

Civil Society's Dual Role in Foreign Policy: A Comparative Analysis of Benefits and Risks

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of civil society as an instrument of foreign policy, exploring its potential benefits and risks. Traditionally, foreign policy analysis focused on decision-making processes and the primacy of the state. However, the end of the Cold War, the rise of post-positivist approaches, and the increasing interconnectedness of global issues have led to a broader consideration of policy instruments, including the involvement of non-state actors like civil society. The study employs a comparative approach to analyze the benefits of civil society in promoting democracy and addressing global challenges against the risks of biased utilization and dependency on state support. It examines case studies, including the role of USAID in Myanmar and the Israel-Palestine conflict, as well as the Indonesian context, where the government engages civil society in development and foreign policy. The findings highlight the need for a balanced approach that leverages civil society's strengths while mitigating its risks as an instrument of foreign policy.

Keywords: civil society, foreign policy, democracy, donor bias.

INTRODUCTION

Civil society's involvement has gained significant importance as a tool of foreign policy, particularly in light of notable paradigm shift within foreign policy analysis and the expansion of International Relations (IR) topics. Previously, scholars in foreign policy emphasized the significance of decision-making processes, a discourse largely dominated by Realism's assertion of state as the primary actor in IR and the consequent confinement of foreign policy analysis to national interests (Hudson 2005,

2). However, the conclusion of the Cold War, coupled with the emergence of post-positivist approaches in IR theory, and the increasing interconnectedness of global issues have led to a profound expansion in both the scope and nature of discussion within the realms of foreign policy and IR.

Contemporary scholars in the field of foreign policy, however, lean towards discourse that centres on the policies themselves rather than conventional decision-making processes (Carlsnaes 2013, 304). The shift towards a policy-

oriented approach allows for a broader examination of the instruments employed in foreign policy, transcending the narrow focus on national interests that underpinned traditional analyses. Furthermore, the once-central role of state in IR has faced challenges from various non-state actors, with civil society emerging as a prominent entity recognized for its significance in global governance (Chandler 2004, 57).

Civil society, comprising a diverse range of non-governmental organizations, grassroots movements, and citizen-led initiatives, has emerged as a pivotal player in the realm of foreign policy. It plays a significant role in holding global regulatory bodies accountable and influencing their decisions (Scholte 2011).

Academics have underscored the increasing impact of civil society actors in shaping the global agenda, contesting conventional state-centric methodologies, and endorsing alternative viewpoints on worldwide concerns (Kaldor 2003). By engaging in advocacy, public education, and direct action, civil society organizations have the capacity to raise awareness, mobilize public opinion, and exert pressure on policymakers, ultimately influencing the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. This increased involvement of civil society has been especially noticeable in tackling international issues including

environmental sustainability, human rights abuse, and global health emergencies, where civil society groups have frequently filled the gaps left by state-led initiatives (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Despite its significant role, civil society can be both beneficial and perilous instrument in this context. It is useful for promoting democracy in non-democratic countries and can effectively address or manage problems when the roles of country and market are deadlocked. However, these advantages are counterbalanced by several risks. Rather than fostering democracy by empowering civil society, donor countries often exhibit biases in their foreign policy agendas. Although civil society has the potential to oppose authoritarian regimes, it can also be perceived as undemocratic if its agenda conflicts with the interests of donor countries. Additionally, civil society organizations may be viewed pessimistically due to their strong dependence on the country, which jeopardizes the independent character crucial for addressing global issues.

This study seeks to compare two perspectives on civil society as a tool of foreign policy. It makes an inquiry into how the role of civil society as an instrument of foreign policy balances its potential benefits in promoting democracy with the risks posed

by biases in donor countries' agendas and dependency on state support.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Civil Society as Instrument of Foreign Policy

The instrument of foreign policy comprises a wide range of options chosen by various countries amidst different political conditions. Town planning, for instance, has been utilized as one of America's instruments to extend its influence in European countries that suffered physical destruction after the Second World War (Zevi 1946, 34). Subsequently, economic sanctions imposed on autocratic regimes have perhaps become the most favored instrument, despite their debatable effectiveness (Morgan and Schwebach 1995, 248). Additionally, in some cases, states also employ terror as a tool. There is little disagreement that certain countries play a significant role in the planning, financing, and execution of many acts of international terrorism (Wardlaw 1987, 237).

