

# Redefining India's Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Bibliometric Analysis of Scholarly Trends

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives/Background:** India's foreign policy has undergone a significant transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, marked by a strategic shift from traditional non-alignment to a more proactive and multifaceted approach to global engagement. **Results:** The study reveals a steady rise in publication output, peaking in recent years, with a strong emphasis on India's strategic alignment in the Indo-Pacific, its soft power diplomacy, and global governance. Leading journals in this discourse include *International Affairs*, *India Review*, and *Foreign Policy Analysis*, while institutions such as Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Observer Research Foundation dominate scholarly contributions. Additionally, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia are identified as key international contributors to literature on Indian foreign policy. **Conclusion:** The findings underscore the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of the field, providing valuable insights for future research. This analysis not only maps the academic landscape but also informs policy practitioners, scholars, and institutions about emerging trends and existing gaps in the literature.

**Keywords:** Bibliometric Analysis, Global Governance, India's Foreign Policy, Indo-Pacific, International Relations, Strategic Autonomy.

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## INTRODUCTION

India's foreign policy has undergone a profound transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, driven by rapid changes in the global geopolitical landscape, economic globalization, regional security concerns, and the emergence of new diplomatic imperatives. As the world transitions from a unipolar to a multipolar order, India has repositioned itself from a traditionally non-aligned actor to a more assertive and pragmatic global player. Its foreign engagements now span from strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific to climate diplomacy, South-South cooperation, and active participation in multilateral forums such as BRICS, G20, and the United Nations. This reorientation has sparked considerable academic interest, with a growing body of scholarly work analyzing the evolving contours of India's external relations. From strategic autonomy to soft power diplomacy, and from counterbalancing China to redefining ties with the United States and Russia, India's foreign policy has become a subject of dynamic and interdisciplinary inquiry. The emergence of new global issues such as cybersecurity, vaccine diplomacy, climate change, and regional connectivity has further enriched the discourse.

Bibliometric analysis provides a valuable method to trace scholarly trends, identify key contributors, map evolving themes, and assess the intellectual landscape surrounding India's foreign policy. By examining patterns in publication output, citation impact, institutional affiliations, and thematic keywords, this study aims to uncover how academic discourse has responded to India's changing international role over the past two decades.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature has explored a range of themes, including strategic partnerships, regional dynamics, normative principles, and emerging challenges such as climate change and technological diplomacy. Scholarly discourse on India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century highlights a transition from idealistic non-alignment to pragmatic multi-alignment shaped by global power shifts, economic priorities, and strategic autonomy. Scholarly discourse on India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century consistently emphasises the interplay between continuity and adaptation in response to evolving global and regional dynamics. Early foundational analyses argue that India's foreign policy has adjusted to structural changes in the international system while preserving core national interests and strategic autonomy (Mohan, 2004; Mitra and Schöttli, 2007). This perspective is reinforced by Ganguly and Shoup (2016), who contend that India's diplomatic behaviour reflects pragmatic engagement with a changing world order rather than a radical departure from established principles.



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Post-Cold War scholarship situates India's foreign policy within a broader context of strategic recalibration (Rajan, 1997). Provided one of the earliest assessments of India's external relations in the post-Cold War environment, highlighting the constraints and opportunities arising from the emergence of a multipolar system. Building on this, (Raghavan, 2017) traces India's gradual shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment, identifying flexible partnerships as a defining feature of contemporary Indian diplomacy (Pant, 2020). Further consolidates these arguments by offering a comprehensive overview of Indian foreign policy, emphasising security concerns, economic diplomacy and regional stability as key drivers of external engagement.

The ideational and civilizational dimensions of India's foreign policy have received growing scholarly attention (Dar, 2021). Revisits Kautilya's realist thought to challenge Eurocentric international relations theories, arguing that indigenous strategic traditions play a significant role in shaping India's regional diplomacy. Complementing this approach, (Tharoor, 2012) highlights India's civilizational identity and soft power as important sources of global influence (Jaishankar, 2020). Articulates a realist, interest-based vision of India's external strategy, while his later work further reinforces the idea of "Bharat" as a civilizational state shaping India's diplomatic worldview (Jaishankar, 2024).

