

Research Article

Between Ambition and Reality: Indonesia's One Channel System as an Instrument of National Interest in Malaysia

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Abstract

This article examines Indonesia's One Channel System (OCS) as a strategic labor migration policy. Grounded in a qualitative content analysis of policy documents and bilateral agreements, the study moves beyond a descriptive account to offer a critical evaluation of the OCS. It utilizes Michael G. Roskin's theory of National Interest as a foundational framework for understanding the state's motivations. Still, it enriches this with complementary lenses from the International Relations literature, including migration governance, labor diplomacy, and human security. The findings affirm that the OCS serves as a key instrument of Indonesian statecraft, advancing national security, securing economic interests through remittance formalization, and enhancing international prestige. However, the analysis reveals that significant challenges severely constrain the policy's effectiveness. These include a persistent lack of bilateral cooperation from Malaysia, critical on-the-ground implementation gaps, and the unintended risk of state overreach. A fundamental disconnect between the policy's top-down objectives and the lived realities and agency of migrant workers. The study concludes that while the OCS is a vital assertion of regulatory sovereignty, its success is contingent on bridging the gap between state-centric interests and worker-centric protection. It suggests that future policy must prioritize legally binding bilateral enforcement and address deep-rooted implementation failures.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Governance, Indonesia-Malaysia Relations, Labor Migration, National Interest, One Channel System

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has long been recognized as one of Southeast Asia's major labor-sending countries, with Malaysia remaining a primary destination for its workforce, particularly in the domestic and low-skilled sectors. This transnational labor migration plays a vital role in supporting the Indonesian economy, primarily through a consistent flow of remittances that provide a financial lifeline for many families. However, this economic benefit is overshadowed by the persistent structural vulnerabilities and precarious conditions faced by a significant portion of Indonesian migrant workers. Many continue to operate in undocumented situations, leaving them susceptible to exploitation, poor working environments, and severely limited access to legal protection, a reality that underscores the enduring fragility of Indonesia's labor migration governance (Dwi et al., 2024).

The scale of this problem is stark. A 2023 report from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) highlighted that over 30% of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia remain undocumented (IOM, 2023a). These individuals are frequently subjected to severe rights violations, including wage theft, harassment, physical abuse, and, in extreme cases, human trafficking. These conditions are exacerbated by the absence of a unified and enforceable recruitment framework between the two nations, allowing unregulated labor brokers to thrive within a fragmented system that undermines both state authority and migrant safety. The risks are further compounded by gender-based vulnerabilities; female migrant workers, who dominate the domestic sector, face heightened exposure to abuse due to systemic gaps in legal protection and the informal nature of their employment. These intersecting challenges signify more than a mere policy failure; they point to a deeper institutional incapacity to govern labor mobility within a rights-based framework.

In response to these chronic issues, the Indonesian government introduced the One Channel System (OCS), signed in April 2022, an integrated digital platform designed to serve as the sole legal mechanism for the recruitment and placement of its migrant workers in Malaysia. The policy's main objectives are to enforce transparency, centralize oversight, and enhance protection mechanisms, thereby reducing the prevalence of illegal recruitment practices. Despite this strategic design, the OCS has encountered a critical implementation obstacle. While Indonesia mandates OCS as the only legitimate pathway, Malaysia continues to operate its own "System Maid Online" (SMO), which permits employers to hire directly. This policy divergence creates a dual-track system that not only undermines the 2022 bilateral Memorandum of Understanding but also perpetuates the high risks the OCS was designed to mitigate. This challenge is magnified by low legal literacy among prospective migrants in Indonesia, many of whom remain uninformed about legal procedures and continue to rely on informal, often exploitative, recruitment channels (BP2MI, 2022).

This study is significant as it moves beyond a standard policy evaluation to analyze the OCS as a crucial instrument of Indonesian statecraft. The central tension between Indonesia's OCS and Malaysia's SMO provides a compelling case study for examining the complexities of bilateral labor diplomacy, regulatory sovereignty, and the pursuit of national interests in an asymmetrical relationship. The scope of this review covers the policy's design, its alignment with Indonesia's strategic objectives, and the persistent gaps between its intent and its on-the-ground implementation. By situating the OCS within broader geopolitical dynamics and comparing it with regional best practices, such as the more established Philippine model, this article offers a critical analysis of Indonesia's capacity to protect its citizens abroad and project its influence in the competitive landscape of global labor governance (Leonardo, 2024).