While the use of such instruments could be controversial due to the association of terrorism with violence, leveraging civil society as an instrument appears to be one avenue for addressing global issues. Optimism towards civil society is closely tied to promoting democracy and the notion that

democracies tend to act more peacefully than their autocratic counterparts. For example, the European Union has underscored democracy promotion in its foreign policy since the end of the Cold War (Olsen 2000, 144).

Civil society has become increasingly important in foreign policy for at least two reasons. First, it is driven by the growing consensus that morality regains its place in the study and practice of international relations (Chandler 2004, 1). Second, it is also propelled by the domestication of the international sector, transforming civil society into the 'global' civil society (Kaldor 2003, 78). This implies that domestic politics are just as important as international politics (Schultz 2013, 478). However, such an agreement cannot simply ignore dissenting views on civil society, which is diversely defined in political thought. Consequently, these discrepancies should be addressed before delving into discussions on its use as an instrument of foreign policy. Moreover, understanding the divergent viewpoints is crucial for comprehending the varied practices of civil society in politics.

Civil society can be described as the 'social relations and structures that lie between the state and the market' (Ehrenberg 1999, 235). Although this definition is acceptable in its simplest form, in

classical thought, civil society and state were less distinct. For instance, in Aristotle's works, both state and civil society are types of political associations that manage social conflict through the establishment of fair laws (Edwards 2004, 6). However, due to the avoidance of despotism practiced by the state, as well as the rise of individual rights and freedoms, eighteenth and nineteenth-century thinkers such as Alexis de Tocqueville differentiated civil society from the state (Edwards 2004, 7).

There is also a contradiction between Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci in defining civil society. Marx emphasizes the skeptical view that civil society is just another vehicle for furthering the interests of the dominant class under capitalism, while Gramsci views civil society as an instrument to challenge the cultural domination of the ruling class (Edwards 2004, 8). Although Gramsci criticized Marx's notion, it remains relevant if it is expanded to encompass the control of civil society by the state or as it is known by government-organized nongovernmental organizations or GONGOs (Walker 1987, 51). Moreover, twentieth-century thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Jurgen Habermas emphasize the public sphere and democracy in their views. According to Arendt, civil society could be healthier if steered by its members through shared meanings

constructed democratically in the public sphere (Edwards 2004, 9).

The purpose of presenting the various views above is neither to seek a strict definition nor to combine historical definitions of civil society into an ahistorical one. Rather, it aims to provide a normative background for assessing its benefits and perils as an instrument of foreign policy. The latest view toward the society that emphasizes democracy, and the public sphere has determined the benefits.

It is considered beneficial if the policy in practice aligns with democratic agendas such as democratization. Additionally, civil society's attention to diminishing global problems is strongly related to its position as a middle ground between the state and the market. If civil society tends to lean towards one of them, as Marx cautioned, it could become a perilous instrument in foreign policy. Moreover, civil society can, to some extent, undermine the public sphere and democracy itself. In such cases, the problem will not be solved by civil society.

Comparative Analysis in Foreign Policy Analysis

The study employs a comparative analysis approach to examine the role of civil society as an instrument of foreign policy. It compares the potential benefits of civil society in promoting democracy and

addressing global challenges with the risks posed by biases in donor countries' agendas and the dependency of civil society on state support.

In the field of foreign policy analysis, which tries to comprehend and explain the decision-making processes and behaviors of governments in the international arena, comparative analysis is recognized as one of the fundamental approaches (Lijphart 1971, 690–91). A more thorough grasp of foreign policy is made possible by the ability to recognize patterns, similarities, and differences across numerous examples through comparative analysis (Breuning 2007, 16–21).

