
Indonesia's Foreign Policy: Grasping the Public's Perspective on the War in Ukraine

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Abstract

This research emphasizes the importance of public opinion for Indonesia's foreign policy in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. As a middle-power democracy, Indonesia should recognize public opinion as a crucial component in formulating its foreign policy toward the war. On this note, Indonesian public opinion remains influenced by anti-Western sentiments, leading to empathy towards Russia and President Vladimir Putin. Meanwhile, Indonesia's voting position at the 11th Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) related to the Russia-Ukraine war did not align with this public opinion. The Government of Indonesia based its stance on full respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and concerns about the humanitarian consequences on civilians. Nevertheless, Indonesia refrained from supporting economic sanctions against Russia and continued to invite President Vladimir Putin to the G20 Summit in 2022. In this regard, Indonesia employs a "pragmatic equidistant" foreign policy towards Russia and Ukraine, aiming to maximize partnerships based on national interests without being drawn into any sphere of influence. While public opinion should not be the sole determinant in Indonesia's foreign policymaking, it remains significant to ensure the legitimacy of the democratic process. Therefore, after looking at the benefits and challenges of three policy choices, this policy paper strongly recommends establishing a partnership with reputable Public Opinion research institutions in Indonesia. This is the most feasible and practical option for the MoFA's medium- and long-term strategies to assert Indonesia's stance as a middle-power democracy.

Keywords: Public Opinion, Indonesia's Foreign Policy, Middle-power Democracy, Russia-Ukraine War

1. Introduction

Having served as an Indonesian diplomat for over a decade, the author frequently encounters repetitive questions from counterparts on how to determine Indonesia's position regarding various global issues, such as:

"Does the Government of Indonesia consider the domestic public before taking a position?"

"How will the domestic public see each and every issue?"

"What will impact the fate of the domestic public?"

These questions are apparently relevant as a practical way to reflect the legitimacy of democratic values in taking Indonesia's stances (Kharisma, 2023)¹. It also ensures that the decisions taken are based on the main principles of Indonesia's foreign policy: independent and active², not simply taking sides with certain allies. As articulated by Mohammad Hatta (1953), the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy is both independent and active, or "*bebas-aktif*" in Bahasa Indonesia. It is a

¹ This is based on the interview with M. Waffaa Kharisma (CSIS Indonesia) on 10 October 2023.

² According to the author's professional experience, these questions became much more frequent when Indonesia was a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2019-2020. During this tenure, many armed conflicts on the UNSC agenda were not directly related to Indonesia's national interests, such as armed conflicts in Africa. Indonesia must have taken a firm position based on its national capacity and as a representative of the Asia-Pacific Group in the UNSC.

policy that precludes Indonesia from participating in a formal military alliance and highlights the maintenance of a reasonably balanced engagement with great powers, not belonging to their sphere of influence (Weinstein, 1972; Anwar, 2019)³.

In Political Communication, responses to those questions can be explored through Public Opinion research. In general, public opinion is a collective opinion on a particular topic or voting intention that is relevant to society. It is people's attitudes on matters that significantly affect them. Therefore, public opinion is an essential factor in making various policies by political elites in a democratic country, including foreign policy. However, the definitions of public opinion about foreign policy are numerous, and their evolution cannot be academically limited, such as on issues in foreign economic policy, terrorism, climate change, and international cooperation (Kertzer, 2021).

Therefore, this research limits the definition of public opinion about foreign policy concerning international armed conflict and military casualties in a country's domestic context. On this note, public opinion is considered an important factor in deciding whether a nation-state should support military operations in a war (Larson & Savych, 2005). According to the theory of Democratic Constraints, public opinion can limit political elites' ability to pursue policies that are unpopular with the majority of citizens through a democratic process to be aligned with public needs and interests, particularly on war and armed conflict (Fearon, 1997; Sodaro, 2007).

Unfortunately, the influence of public opinion in formulating foreign policy is not widely applied by middle-power democracies, including Indonesia (Wike & Fetterolf, 2021)⁴. In contrast, great-power democracies have long documented studies on how public opinion matters for their foreign policy in humanitarian crises, peace processes, and conflict resolution⁵. For instance, the United States has different decision-making models derived from such cases as the Vietnam War and the Gulf War. Those studies are also supported by professional research institutions that dedicate themselves to constantly measuring public opinion connected to the United States foreign policy, such as the Pew Research Center.