Recent literature has increasingly focused on the emerging challenges and opportunities confronting India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Edited volumes by Ahmed (2024) and Basu and Arshed (2024) provide comprehensive assessments of India's bilateral, regional and emerging partnerships amid heightened geopolitical uncertainty. Empirical studies have examined changing trends, such as strategic partnerships, Indo-Pacific engagement, and issue-based alignments, in India's external relations (Ahmed and Mohapatra, 2021; Chaudhary, 2025; Narazary, 2024). Continuity and change remain central analytical themes in contemporary scholarship (Mohan 2022; Verma 2024). Argue that while India's foundational foreign policy principles endure, there has been increasing tactical flexibility in response to global power transitions (Mohanty, 2012). Similarly identifies economic globalisation and regional security dynamics as transformative forces influencing India's diplomatic priorities.

An emerging interdisciplinary strand links foreign policy with scientific diplomacy and international research collaboration. Studies of global collaboration patterns suggest that international research partnerships, particularly Indo-US collaboration, have become an important component of India's soft power strategy (Dua *et al.*, 2022; Singh *et al.*, 2020). Recent work further examines the evolving nature of Indo-US research collaboration and its broader diplomatic implications (Dua *et al.*, 2024; Vaishya *et al.*, 2025). Contextualise these developments through bibliometric analysis, demonstrating how patterns of scholarly communication increasingly mirror geopolitical engagement.

Overall, the literature indicates that India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterised by strategic continuity, adaptive change and expanding global engagement, shaped by historical traditions, leadership perspectives and emerging international challenges (Ahmed, 2024; Mohan, 2022; Pant, 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a bibliometric analysis to examine scholarly literature on India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Data were collected from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using keywords such as "India's foreign policy," "strategic autonomy," "Indo-Pacific," "non-alignment," and "multilateralism," focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers published between 2000 and 2025. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria and removing duplicates, 720 records were selected for analysis. Ethical considerations were addressed by using publicly available bibliographic data, with no human participants or confidential information involved, ensuring proper attribution and adherence to academic integrity standards. The data were organised and analysed using Microsoft Excel and bibliometric tools such as VOS viewer and Bibliometrix, examining quantitative indicators including annual publication output, leading journals, prolific authors and institutions, keyword frequency, citation counts, and country-wise contributions. Descriptive statistics and visualisations were employed to identify publication trends, collaboration patterns, and emerging thematic areas, providing a systematic and quantitative understanding of the evolution of scholarly research on India's foreign policy in response to changing geopolitical dynamics.

## SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The scope includes identifying key publication trends, frequently studied topics, high-impact journals, leading institutions, and international contributions that have shaped academic discourse on India's external relations. It highlights dominant themes, including strategic autonomy, the Indo-Pacific, soft power, multilateralism, and evolving partnerships with global powers. The analysis aims to inform policymakers and academics about the intellectual landscape surrounding India's foreign policy, guiding future research.