The given discussion presents a comparative analysis of the benefits and perils associated with civil society's involvement in foreign policy. The discussion provides case studies including USAID's assistance to Myanmar's transition to democracy, the involvement of civil society in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the future directions for civil society engagement in Indonesia's development. These cases are interesting to compare as they represent diverse political contexts that highlight the varying roles and challenges faced by civil society in engaging with foreign policy. By examining these varied scenarios, the discussion is purposed to inquire a

comprehensive understanding of the nuances and complexities of civil society involvement in foreign policy, making it a relevant and thought-provoking exploration of this topic.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative research study that examines the role of civil society as an instrument of foreign policy. The qualitative aspects of this study are emphasized on the exploration of discussion regarding theoretical perspectives, academic debates, and related case studies.

The research methodology involves a review of relevant academic literature and case studies to illustrate the key arguments. The paper draws on scholarly works that discuss the evolving role of civil society in foreign policy, as well as examples such as USAID's support for civil society in Myanmar and the United States' engagement with Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations.

Given Indonesia's prominent role in global affairs and the active involvement of its civil society, the paper also utilizes the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs annual report as primary data. Additionally, it highlights the dynamics of civil society involvement in the 2023 Bali Civil Society Media Forum as an observational case study.

This Indonesian context provides a preliminary assessment of the extent to which civil society is involved in foreign policy, especially in emerging countries. This multifaceted approach allows the paper to critically analyze the nuanced dynamics and implications of leveraging civil society as a foreign policy tool.

By employing this multi-faceted qualitative approach, blending conceptual analysis with empirical case studies, the research aims to provide a robust and well-rounded examination of the benefits and perils associated with leveraging civil society in the foreign policy realm. This systematic methodology is expected to enable the study to contribute to meaningful insights into the better address of civil society in foreign policy agendas.

DISCUSSION

The critical role of civil society in promoting democracy is particularly salient in countries that have undergone significant political transitions or experienced ongoing conflicts. Myanmar, Israel, Palestine, and Indonesia represent diverse contexts where civil society has emerged as a key player in shaping democratic processes and addressing social and political challenges. Understanding the similarities and differences in civil society's contributions across these nations is essential for

developing effective strategies to support democratic development as well as to avoid potential drawbacks.

Civil society plays a crucial role in the promotion of democracy across diverse global contexts. In Myanmar for instance, the civil society sector, together with media, political parties, and private-sector leaders, has been instrumental in advocating for democratic reforms, despite the country's history of military rule (Callahan 2012, 123). Civil society in Myanmar, deeply rooted in cultural, social, and religious practices, has grown through political liberalization and democratic movements. The ideal roles include controlling state policies, exposing corruption, promoting political participation, fostering democratic values, and supporting community interests and education (Bawana 2021, 130–32).

Similarly, in Israel and Palestine, civil society organizations have been at the forefront of initiatives aimed at fostering peaceful coexistence and addressing issues of human rights and justice. The methods employed by grassroots movements are far from politically driven but have significant impacts. For example, establishing direct communication via telephone between Israeli and Palestinian citizens has proven effective in dismantling mistrust, fostering emotional connections, promoting

reconciliation, and enhancing understanding amid the conflict (Barnes 2006, 40).

Indonesia, on the other hand, has experienced a relatively more stable political transition, allowing civil society to play a more prominent role in shaping the country's democratic trajectory. In Indonesia, civil society, particularly NGOs and major religious groups, has largely acted as a catalyst for democratization by advocating for political reforms and moderating communal tensions. However, certain factions, including radical religious groups and opportunistic *preman* (thugs), have used newfound freedoms to promote sectarianism and exploit political processes, thereby hindering democratic progress (Mietzner and Aspinall 2010, 11–13).