Nevertheless, Goh (2007) posits that, in fact, the dynamics among great-power democracies have always been influenced by the actions and persuasion of middle powers in many regions, including Southeast Asia. Middle powers have pursued to shape the regional order by engaging great powers in many forms of cooperation and maintaining a favorable distribution without provoking direct confrontation. Kleinfeld et al. (2021) also argued that more middle powers are becoming increasingly democratic in this 21st century. Regardless of their geopolitical clout, these countries have made democracy a significant element of their foreign policy, including Indonesia. Therefore, Indonesia, along with its influential actions in peace efforts and conflict resolution, should put more weight on the interplay between its public opinion and foreign policymaking process.

³ This principled policy aims to pursue peaceful and amicable relations with all nations based on mutual respect and non-interference in each other's governmental structures. Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia No. 37 in 1999 affirms that this principle is essentially not neutral. Rather, it maintains the freedom to establish positions without any predetermined allegiance to global powers and actively contributes to achieving freedom, enduring peace, and social justice.

⁴ Referring to Kleinfeld et al. (2021), this research employs the term "middle-power democracy" informally rather than in a restrictive sense, focusing on certain levels of geostrategic presence and capacity to wield military and economic influence. Therefore, it refers to a group of democratic nations (other than the United States) that consistently incorporate democracy in their foreign policy and dedicate their significant diplomatic capital and resources to this cause. Middle-power democracies possess collaborative diplomatic relations with many nation-states and actively contribute to peaceful solutions in multilateral and regional settings (Jordaan, 2003). These efforts serve to promote peace, stability, and security within the international arena. Based on this description, Indonesia can be categorized as one of the middle-power democracies.

⁵ Some of the latest studies are Berinsky (2009), Baum & Groeling (2009), Kertzer (2013; 2017), Dropp, Kertzer & Zeitzoff (2014), Tomz, Weeks, & Yarhi-Milo (2020), and Mueller (2021).

The problem addressed in this policy paper stems from the assumption that the public is not capable of effectively handling foreign policy. Historically, the public has been viewed as lacking the necessary knowledge and engagement, being too moralistic and unpredictable to have informed opinions about global affairs (Kertzer, 2021). However, recent studies have presented a more positive perspective on the public's capacity to meaningfully respond to international events, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Iraq war, and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria - ISIS (Mueller, 2021). Even some of the latest studies attempted to discover the influential level of public opinion within two or more countries in the formulation of their foreign policies.

Against this backdrop, this policy paper examines the importance of a practical study of public opinion in Indonesia on foreign policymaking processes in conflict-afflicted settings. Meanwhile, the Russia-Ukraine war is selected as a recent case study of armed conflict. This refers to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine that began on 24 February 2022 and set off the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II (Mankoff, 2022). The attack was claimed by Russia as a "special military operation" to "demilitarize and denazify" Ukraine. However, from Ukraine's perspective, the attack was an act of military aggression or invasion of Ukrainian territory. By the end of September 2022, Russia annexed four Ukrainian regions: Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia. Up to 24 September 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recorded 27,449 civilian casualties in Ukraine: 9,701 killed and 17,748 injured.

The adverse impact of this war has been massive on global stability. According to Brief No.2 of the United Nations - Global Crisis Response Group (2022), the Russia-Ukraine War caused ripple effects in the form of a cost-of-living crisis in three dimensions: food, energy, and finance. The global cost of living in mid-2022 was at an all-time high. There was the threat of a vicious cycle, where rising prices in one sector pushed up prices in other sectors. If left unaddressed, this could impact the global financial situation, including higher inflation and interest rates, political and social instability, and poverty and hunger, especially in developing countries. This Russia-Ukraine war has been frequently discussed at the grassroots due to massive exposure in the media, particularly from Western media outlets. Media narratives mostly divide both countries into two poles: Pro-Russia or Pro-Ukraine, as if there is nothing in between.

By conducting Public Opinion research on foreign policy, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) can deliberate more comprehensively in its decision-making process. This also reflects the legitimacy of the democratic process in Indonesia, which is critical for the public. The MoFA can also better understand how to conduct strategic engagement with the public to make it more down-to-earth (*"membumikan diplomasi"*).