Indonesia's diplomatic leverage has also been tested. The ambiguous response from Malaysia, formally endorsing the OCS while simultaneously maintaining the SMO, reflects deeper geopolitical and economic calculations. The continuation

ofererodeck systems erodes the integrity of the bilateral agreement. It contravenes international legal principles such as *Pacta Sunt Servanda*, which mandates adherence to treaty obligations under the 1969 Vienna Convention (Saepudin et al., 2024). Indonesia's imposition of a temporary moratorium on worker deployment is emblematic of a more assertive diplomatic stance aimed at pressuring Malaysia into compliance (Novia & Djelantik, 2024).

Previous scholarship on Indonesia-Malaysia labor migration is broadly divided across three primary debates that underscore the chronic fragility of governance. First, the structural vulnerability debate highlights the persistence of undocumented migration, which leaves a significant portion of Indonesian migrant workers (over 30% according to IOM reports) susceptible to exploitation, wage theft, and abuse (IOM, 2023b). This is often attributed to the enduring influence of unregulated labor brokers operating within a fragmented recruitment system. Second, the governance friction debate centers on the chronic failure of bilateral cooperation. Despite repeated attempts at MoUs, the policy divergence epitomized by Malaysia's continued maintenance of the System Maid Online (SMO) in direct contravention of the OCS creates an exploitable dual-track system. Scholars argue that this contravenes international legal principles such as *Pacta Sunt Servanda* (Saepudin et al., 2024). Third, the comparative policy debate often frames Indonesia's governance capacity against regional best practices, particularly the Philippines' model, which is recognized for its more established digital integration and robust protection mechanisms (Leonardo, 2024). This comparison inherently questions Indonesia's capacity for "regulatory statecraft" (Setyawati, 2013). Building on these insights, this study moves beyond a descriptive account of policy failure to critically analyze the OCS as a strategic instrument of national interest, examining how persistent structural vulnerabilities and bilateral frictions actively undermine Indonesia's pursuit of security, economic formalization, and, critically, its international prestige.

This study, therefore, situates the One Channel System (OCS) within a broader analytical framework. While it is grounded in Michael G. Roskin's theory of National Interest, which explains the strategic drive for national security, economic welfare, and international prestige, this paper argues that a richer understanding emerges when Roskin's framework is engaged with more specific concepts from contemporary IR literature. To achieve this, the analysis integrates three complementary lenses. First, the concept of migration governance is employed to dissect the institutional challenges and bilateral frictions in the policy's implementation (Betts & Kainz, 2017). Second, OCS is analyzed as an instrument of labor diplomacy, through which Indonesia actively leverages migration policy to achieve foreign policy goals (Wickramasekara & Baruah, 2014). Finally, the pursuit of international prestige is examined through the concept of soft power, framing the OCS as Indonesia's effort to enhance its global standing through value-based policies (Nye, 2004). By synthesizing these perspectives, this study offers a multi-layered analysis of how a labor migration policy serves as a critical tool of statecraft in the complex arena of regional cooperation and international relations.

This paper argues that Roskin's framework, while foundational, is enriched when analyzed alongside more specific international relations concepts such as labor diplomacy, the mechanics of migration governance, and the pursuit of soft power. By integrating these perspectives, the OCS can be understood not just as a matter of national interest, but as a complex case of modern statecraft in which domestic and foreign policy are deeply intertwined.

In the evolving landscape of transnational labor governance, the relationship between sending and receiving countries is no longer confined to bilateral agreements. However, it increasingly intersects with the strategic calculus of national interest. In the case of Indonesia, the One Channel System (OCS) emerges not simply as a labor-management tool, but as a foreign policy instrument aimed at recalibrating the country's role in the regional labor economy. Michael G. Roskin's theory of national interest provides a useful analytical framework in this regard, emphasizing that a state's pursuit of national security, economic advantage, and international prestige should be dynamically responsive to the challenges and opportunities of a globalized system (Roskin, 1994).

The OCS policy represents a shift from reactive regulation to proactive diplomacy, where labor placement becomes an extension of Indonesia's statecraft. It reflects a growing recognition within Indonesia's policy circles that the vulnerability of its overseas citizens, particularly undocumented and informal migrant workers, constitutes not only a social and human rights issue, but also a threat to national credibility and sovereignty. As articulated in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, a state's failure to uphold international commitments, or to ensure their reciprocity, can erode diplomatic leverage (Saepudin et al., 2024).

This growing emphasis on diplomatic reciprocity and legal enforcement is reflected in Indonesia's temporary moratorium on labor deployment to Malaysia, intended as a signal of Indonesia's commitment to *pacta sunt servanda* in labor diplomacy (Novia & Djelantik, 2024). Such assertiveness demonstrates how the OCS has evolved from a domestic administrative solution into a geopolitical mechanism aimed at strengthening regulatory sovereignty. It marks Indonesia's gradual transition toward what Setyawati (2013) describes as "regulatory statecraft"—the capacity of states to use legal and institutional tools to shape cross-border labor mobility in line with national interests.