This study will further compare three cases: the involvement of civil society in the democratization of Myanmar, the resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict, and the development of Indonesia, within the framework of foreign policy analysis. These cases will be examined to determine how donor countries influence the agenda of civil society, whether they stay true to their function of promoting democratization or become biased and detrimental, as seen in the Myanmar and Palestine-Israel cases; and also, to assess how civil society agendas are mainstreamed into foreign policy

agendas, as observed in the case of Indonesia.

Benefits: Promoting Democratization and Addressing Global Challenges

There are at least two benefits of civil society's involvement in foreign policy. First, through foreign aid from various countries, civil society in non-democratic states can directly promote democracy. Second, it plays a crucial role not only in democratization programs but also, given its capacity as a 'global' civil society, in addressing global challenges.

As the primary instrument in promoting democracy, civil society not only nurtures society in domestic politics but also contributes to the development of the global public space (Spini 2011, 15). While some scholars have previously questioned these abilities, some argue that consistent democracy assistance programs, such as those implemented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), have contributed to democratization in recipient countries (Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, and Seligson 2007, 436).

A pertinent example is the USAID assistance to Myanmar's transition to democracy. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, civil society in Myanmar had limited influence due to the failed 1988 pro-

democracy demonstrations (International Crisis Group 2001). However, from 2008 to 2012, civil society organizations in Myanmar received foreign aid from the United States through USAID, amounting to USD 196 million. This aid aimed to support humanitarian needs, promote democracy, and advance human rights through various projects aimed at empowering civil society. USAID claims that its assistance, including the J-School program training over 1,000 journalists, has laid a strong foundation for democracy (USAID 2012). In 2013, private daily newspapers returned to Myanmar after 50 years, breaking the state monopoly on the daily press. Four dailies were released on 1 April, with twelve more to follow in the coming months. The return of private daily newspapers is part of a series of reforms that have taken place since 2011, although journalists still face strict regulations under the 1962 Printing and Registration Act (The Guardian 2013).

Another reason for optimism towards civil society is its vital role in addressing global issues. Arguably, civil society can empower marginalized communities and advocate for their rights, especially when governments and markets fail to address their needs. Moreover, civil society promotes gender equality, defends the rights of Indigenous peoples and their cultures, and addresses issues such as transparency,

accountability, corruption, and violence (Sfeir-Younis 2004, 29–30). Furthermore, civil society plays a crucial role in conflict resolution, establishing both cultural and structural peacebuilding in conflict-prone regions (Ramsbotham, Miall, and Woodhouse 2011, 16).

An intriguing example of civil society's involvement in foreign policy is its role in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Despite the failure of high-level diplomatic efforts like the 1993 Oslo Accords, civil society remains optimistic about contributing to the peace process in this seemingly perennial conflict. Democratic countries have sought to foster local civil society in Israel and Palestine to facilitate peacebuilding and bottom-up peace processes.

For instance, since 2008, the United States has supported the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP). It is an umbrella organization that seeks new peace initiatives and alternatives outside Israel and the Palestinian territories (Schultz 2013, 174). Its network of more than 160 groups, representing Jews, Arabs, Israelis, and Palestinians, was founded in 2006 and is based in Washington, DC. Its goals include promoting mutual understanding in the Middle East and other peacebuilding initiatives (ALLMEP 2024).

With main sponsorship from the United States, ALLMEP has successfully educated policymakers about the significance of its projects, leading to increased U.S. funding for reconciliation programs and the establishment of a USD 9 million grant program dedicated to the Arab-Israeli conflict (Meyerstein 2008, 72). Although the reported funding amounts vary, ALLMEP claims to have received USD 10 million annually for its people-to-people programs. Despite discrepancies, ALLMEP has demonstrated success through programs like the Mercy Corps project, which utilizes Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to facilitate collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians. From 2014 to 2016, this program received approximately USD 1,194,172 in funding (ALLMEP 2024). The USD 250 million Middle East Partnership for Peace Act (MEPPA) for Fiscal Year 2021 was passed by the US House of Representatives to assist Palestinian economic development and Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding over five years. After more than ten years of activism, the ALLMEP has successfully gathered a large coalition of supporters to push for the passage of this legislation (ALLMEP 2020).