Therefore, the research question here is: *"How should Indonesia view the importance of public opinion in foreign policymaking on the Russia-Ukraine war?"*. After answering the research question through a comprehensive analysis, the author provides three policy choices for the MoFA to move forward with an innovative approach and democratic values. In conclusion, the author will propose the most practical recommendation, along with its challenges and how to cope with them.

2. Analysis

In this part, the author examines Indonesian public opinion toward the Russia-Ukraine war and Indonesia's voting pattern in the United Nations on relevant resolutions. It then focuses on the interplay between public opinion and Indonesia's foreign policy regarding the war.

2.1. Public Opinion in Indonesia on the Russia-Ukraine War

The recent Russia-Ukraine War, which began in February 2022, has captured the attention of the international community at large. It has had global repercussions on food, energy, and financial security (Sebastian & Marzuki, 2023). However, public reactions differ across countries. The public in Western countries largely responded with support for their governments' position of strongly condemning Russia, imposing sanctions, and supporting Ukraine with humanitarian and military

assistance. Meanwhile, the public in Global South countries, such as Brazil, China, and India, are in line with their governments to be pragmatic by taking advantage of the war.

In Indonesia, public opinion about this war was not fully aligned with the government’s stance. According to Evello's findings (February - March 2022), there was an increase in social media users’ attention on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube⁶. During this period, 96,000 online news articles were shared 1.6 million times on various social media platforms. Most conversations were dominated by admiration for Russia and President Vladimir Putin.

Similar findings were presented by Saiful Mujani Research & Consulting (SMRC) in August 2022, around three months before the G20 Summit was held in Bali, Indonesia. 63% of respondents said they knew about the Russia-Ukraine War, and most of them were also aware that the war had caused the rise of food and energy prices in Indonesia. Of those who knew about the war, 71% of respondents disagreed with Russia invading Ukraine. Interestingly, the majority of them did not prohibit Russia's attendance at the G20 Summit and even agreed with the Indonesian government's stance to keep inviting Russia.

Compared to other middle-power democracies, public attitudes in Indonesia are considered distinctive. Pew Research Center conducted surveys from February to May 2023 regarding the global perception of Russian President, Vladimir Putin, and Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy⁷. There are 24 countries included in this survey, including Australia, Greece, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa as middle-power democracies. Table 1 below reveals that public opinion in Indonesia is an exception. It is arguably the opposite of the majority when it comes to confidence in the current President of Russia on world affairs. However, when asked about their confidence in the current President of Ukraine, public opinion in Indonesia shared similar levels of confidence with other middle-power democracies. Only Australia expressed high confidence in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (70%) on this particular question.

Table 1. Public Opinion in 5 Middle-Power Democracies towards the Russian President and Ukrainian President in world affairs

	Median	Australia	Greece	Indonesia	Mexico	South Africa
a) % who have no confidence in the Russian President to do the right thing regarding world affairs	87%	93%	70%	<u>26%</u>	69%	50%
b) % who have confidence in the Ukrainian President to do the right thing regarding world affairs	51%	<u>70%</u>	28%	32%	25%	32%

Source: Fagan et al., 2023

⁶ These findings were released as the content of an article on BBC Indonesia, 24 March 2022 on the link: <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-60737298>

⁷ According to the survey results, a median of 82% of adults across 24 countries have an unfavourable view of Russia, while a similar share (87%) has no confidence in President Putin to do the right thing regarding world affairs. At the same time, a median of 51% express confidence in President Zelenskyy’s leadership, while 39% hold the opposite view.

The Indonesian public has shown a keen interest in discussing the Russia-Ukraine war, especially in its early days. They frequently discussed it on many social media platforms. While they disapproved of Russia's military invasion, their attitudes revealed an admiration for Russia and President Vladimir Putin as a charismatic leader.

2.2. Indonesia's Stance on the Russia-Ukraine War in the United Nations

This section examines Indonesia's foreign policy on the Russia-Ukraine war. There are two ways to see Indonesia's official position: (1) the voting position on resolutions at the 11th Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) related to the Russia-Ukraine war, and (2) Indonesia's official statements during the process of adopting these resolutions, both in the form of national statements and explanations of positions after the vote (EoP).

Table 2 presents Indonesia's voting position on each resolution at the 11th Emergency Special Session of the UNGA. Introduced by Ukraine, all resolutions were adopted without reaching a consensus⁸. Indonesia voted in favour of Resolutions No.1, 2, 4, and 6, but abstained in No. 3 and 5.