However, the study has certain limitations. It relies primarily on secondary data from selected databases like Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, which may exclude relevant literature not indexed therein, particularly regional journals and grey literature. Additionally, bibliometric analysis does not assess the qualitative depth or theoretical frameworks of the publications. Language bias may also exist, as English-language sources dominate the dataset. Despite these limitations, the study offers a comprehensive and data-driven overview of key scholarly trends in the field.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows that in the year 2000, only 5 publications were recorded, reflecting a relatively modest academic focus during the early phase of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, by 2005, the number had more than doubled to 12, signalling a growing attention toward India's international engagements, particularly after liberalization. The momentum continued, reaching 25 publications in 2010, which corresponds with India's increasing involvement in global forums and strategic partnerships. A sharp increase is evident by 2015, with 45 publications, likely influenced by major foreign policy initiatives such as the "Act East Policy," closer Indo-U.S. ties, and India's growing regional assertiveness. The upward trajectory peaked further in 2020 with 72 publications, reflecting intense academic engagement driven by geopolitical shifts, including tensions with China, participation in the Quad, and India's role in the Indo-Pacific discourse. By 2024, the number of publications reached 80, indicating sustained and heightened scholarly focus on India's foreign policy redefinition amidst a dynamic global order. This trend underscores both the transformation in India's diplomatic posture and the parallel evolution of academic discourse analyzing its implications.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of scholarly articles across leading journals, highlighting the growing academic interest in India's evolving foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. International Affairs tops the list with 45 articles, underscoring its global appeal and the international community's engagement with India's diplomatic trajectory. Close behind is India Review, which has published 42 articles, reflecting its specialized focus on Indian policy, politics, and external relations. Foreign Policy Analysis and Strategic Analysis, with 38 and 35 articles respectively, indicate strong contributions to theoretical and strategic discourse surrounding India's role in regional and global affairs. Asian Survey and Contemporary South Asia follow closely with 33 and 30 articles, revealing a robust interest in India's interactions within the broader Asian and South Asian context. The Journal of Asian Security and World Affairs have contributed 28 and 25 articles, focusing on geopolitical and security dimensions of India's foreign policy. Meanwhile, International Studies and Global Governance, with 23 and 22 articles, demonstrate interdisciplinary coverage, incorporating international relations theory, global institutions, and governance structures. Collectively, this journal-wise distribution reflects a rich and diverse scholarly engagement with India's foreign policy, drawing attention from both region-specific and globally-oriented academic platforms.

Figure 3 shows the keyword frequency analysis offers a revealing insight into the thematic priorities of scholarly literature on India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. "Strategic autonomy" emerges as the most frequently used keyword with 120 occurrences, underscoring India's enduring emphasis on maintaining independent decision-making in international affairs while engaging with global powers. The prominence of "Indo-Pacific"

(110 mentions) reflects India's strategic reorientation towards maritime security and regional partnerships amid evolving geopolitical dynamics. The traditional principle of "non-alignment" remains relevant with 95 citations, indicating continued academic reflection on its legacy and adaptation in a multipolar world.

Equally significant is the focus on "Soft power" (90), highlighting India's cultural diplomacy, diaspora engagement, and global image-building strategies. Keywords like "Global South" (85) and "Multilateralism" (80) illustrate India's positioning as a voice for developing nations and its active role in global governance institutions. The frequent mentions of "China" (78) and "United States" (75) point to the centrality of these bilateral relationships in shaping India's foreign policy calculus. The region-specific terms "South Asia" (70) and "Quad" (68) indicate the importance of neighbourhood diplomacy and security-oriented groupings in scholarly discourse. Overall, these keyword trends capture the nuanced, multi-dimensional, and evolving character of India's foreign policy scholarship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Figure 4 presents the institution-wise publication output on India's foreign policy, revealing clear disparities in scholarly productivity among leading national and international institutions. Jawaharlal Nehru University leads with 85 publications, underscoring its central role in foreign policy and international relations research in India. The Observer Research Foundation follows closely with 78 articles, highlighting the growing influence of policy think tanks in academic and policy-oriented scholarship. Among global institutions, King's College London (60) and Georgetown University (58) show strong research engagement, reflecting sustained international academic interest in India's strategic and diplomatic affairs. Indian universities such as Delhi University (55), Jadavpur University (53), and Jamia Millia Islamia (50) also contribute substantially, indicating a robust domestic research base. Institutions like Australian National University (52), University of Oxford (48), and University of Sydney (45) demonstrate moderate yet consistent output. Overall, the distribution suggests a concentration of scholarly production within a limited number of institutions, with Indian universities and prominent international centers collectively shaping the academic discourse on India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This data shows that both academic institutions and policy research centres within India and globally are actively engaging with the study of India's foreign policy, making it a field of growing interdisciplinary and international relevance.