Through the promotion of grassroots endeavors and people-to-people exchanges, civil society groups can both enhance and impact diplomatic attempts at the highest

level. This bottom-up strategy represents an increasing understanding that in addition to government-led initiatives, active citizen and local community engagement is frequently necessary to find sustainable answers to global concerns. Policymaking can benefit from the varied viewpoints, creative ideas, and practical experience that civil society organizations can offer. The ALLMEP case serves as an example of how civil society may profoundly alter the course of a war and aid in the pursuit of enduring peace when it can successfully argue for its projects and win the backing of the public and commercial sectors. Involving civil society is an essential – yet frequently disregarded – part of successful foreign policy in tackling global issues.

Perils: Non-democratic and Dependent Civil Society

In the ideal scenario, positioned as an intermediary between governmental and market forces, civil society ought to function as an independent advocate for democracy and a solver of global issues. However, when civil society becomes a tool for specific foreign policy agendas, it risks becoming biased.

The Israel-Palestine conflict exemplifies this, revealing how foreign aid allocated to civil society can be manipulated to serve the interests of both donor nations

and non-democratic recipients within civil society. Moreover, if such aid remains unaltered, it can lead to a scenario where weak democratic civil societies become overly reliant on foreign assistance, rendering them ineffective in resisting authoritarian regimes.

A critical caveat in employing civil society as a foreign policy instrument is its potential for biased utilization. Bias emerges when civil society initiatives diverge from democratization objectives. The intended outcome of nurturing local civil societies in non-democratic nations is the gradual or substantial transition from autocracy to democracy. Western democratic entities even engage with autocratic regimes through welfare programs, aiming to foster liberalization alongside economic growth and the development of a middle class (Walker 1987, 49–63). Nevertheless, in Palestine, for instance, democracy assistance programs often falter due to the tendency of donor countries, such as the United States, to prioritize their political interests over aiding local civil society in opposing authoritarian rule.

This biased approach is evident in the United States' efforts to promote democracy through Palestinian civil society. Organizations like the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) endeavor to enhance civic understanding of

democratic principles, cultivate community leadership, and encourage local participation in decision-making processes. Between 1995 and 1998, NDI facilitated educational sessions for approximately 25,000 individuals, covering a broad spectrum of democratic topics, including elections, judicial systems, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public budgeting practices, political parties, local governance, and independent media. However, the program implemented by the Civic Forum, a Palestinian civil society entity supported by NDI, appears to exhibit cultural bias in participant selection, deliberately excluding individuals with traditional Islamic perspectives (Brouwer 2000, 35). This bias may stem from the negative portrayal of Islam in the foreign policy discourse of the United States, particularly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Roy 2011, 1).

For both the United States as the donor nation and the Civic Forum as the recipient, maintaining objectivity necessitates acknowledging the potential contributions of the Islamic sector within Middle Eastern civil society. In reality, the Islamic sector represents the largest segment, whereas pro-democracy civil society remains comparatively small (Hawthorne 2004, 6). While U.S. concerns are understandable, rather than shying away from supporting Islamic civil society, efforts should be made

to selectively engage with moderate Islamic groups that endorse democratic principles. However, the United States appears hesitant to pursue this alternative approach, resulting in inconsistency in its policies (Brouwer 2000, 40). On one hand, there is a desire to empower Palestinian civil society to resist authoritarianism, while on the other, apprehensions about its Islamic characteristics hinder further support.

Another risk arises when foreign aid is directed towards weak democratic civil societies, raising doubts about its efficacy in addressing critical issues. It is observed that foreign aid from the United States and other Western democracies often proves futile when civil society lacks sufficient strength. For example, in the Israel-Palestine conflict, foreign aid received by a weak civil society segment contributes little to the peace process and may even exacerbate the conflict (Carothers 2006, 63).