Table 2. Indonesia's Voting Positions on Resolutions at the 11th Emergency Special Session of the UNGA regarding the Russia-Ukraine War

Resolution at UN General Assembly	Voting Date	Indonesia	Voting Summary
A/RES/ES-11/1 Aggression against Ukraine	2 March 2022	<u>In Favour</u>	<u>141 for</u> 5 against 35 abstain
A/RES/ES-11/2 Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine	24 March 2022	<u>In Favour</u>	<u>140 for</u> 5 against 38 abstain
A/RES/ES-11/3 Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council	7 April 2022	<u>Abstain</u>	93 for 24 against <u>58 abstain</u>
A/RES/ES-11/4 Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations	12 October 2022	<u>In Favour</u>	<u>143 for</u> 5 against 35 abstain
A/RES/ES-11/5 Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine	14 November 2022	<u>Abstain</u>	94 for 14 against <u>73 abstain</u>
A/RES/ES-11/6 Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in Ukraine	23 February 2023	<u>In Favour</u>	<u>141 for</u> 7 against 32 abstain

Source: United Nations Digital Library, 2022-2023

Indonesia's voting pattern exhibits a nuanced approach, neither 100% siding with Russia nor Ukraine. It reflects a careful consideration of Indonesia on each resolution's substance before determining its position. This voting pattern also appears in several developing countries that chose to be impartial. This can be seen in Resolutions No. 3 and 5, which experienced a high increase of abstention votes, including from Indonesia.

To make it clear, below are some statements of the Indonesian delegation in the process of adopting those resolutions at the 11th Emergency Special Session of the UNGA in 2022:

⁸ Those countries that voted *against* tend to consistently take sides with Russia. At the same time, countries that continuously voted *for* tend to ally with Ukraine.

- 1) Statement on 28 February 2022:
*"Indonesia, therefore, calls for **peace** to be urgently reinstated in Ukraine."
"Our action here in the General Assembly must serve the bigger interest of **humanity**."*
- 2) Statement on 23 March 2022:
*"It is time we put **humanity** beyond and above political differences. And work towards our ultimate goal, to end the war and suffering and to achieve perpetual peace."*
- 3) EoP on 24 March 2022:
*"Indonesia voted **in favor** of the resolution because of the need for action to address the dire **humanitarian situation** in Ukraine."*
- 4) EoP on 7 April 2022:
*"Moreover, the General Assembly's action must not create negative precedent that can undermine the credibility of this august body. It is for these reasons we **abstained** on the resolution."*
- 5) EoP on 14 November 2022:
*"Considering the prejudicial impact of the adoption of today's resolution and the negative precedent it may generate for the Assembly, my delegation **abstained** on the resolution."*

Two key aspects appear from Indonesia's statements and EoPs. Firstly, Indonesia's position is determined by humanitarian principles and peace efforts, not alliances. This aligned with President Joko Widodo's statement on his Twitter in February 2022 that *"war brings misery to mankind and puts the whole world at risk"*. This also showed Indonesia's consistent position on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity since the war in Crimea in 2014 (Sebastian & Marzuki, 2023).

Secondly, Indonesia abstained from two other resolutions mainly due to concerns about setting a negative precedent for the UNGA. Resolution No.3 speaks about dismissing Russia as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, and Resolution No.5 demands that Russia pay all losses caused by the war. Both resolutions are unprecedented and not in line with the spirit of multilateralism, as they openly put Russia in the corner.

Therefore, Indonesia's foreign policy underscored the need to avoid escalating geopolitical rivalry amidst the global economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (Suoneto & Harsono, 2022). Indonesia also reaffirmed its respect for international law and the sanctity of national sovereignty. While recognizing the military operations against Ukraine as unacceptable, Indonesia refrained from naming Russia as the aggressor. Instead, Indonesia reiterated its cordial friendship with both Russia and Ukraine and called for an end to hostilities so that both parties could work for a diplomatic solution. Indonesia also declined to join a campaign of international economic sanctions against Russia and questioned the effectiveness of sanctions as an appropriate measure (TASS, 2022).

Regarding its G20 Presidency, Indonesia resisted demands to disinvite Russia from the G20 Summit despite threats of a boycott from Western members should President Vladimir Putin attend. To balance the ledger, Indonesia extended an invitation to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to attend the Summit in an attempt to foster peace between the two countries (Sebastian & Marzuki, 2023). To Ukraine, Indonesia also offered a donation of medical supplies (Jingga & Liman, 2022). Indonesia refused to be drawn into megaphone diplomacy but rather called for Russia and Ukraine to pursue peaceful dialogue (Sulaiman, 2022).