Figure 5 illustrates the institution-wise distribution of articles published on India's foreign policy, highlighting notable variations in research productivity across leading institutions. Jawaharlal Nehru University emerges as the most prolific contributor with 85 publications, reflecting its long-standing academic focus on international relations and strategic studies. This is followed by the Observer Research Foundation with

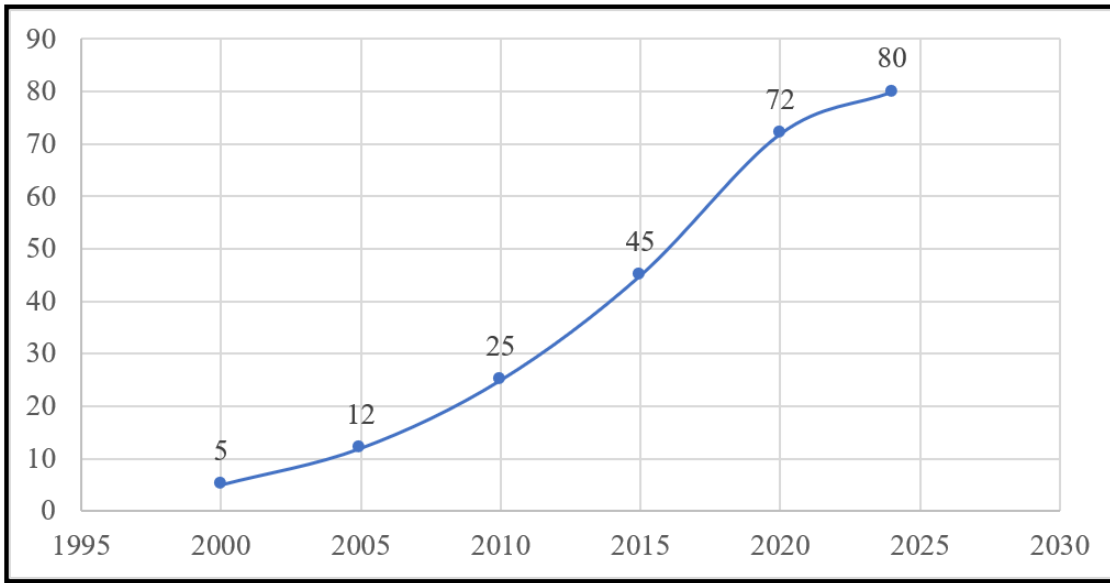


Figure 1: Annual Publication Output (2000-2024).

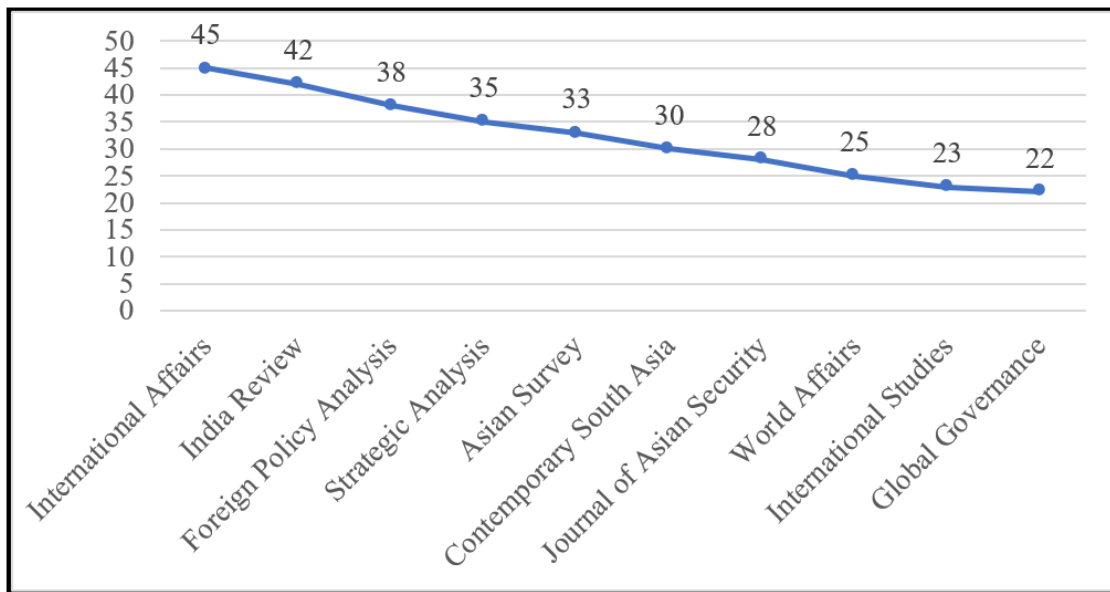


Figure 2: Number of Articles published in Top 10 Journals.