Israeli civil society could be classified into two factions: conservative nationalist social forces and liberal human rights organizations. While the latter promotes democracy in Israel, the former advocates for narrow nationalism. Conservative groups such as Im Tirtzu, My Israel, Regayim, Leava, Shurat HaDin, the Institute for Zionist Strategy, and the NGO Monitor vilify liberal human rights organizations as enemies and

unpatriotic entities. Despite this, Israeli human rights organizations like the New Israel Fund (NIF) play a crucial role in monitoring Israel's military activities. Nevertheless, the NGO Monitor seeks to impede financial support to the NIF from various international sources (Jamal 2018).

Optimistically, funding the NIF by strong democratic nations could potentially foster democracy in Israel and facilitate the peace process in the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, the NIF's limited capacity undermines its effectiveness against opposition from conservative civil society groups. Consequently, it is asserted that the absence of a robust, actively engaged civil society in Israel contributes to the failure to achieve peace with Palestinians and prevent regional conflict (Ben-Eliezer 2015, 183). This failure is exacerbated by dependency on foreign aid and could be rectified by garnering broader support and sympathy for Israeli civil society initiatives.

The involvement of civil society in foreign policy carries substantial risks. Civil society risks losing objectivity and becoming prejudiced when used to further specific foreign policy agendas, as seen in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Foreign aid to civil society can be manipulated to serve the interests of donor countries and non-democratic recipients, undermining weak democratic

civil societies by making them overly dependent on external assistance. A critical concern is the potential for biased utilization, where donor countries prioritize political goals over democratic progress. The perils of civil society's role in foreign policy highlight the need for a more nuanced, impartial approach that preserves civil society's independence and accountability.

Indonesian Context: Future Directions for Civil Society in Development and Strengthening Foreign Policy

This discussion examines the future trajectory of civil society engagement in Indonesia's development, particularly in the context of strengthening foreign policy, by considering both the benefits and drawbacks of such involvement. Overall, civil society plays a significant role in fostering a more participatory, inclusive, and needs-oriented development in Indonesia, as well as in enhancing the country's position in foreign politics. However, it is crucial to anticipate the potential risks associated with civil society engagement, such as biased positions, lack of accountability, heavy reliance on foreign funding, and policy coordination challenges arising from divergent interests between civil society and the government.

The involvement of civil society in Indonesian development has been incorporated into the National Medium-Term Development Planning (RPJMN) 2020 –

2024. There are two approaches to the active engagement of civil society in the document.

Firstly, in the context of the Mental Revolution and Cultural Development. In this regard, the government aims to enhance human development that demonstrates social cohesion and inclusion, as well as the capacity building of civil society (Pemerintah RI 2020, secs. V–3). The involvement of civil society in foreign policy, as encompassed within the context of human development in the RPJMN, is not explicitly stated. However, the empowerment of civil society can be encouraged, for instance, to advance human development in Indonesia. In a global context, Indonesia's Human Development Index (HDI) has shown improvement from 1990 to 2022, although it remains below the global HDI. When aligning the timeline with the RPJMN, there has not been a significant increase in Indonesia's HDI between 2020 and 2022. In other words, the engagement of civil society in this context still requires further encouragement (Figure 1).

The second context pertains to efforts aimed at reinforcing political stability, law, defense, security, and the transformation of public services. The enhancement of the quality and capacity of civil society organizations is recognized as a significant endeavor in the consolidation of democracy, which is aligned with the optimization of

foreign policy (Pemerintah RI 2020, sec. VIII.14).

In recent years, civil society has not been directly mentioned in the Annual Press Statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (PPTM). The last instance where this actor's role was highlighted was in 2019 when the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs acknowledged the contribution of civil society in strengthening the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF) (MOFA Indonesia 2019). Although civil society is rarely mentioned, the recognition of its role is maintained, as evidenced by the regular organization of the BDF.