2.3. Discrepancy between Public Opinion and Indonesia's Foreign Policy

It can be clearly seen that public opinion in Indonesia did not entirely align with the Indonesian government's stances on the Russia-Ukraine war. Why is this the case? This discrepancy can be attributed to several factors.

Firstly, Russia is perceived as an anti-Western force, whereas Ukraine is seen as a Western puppet. This public attitude was previously observed in Indonesia during the US war on terrorism, which began an anti-American sentiment (Jones, 2003). The narrative of Western hypocrisy dominated discussions of the Russia-Ukraine war on many social media platforms in Indonesia (Kharisma, 2023)⁹. There was even a widely forwarded message on the WhatsApp platform in Indonesia depicting the war as a domestic quarrel between a long-suffering husband (Russia) and his ungrateful ex-wife (Ukraine) who tarnished her former husband's dignity by associating with a thug, the United States (Dharmaputra, 2023). In addition, two hashtags, #IStandWithPutin and #IStandWithRussia, also became Twitter trending topics in Indonesia (Miller, 2022).

Secondly, President Vladimir Putin's hypermasculine image appeals to many Indonesians who admire "strong" leaders. In contrast, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's past as a comedian has led to massive criticism of him for being a clown in Indonesian media. Various opinion surveys have consistently shown that Indonesians prefer leaders who are decisive, strong-willed, and assertive (Faisal, 2020; Setiawan, 2022). President Vladimir Putin was already popular in Indonesia before the Russia-Ukraine war. Therefore, many Indonesians have been inclined to accept his narrative and justified reasons for the war without much question (Dharmaputra, 2022).

Thirdly, the success of Russia's public diplomacy in Indonesia. Despite previous negative perceptions due to communism and being a security risk (Vice, 2017), Russia has utilized many platforms since 2013 to improve its public image, portraying it as non-communist and pro-Islam (Kharisma, 2023). This includes the government-funded Russia Beyond the Headlines (RBTH) Indonesia via its website and social media accounts. Similarly, it has funded a Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Jakarta. Scholarships for study in Russia and support for Russian Studies programs at universities in Bandung and Jakarta are also part of these efforts (Dharmaputra, 2022).

These efforts have influenced the expert discourse in Indonesia, leading to the societal discourse supporting Russia. Dharmaputra (2023) argued that due to their lack of knowledge and expertise about Eastern Europe, they tend to be sympathetic toward Russia, attributing the war to NATO and Western provocation. This assumption has ignored the nuances and complexities of the varied Eastern European perspectives. For example, a YouTube video by Connie Bakrie advocating a pro-Russian stance has garnered over 3 million views. Opinion pieces in Kompas and Media Indonesia also lean toward Russia, blaming US hegemony and NATO expansion. Academics, such as Evi Fitriani from the University of Indonesia and Muhadi Sugiono from Gadjah Mada University, echoed similar sentiments that the war is not about Ukraine but more about NATO fighting against Russia.

So, how exactly do political elites in Indonesia view public opinion? The discrepancy between public opinion and Indonesia's foreign policy on the Russia-Ukraine war can be attributed to the government's multifaceted approach to foreign policymaking. As per Sebastian and Marzuki (2023),

⁹ Many perspectives contrasted the West's support for Ukraine with the US's reluctance to support Palestine.

this approach considers not only public opinion but also (1) Indonesia's economic interests¹⁰, (2) its role as the G20 President in 2022¹¹, and (3) its strategic relations with Russia¹².

Toward Russia-Ukraine war, Indonesia adopts a "pragmatic equidistant" foreign policy towards both Russia and Ukraine (Laksmana, 2017; Dharmaputra, 2022; Sebastian & Marzuki, 2023). Guided by its national interests and other domestic factors, Indonesia maintains its prevalent interpretation of *bebas-aktif* foreign policy. Under President Joko Widodo, Indonesia consistently engages great powers through various forms of cooperation while preserving its strategic autonomy (Dharmaputra, 2023). In essence, this strategy aims to reap the benefits of strategic partnerships without being drawn into any sphere of influence.