78 articles, indicating the significant role of policy think tanks alongside universities in shaping foreign policy scholarship. Among international institutions, King's College London (60) and Georgetown University (58) demonstrate strong engagement, underscoring global academic interest in India's foreign policy. Prominent Indian universities such as Delhi University (55), Jadavpur University (53), and Jamia Millia Islamia (50) also show substantial contributions, reinforcing India's domestic scholarly base. Meanwhile, institutions like Australian National University (52), University of Oxford (48), and University of Sydney (45) reflect consistent but comparatively lower output. Overall, the trend reveals a concentration of research output among a few key institutions, with Indian universities and international research centers jointly shaping the scholarly discourse on India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Figure 6 shows the citation analysis of top scholarly articles on India's foreign policy reveals the most influential themes shaping academic discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Leading the list is "India and the Balance of Power" with 220 citations, highlighting the centrality of India's role in the shifting global power structure and its efforts to maintain strategic autonomy amidst great power competition. The article titled "The Indo-Pacific Strategy" follows closely with 198 citations, reflecting widespread interest in India's maritime strategy and its growing significance in regional security architecture.

"India-US Strategic Partnership" with 185 citations underscores the evolving bilateral relationship that has become a cornerstone of India's foreign engagement, especially post-2000. "Soft Power and Indian Diplomacy" (172 citations) emphasizes the scholarly

appeal of India's non-coercive influence through culture, diaspora, and education. The revisiting of traditional principles in "Revisiting Non-Alignment" (160 citations) indicates continued debate on the relevance and evolution of non-alignment in India's contemporary foreign policy. "India-China Border Disputes" (158 citations) underscores the geopolitical and security concerns surrounding bilateral tensions, especially post-Doklam and Galwan clashes. Articles on "India's Climate Diplomacy" (145) and "Multilateralism in Indian Policy" (140) reflect India's proactive role in global environmental negotiations and institutional frameworks such as the UN and G20. Additionally, "India-Africa Relations" (132) and "India and BRICS" (128) highlight India's engagement with the Global South and multilateral blocs as part of its broader south-south cooperation strategy.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

The bibliometric analysis reveals a steadily increasing scholarly interest in India's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with publications rising from 5 in 2000 to 80 by 2024, reflecting India's growing global engagement and strategic initiatives such as the Act East Policy and participation in the Indo-Pacific framework. Journal-wise, International Affairs and India Review lead in publications, indicating both global and domestic academic attention, while keyword analysis highlights thematic priorities including "strategic autonomy," "Indo-Pacific," "non-alignment," "soft power," and key bilateral relationships with China and the United States. Institution-wise, Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Observer Research Foundation dominate scholarly output, alongside contributions from international centers like King's College London and Georgetown University, demonstrating