BDF has been held since 2008 and involves not only government representatives (participants from Asia-Pacific countries and observers from both countries outside the region and international organizations) but also encompasses three pillars: (i) the civil society and media forum (engaging civil society, think tanks, academics, and media to directly discuss democratic issues affecting society); (ii) the youth pillar (involving students from various participating countries); and (iii) the inclusive economic pillar (providing a platform for economic actors, academics, and government representatives to find common ground and translate democracy into economic progress) (MOFA Indonesia 2020).

During the 2023 Bali Civil Society and Media Forum, the nexus between civil society and foreign policy was clearly articulated. Under the theme "Can Election Rejuvenate Democracy?" the participating civil society organizations brought issues related to democratic processes and election integrity into the foreign policy discourse, recognizing the broad regional and global impacts of these issues. The forum's discussions and recommendations, such as enhancing women's leadership, leveraging social media for public awareness, and implementing media literacy programs, are directly pertinent to foreign policy objectives concerning the promotion of democracy and good governance (MOFA Indonesia 2023).

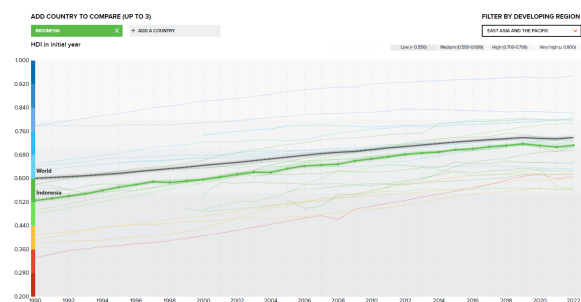


Figure 1. Human Development Index of Indonesia (UNDP, 2023)

CONCLUSION

The involvement of civil society in foreign policy carries substantial risks. Civil society risks losing objectivity and becoming prejudiced when used to further specific

policy agendas, as seen in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Foreign aid to civil society can be manipulated to serve the interests of donor countries and non-democratic recipients, undermining weak democratic civil societies by making them overly dependent on external assistance. A critical concern is the potential for biased utilization, where donor countries prioritize political goals over democratic progress. The perils of civil society's role in foreign policy highlight the need for a more nuanced, impartial approach that preserves civil society's independence and accountability.

In the Indonesian context, civil society plays a significant role in fostering more participatory, inclusive, and needs-oriented development, as well as in enhancing the country's position in foreign affairs. However, the potential risks associated with civil society engagement, such as biased positions, lack of accountability, heavy reliance on foreign funding, and policy coordination challenges, must be anticipated. The involvement of Indonesian civil society in development and foreign policy, as outlined in the RPJMN and the BDF, demonstrated both the benefits and the need for careful management of this complex relationship.

To fully harness the potential of civil society in Indonesia's foreign policy, a balanced approach is required. The government should establish clear

guidelines and mechanisms to ensure civil society's contribution aligns with national interests and strategic priorities, without compromising their independence and autonomy. Strengthening the accountability and transparency of civil society organizations, while fostering constructive collaboration between the government and civil society, can help navigate the risks and capitalize on the benefits of this relationship. By striking the right balance, Indonesia can leverage the expertise, advocacy, and outreach of civil society to enhance its foreign policy objectives and international standing, while safeguarding the integrity and effectiveness of its civil society sector.

Finally, to ensure that the involvement of civil society in foreign policy agendas remains rooted in its role as a balance between the state, society, and the private sector, it is necessary to cross-check civil society aspirations with foreign policy. These are not always aligned, as civil society primarily aims to serve societal interests. However, foreign policy can also address societal needs through "down-to-earth" diplomacy (MOFA Indonesia 2021). In this context, periodic assessments, such as comprehensive surveys measuring public perceptions of foreign policy, can help synthesize governmental agendas with public expectations.

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