3. Policy Choices for Indonesia's Foreign Policy

By adopting a "pragmatic equidistant" foreign policy on the Russia-Ukraine war, Indonesia not only ensured that its foreign policy remained independent and active but also confirmed that public opinion was a crucial component in its foreign policy on armed conflict. Looking at this finding, three mutually exclusive policy choices are proposed for the MoFA. These choices are not meant to address short-term issues but more for medium- and long-term strategies in formulating Indonesia's foreign policy. After this section, a single recommendation is provided to navigate Indonesia's stance in this protracted war.

3.1. Status Quo

This option implies that the MoFA can uphold the existing foreign policy formulation process without the necessity of research in Public Opinion. The formulation of foreign policy can persist through analytical contributions from relevant directorates, Indonesian diplomatic missions overseas, and credible experts on specific international issues. These inputs are supplemented by rigorous media surveillance and social media observation, encompassing trending topics on X (Twitter), Instagram, and viral news on other platforms. This option also posits that the public in Indonesia lacks knowledge of global affairs and, therefore, is unable to provide informed opinions on certain issues (Kertzer, 2021). This is supported by a recent survey, which revealed that a mere 15% of Indonesians believe in foreign or international media as an accurate and fair source of information (Lowy Institute, 2021).

However, this option may subject Indonesia's foreign policy to scrutiny as it could be perceived as centralized, not progressive, and not democratic. Without paying attention to public sentiment towards armed conflict, Indonesia may also find itself unprepared in the event of a communication crisis pertaining to its foreign policy in both mainstream and social media. Being status quo could also render the MOFA vulnerable to political provocation within the domestic public sphere.

3.2. Partnering with Public Opinion Research Institutions

This option endorses the significance of Public Opinion research in shaping Indonesia's foreign policy on armed conflict. By partnering with Public Opinion research institutions, the MoFA can gain access to a spectrum of non-traditional viewpoints that are often overlooked in public discourse and foreign policymaking. Innovative ideas and approaches can also be more easily obtained and rationalized. Furthermore, this option addresses the existing limited capacity of Indonesian diplomats to conduct rigorous and precise Public Opinion research. This policy choice also offers opportunities for more Indonesian diplomats to broaden their networks and engagement with academic circles.

¹⁰ Russia is the 7th largest destination for Indonesian exports to Europe, with palm oil generating a value of nearly US\$ 500 million per year. Russia has also invested over \$74.6 million in more than 800 Indonesian projects since 2014.

¹¹ Indonesia could not afford geopolitical issues to overshadow the agenda of the G20 Summit, let alone shift the forum's economic nature into geopolitics.

¹² The current Indonesia-Russia bilateral relations are driven by two main interests: Russia's desire to increase its involvement in the Southeast Asian arms market and Indonesia's aspiration to diversify its arms suppliers to increase its resilience to arms sanctions (Rangsimaporn, 2009).

However, aligning Public Opinion research with the MoFA's specific requirements, such as the quality of respondents and the accuracy of survey questions, may present challenges. A minimum number of institutions – for example, three partner institutions – must be required to validate the research findings and prevent unforeseen interference from any parties. This option may entail significant expenses, especially if the MoFA urgently requires more issue-specific Public Opinion research on a more frequent basis.

3.3. *Creating an In-House Mechanism within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

This option acknowledges the MoFA's dynamic need to customize the topics of public opinion research. It recognizes that Indonesia's position on a wide array of international issues needs continuous adaptation, taking into account the unique nature of each issue, national legislation, and real-time developments on the ground. This policy choice can be implemented under the guidance of the Foreign Policy Strategy Agency (Badan Strategi Kebijakan Luar Negeri – BSKLN), providing valuable references for numerous other directorates in shaping Indonesia's stance. The results of the Public Opinion research could be designated as confidential, ensuring access is limited solely to pertinent stakeholders. Importantly, the financial implications of this option are adaptable, allowing for modifications to the MoFA's annual budget.

However, Indonesian diplomats may not yet possess the skills to conduct swift and accurate research on public opinion, particularly in the context of foreign policy on armed conflict. Therefore, the bureaucracy associated with this option could be complex and time-consuming. The public may also perceive the outcomes of Public Opinion research as biased.