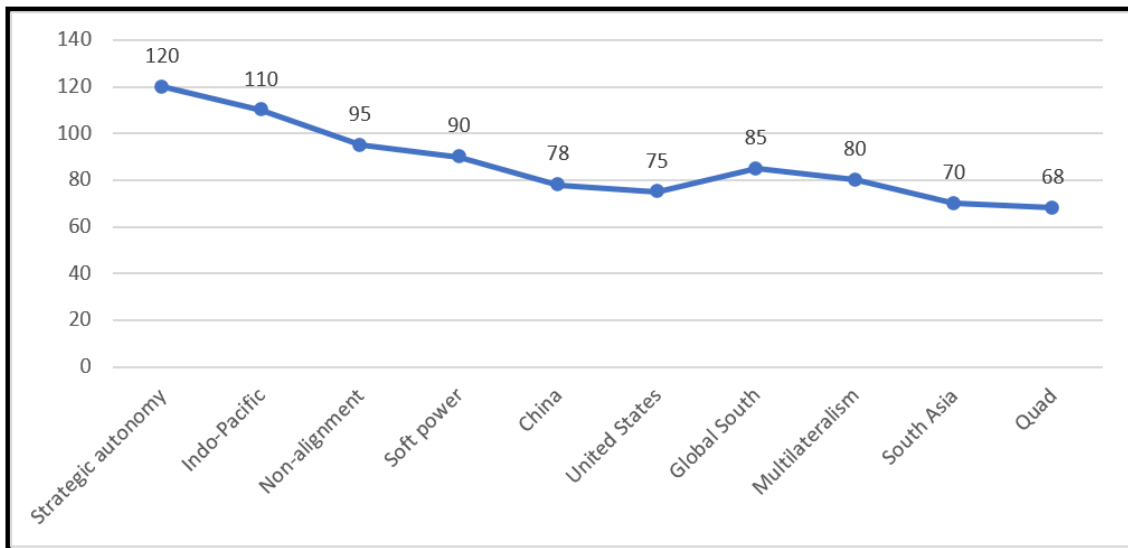


Figure 3: Most Frequently Used Keywords for publication.

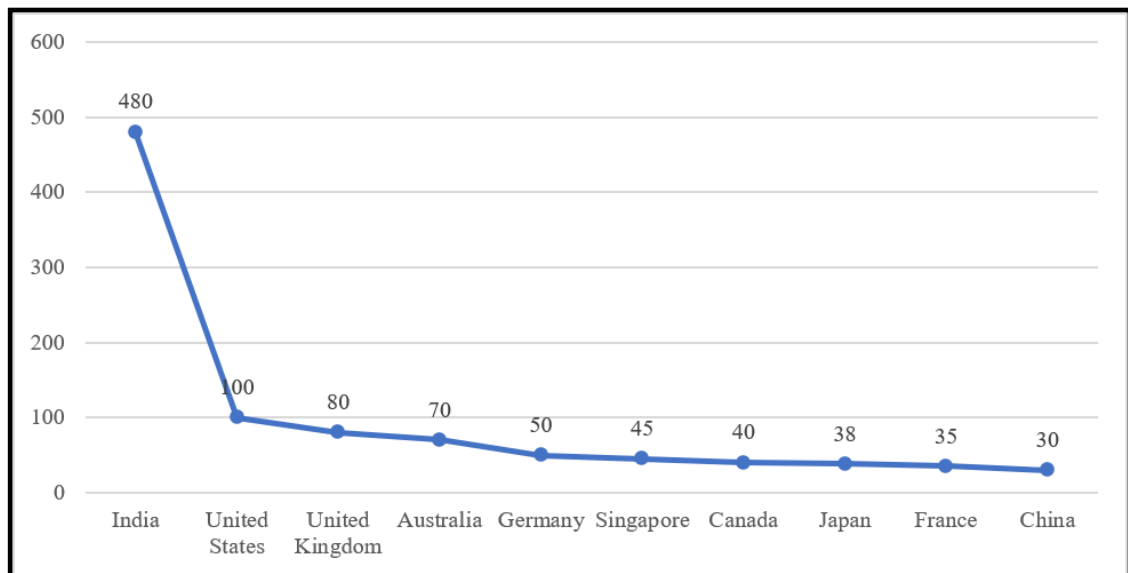


Figure 4: No of Publications in the Top 10 Countries by Scholarly Contribution.

