia better prepared to navigate the challenges of negotiating with other partners. Thus, this change in approach not only provides economic benefits for Indonesia, but it also improves the country's bargaining position in various global trade forums, while strengthening Indonesia's competitiveness in building a broader and more sustainable trade network.

In order to clarify how the experience of negotiations with traditional partners affects Indonesia's trade integration patterns with Latin American countries, this research seeks information from fact sheet of Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia documents. Table 3 below compares the main elements in Indonesia's trade agreements with traditional partners in developed countries as well as agreements that have been implemented or are still under negotiation with Latin American countries, in order to obtain a more comprehensive comparison.

Table 3. Comparison of Indonesia's Trade Integration with Traditional Partners and Latin America

Negotiation Aspects	Trade Integration with Traditional Partners (IEU-CEPA, IA-CEPA) Trade	Integration with Latin America (IC-CEPA, IP-CEPA)
Trade Tariffs	Main focus but combined with other aspects	As a part of a broader trade strategy
Trade in Services	Explicitly included	Starting to be included, as in IC-CEPA
Investment	Regulated in a special chapter with protection provisions	Still in the early stages, but gaining adoption
Workers' Rights	Often become a key issue in negotiations	Starting to be taken into account to new negotiations
Environmental Regulation	Included in a separate chapter	Still in the early stages, but gaining attention
Dispute Resolution	Using international law-based mechanisms	Starting to adopt similar approaches

Source: Reprocessed based on data from the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia (2024)

Table 3. shows integration pattern used by Indonesia in agreements with traditional partners has an effect on the way Indonesia negotiates with Latin American countries. Although initially trade negotiations with Latin America focused more on tariff aspects, currently there is a tendency to adopt more complex elements in agreements; such as, investment protection and environmental regulations.

The implications of this policy learning are quite significant in Indonesia's trade policy. First, it shows that Indonesia is increasingly ready to negotiate at the global level with higher standards. Second, this strategy can increase Indonesia's competitiveness in international trade since elements such as investment and environmental regulations are now increasingly becoming an important part of modern trade agreements. Third, experience in negotiating with traditional partners can be capital for Indonesia in order to play a more active role in shaping the trade architecture in the Latin American region.

In the future, Indonesia can continue to strengthen this approach by ensuring that every trade agreement made is not only economically beneficial but also it takes into account aspects of sustainability and protection of broader economic rights

(Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia, 2024). Thus, the policy learning mechanism not only helps Indonesia in negotiations with traditional partners, but also in expanding trade networks with southern countries, including in the Latin American region.

5. Conclusion

Indonesia chose to form *de jure* trade integration with Latin America not solely because of competition pressure, but more driven by policy learning. Indonesia's experience in trade agreements with developed countries has made it more accustomed to certain standards and negotiation patterns. When interacting with Latin America, Indonesia uses the same approach as traditional partners using agreement formats which have proven effective. It allows the trade integration process in order to run faster and deeper legally *de jure,* compared to a more informal, gradual approach. In the context of competition pressure, it is not the need to compete with Latin America but the tendency to consistently implement trade integration which is also the same as traditional partners.

The concept used based on Gamso and Postnikov (2021), is able to make this research find answers regarding the reasons why Indonesia immediately formed *de jure* trade integration with Latin America. Even one of the concepts in the variable can be explored in more depth. Through this research, it is expected for further research to compare Indonesia's trade integration with its traditional and non-traditional partners which have almost the same form. In addition, for practical recommendations, for the Indonesian government, the experience of *de jure* trade integration with Latin America as a non-traditional partner is expected to be used as a guide when intending to form with other non-traditional partners; such as, Africa and the South Pacific.

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