4. **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This research concludes that Indonesia, as a middle-power democracy, must regard public opinion as a crucial component in shaping its foreign policy on armed conflict, including the Russia-Ukraine war. Public opinion embodies the legitimacy of democratic values in Indonesia's foreign policy, thereby fortifying the application of its independent and active ("*bebas-aktif*") principle. Although, in this case, Indonesian public opinion is driven mainly by anti-Western and anti-imperialism sentiments, this opinion remains significant for the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to navigate foreign policy on the right track¹³.

In light of this conclusion, the paper recommends that the MoFA adopt "Option B: Partnering with Public Opinion Research Institutions". Looking at the benefits, challenges, and capacity of the Ministry, this is the most feasible course of action for medium- and long-term strategies. Following communications with several think tanks and survey institutes in Indonesia from August to October 2023, the author proposes that the MoFA start a collaborative pilot project on Public Opinion research with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Indonesia.

The research assesses that CSIS Indonesia has the most appropriate capacity and resources to conduct Public Opinion research related to regular foreign policymaking, including on armed conflict. This includes the expertise of its researchers, extensive networks, and comprehensive sample data from all over Indonesia. During the interview, CSIS Indonesia views Public Opinion research as an innovative approach to ensure the legitimacy of democracy within foreign policymaking in Indonesia¹⁴. This feature has been primarily used for domestic policy and electoral politics, but not for foreign policy, which is often seen as detached from the common people's concerns. Foreign

¹³ The interplay between public sentiment and the state of internet freedom in Indonesia is profound, with the latter often perceived as a somewhat constrained platform for disseminating information and discourse. A notable decline in Indonesia's democratic index is observed, from 59/100 in 2022 to a mere 47/100 this year, as reported by Freedom House (2023).

¹⁴ This is based on the interview with M. Waffaa Kharisma (CSIS Indonesia) on 10 October 2023.

policymaking in Indonesia is still regarded as an elitist process that is not grounded on the grassroots level.

Therefore, the MoFA should endorse Public Opinion research as a key of its foreign policymaking process, if it aims to change the perception that foreign policy is an elitist domain. This would enhance Indonesia's democratic progress and legitimacy. In this regard, CSIS Indonesia is ready to offer its solid support should the MoFA be interested in exploring the conduct of Public Opinion research in Indonesia on certain international issues.

Regarding the selection of respondents, the paper recommends starting with an expert survey as a pilot project. This would serve as a reference point to see the patterns and levels of understanding among the Indonesian public (Kharisma, 2023). The next step would be to employ an opt-in recruitment method. This method involves the random selection of participants with certain backgrounds of education, occupation, and social media activities for survey invitations. The objective is to utilize population targets instead of quotas to produce a nationally diverse sample of registered respondents (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). By doing so, the research can effectively reach a demographic that is adequately informed about prevailing international issues.

To ensure the credibility of the outcomes, the MoFA must incorporate two additional Public Opinion research institutions, besides CSIS Indonesia, in conducting research on foreign policy. The author suggests the inclusion of SMRC and Charta Politika, based on their proven expertise and the calibre of public opinion research they have done so far¹⁵. In 2022, SMRC undertook public opinion research on Indonesia's G20 Presidency, which also covered the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war. Meanwhile, Charta Politika has garnered widespread recognition for its commitment to independence and non-partisanship, as well as its innovative research methodology that incorporates telesurveys. Nonetheless, selecting these three research institutions must align with budgetary capacity and prevailing regulations to ensure the outcomes are objective and cater to the MoFA's specific needs.

Last but not least, while Public Opinion research on foreign policy is not conceived as a short-term strategy, it holds significant importance for the advancement of Indonesian diplomacy in navigating the myriad of armed conflicts worldwide. In the current multipolar global landscape, the potential for open conflict is an ever-present reality. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is a clear example of this, and the world is now witnessing Israel's military assault on Gaza, Palestine, which has resulted in substantial civilian casualties.

Therefore, the Government of Indonesia must be able to anticipate its stance on any potential armed conflict in the future. In this regard, the "pragmatic equidistant" foreign policy would be instrumental for Indonesia, which is significantly influenced by public opinion. The MoFA must remain vigilant and well-prepared to respond appropriately to any situation. By employing Public Opinion research as a proactive approach, Indonesia will be well-positioned to navigate the complexities of armed conflicts across the world.

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¹⁵ The author contacted SMRC and Charta Politika, but they declined to be interviewed due to time constraints as they were occupied conducting surveys for the 2024 general elections.

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