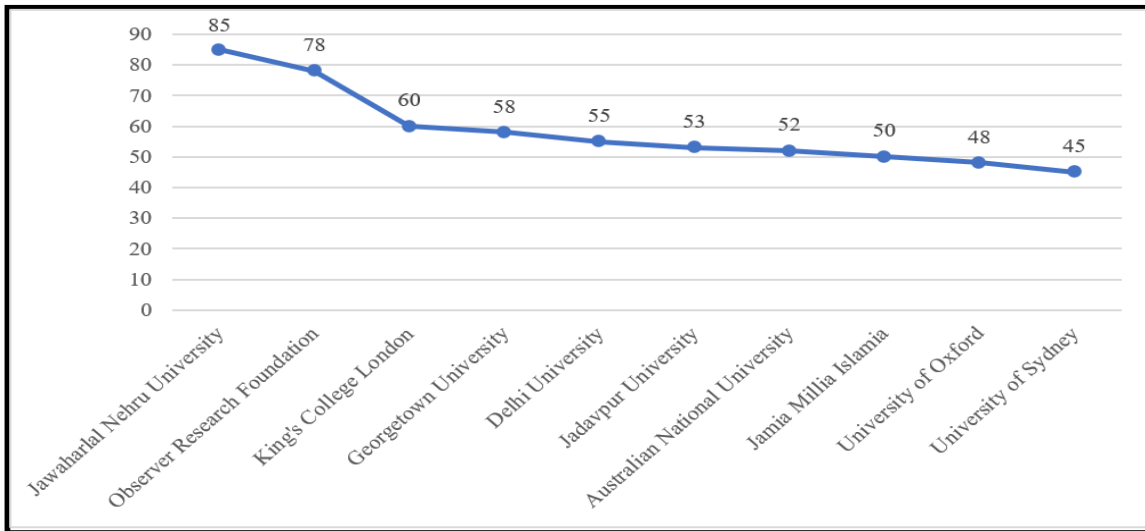


Figure 5: No of Articles Published by the Top 10 Institutions.

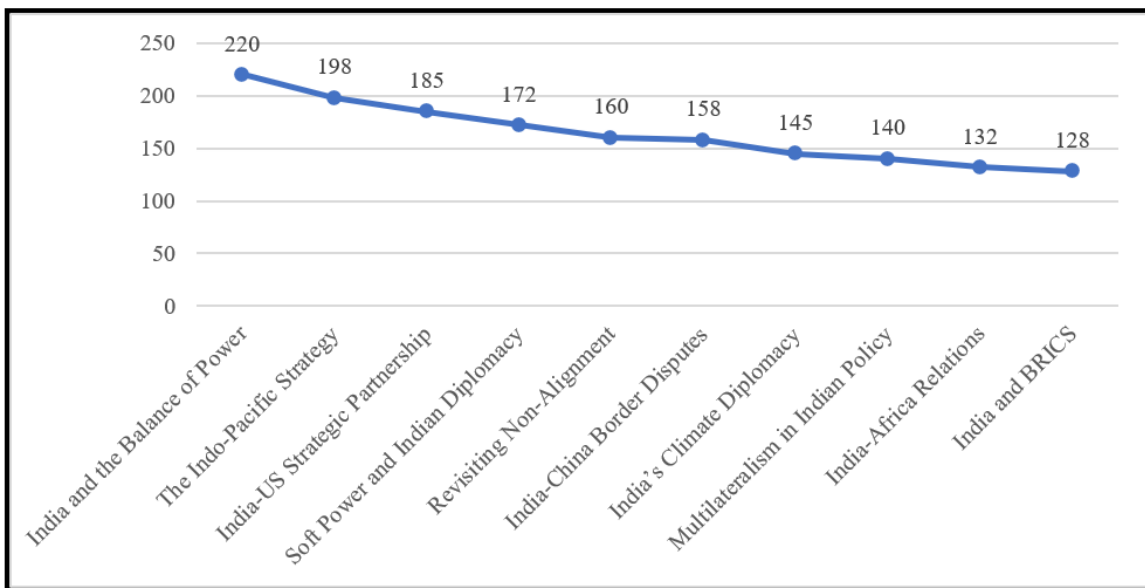


Figure 6: Top 10 Most Cited Articles.

both domestic and global research engagement. Citation analysis identifies influential articles focusing on strategic autonomy, India-US and India-China relations, maritime security, soft power, multilateralism, and climate diplomacy, indicating that India's evolving diplomatic posture and regional-global interactions are central to contemporary academic discourse. Overall, the findings underscore a dynamic, multi-dimensional, and increasingly interdisciplinary engagement with India's foreign policy scholarship.

## CONCLUSION

The bibliometric analysis of scholarly trends on *Redefining India's Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* reveals a substantial evolution in both the thematic orientation and geographical scope of academic discourse. A steady growth in research output is observed, particularly after 2010, reflecting the increasing complexity and

global significance of India's foreign policy in a rapidly changing international system. The concentration of publications in leading international journals such as *International Affairs*, *India Review*, and *Foreign Policy Analysis* underscores the heightened scholarly engagement with India's strategic behaviour, regional leadership, and global aspirations.

Keyword analysis further indicates that concepts such as strategic autonomy, Indo-Pacific, non-alignment, soft power, and multilateralism dominate the literature, suggesting a multidimensional shift in India's diplomatic approach. This shift reflects an effort to reconcile long-standing foreign policy principles with pragmatic adaptations to contemporary geopolitical realities. Citation analysis of highly influential studies highlights key thematic areas, including global power transitions, India-United States and India-China relations, climate diplomacy, and multilateral groupings such as the Quad and BRICS.

Institutional analysis reveals that Indian universities and policy think tanks, most notably Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Observer Research Foundation, are among the leading contributors to this body of scholarship. Simultaneously, prominent academic institutions from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other regions play a significant role, underscoring the growing internationalization of research on India's foreign policy and its increasing visibility within global academic debates.

In conclusion, the 21<sup>st</sup> century marks a strategic transformation in India's foreign policy, evolving from a predominantly regionally oriented and non-aligned posture to a more globally engaged, interest-driven, and multi-aligned paradigm. The bibliometric trends identified in this study not only document this transition but also reflect sustained intellectual efforts to conceptualize, critique, and understand India's expanding role in an increasingly multipolar world order.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the bibliometric findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for scholars, academic institutions, and policymakers engaged in the study and practice of India's foreign policy. First, future research should adopt greater thematic diversification by moving beyond dominant topics such as strategic autonomy and Indo-Pacific geopolitics to include underexplored areas such as digital diplomacy, space governance, health diplomacy, and the role of emerging technologies in foreign policy decision-making. Expanding the thematic scope will enable a more comprehensive understanding of India's evolving diplomatic priorities.

Second, there is a need for enhanced interdisciplinary engagement in foreign policy research. Integrating perspectives from economics, technology studies, environmental science, and security studies can enrich theoretical frameworks and provide more nuanced insights into India's global engagements, particularly in areas such as climate diplomacy, energy security, and sustainable development.

Third, the concentration of research output among a limited number of institutions suggests the importance of strengthening research capacity across a broader range of universities and policy centers, especially in the global south. Encouraging institutional collaboration, research funding, and capacity-building initiatives can help democratize knowledge production and diversify scholarly perspectives.

Fourth, international collaboration should be further promoted through cross-country co-authorship and comparative studies, particularly involving regions where India's diplomatic engagement is expanding, such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Such collaborations can enhance the

global visibility of Indian foreign policy research and facilitate comparative theoretical advancements.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, future studies should employ advanced bibliometric and scientometric techniques, including network analysis, co-citation mapping, and thematic evolution analysis using specialised software tools. Longitudinal and mixed-method approaches combining bibliometric analysis with qualitative content analysis would provide deeper insights into intellectual structures and policy relevance.

Overall, these recommendations aim to strengthen the scholarly ecosystem surrounding India's foreign policy research and support a more inclusive, interdisciplinary, and globally engaged academic discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

**BRICS:** Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa; **G20:** Group of Twenty; **Quad:** Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; **U.S.:** United States; **JNU:** Jawaharlal Nehru University; **ORF:** Observer Research Foundation; **DU:** Delhi University; **COP:** Conference of the Parties; **UN:** United Nations.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author carried out all aspects of the study, including conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation.

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