Moreover, the gendered nature of migration underscores the urgency of embedding human rights safeguards into national interest frameworks. As Parreñas et al. (2019) emphasize, policies that fail to recognize the disproportionate risks faced by female domestic workers often reproduce cycles of exploitation and impunity. In this sense, the prestige component of Roskin's theory finds concrete expression in how Indonesia presents itself on the international stage as a country committed to ethical recruitment, gender justice, and rights-based migration.

By incorporating lessons from regional best practices, enforcing bilateral obligations, and aligning digital systems with diplomatic strategies, the OCS offers Indonesia a pathway not only to protect its citizens abroad but to redefine its role in global labor governance. This article thus examines OCS not merely as a policy

output, but as a strategic articulation of Indonesia's national interest, with significant implications for labor diplomacy, state capacity, and international cooperation.

The selection of Michael G. Roskin's National Interest framework as the foundational theory for this study is a deliberate choice. The OCS policy, at its core, is an expression of statecraft and assertion of Indonesia's sovereignty to regulate and protect its citizens abroad, which directly aligns with the state-centric logic of realist theory. Roskin's framework provides the most direct lens for understanding the Indonesian state's primary motivations: safeguarding national security by controlling irregular migration, securing economic interests through remittances, and enhancing international prestige.

However, this study acknowledges the limitations of a purely realist framework in migration studies. Critics argue that such state-centric approaches can overlook the human dimension, reducing migrants to mere objects of state policy rather than subjects with rights and agency (Haddad, 2003). A sole focus on national interest risks obscuring the critical vulnerabilities faced by individual migrant workers.

By weaving these concepts together, this paper moves beyond a one-dimensional analysis to offer a multi-layered understanding of Indonesia's labor migration strategy. This article focuses on a comprehensive analysis of Indonesia's OCS policy in the context of Indonesia–Malaysia labor migration. It critically examines the policy's alignment with Roskin's tripartite framework of national interest. It situates it within regional best practices, particularly by comparing Indonesia's approach with the more advanced migration governance model of the Philippines. Drawing on empirical data, bilateral agreements, and principles of international law, the review further explores how the effectiveness of OCS depends on cross-border legal harmonization, institutional reform, and digital innovation.

The article also incorporates policy recommendations grounded in comparative international practice. These include strengthening institutional capacity through integrated digital systems, enforcing legally binding bilateral mechanisms, expanding pre-departure legal education, and leveraging diaspora-based protection networks. By synthesizing theoretical insight and field-based evidence, this review positions the OCS not only as a labor policy but as a strategic policy instrument to project and protect Indonesia's national interests in an increasingly competitive and asymmetrical global labor market.

The study of labor migration policy by sending states, such as Indonesia, is traditionally analyzed through the National Interest framework (Roskin, 1994), which focuses on state security, economic welfare (remittances), and international prestige. However, this state-centric approach often fails to capture the complexity of on-the-ground implementation. The literature on Migration Governance has identified persistent bilateral friction between Indonesia's OCS and Malaysia's System Maid Online (SMO). At the same time, research on Human Security calls for a shift in analytical focus toward individual protection. The novelty of this research lies in the synthesis of theoretical frameworks and the depth of its implementation

analysis. Theoretically, this study moves beyond Roskin's narrow focus by integrating the complementary lenses of Human Security and Soft Power to critically examine the tension between state ambition and worker protection. Empirically, by analyzing the OCS as a strategic instrument of statecraft, the research provides a critical contribution by identifying three structural obstacles: the duality of Malaysian policy, the risk of state overreach, and the failure to accommodate worker agency that collectively undermine the credibility of Indonesia's foreign policy and impede the achievement of its ambitious National Interests.

To address the analytical gap regarding the OCS's strategic function, this study sets out three primary objectives. First, it aims to systematically analyze how the design of the One Channel System (OCS) aligns with Indonesia's core National Interest dimensions: national security, economic welfare, and international prestige, as conceptualized by Roskin (1994). Second, the study critically evaluates the policy's real-world effectiveness by dissecting the challenges arising from persistent implementation failures, the external bilateral friction posed by Malaysia's System Maid Online (SMO), and the internal risks of state overreach. Finally, the research seeks to utilize a multi-layered theoretical framework integrating Roskin's concepts with complementary lenses such as Human Security and Soft Power (Nye, 2004) to provide a nuanced understanding of how labor migration policy functions as a critical tool of modern Indonesian statecraft amid asymmetrical bilateral relations, ultimately assessing the policy's capacity to achieve its ambitious goals.

By synthesizing these perspectives, this study offers a multi-layered analysis of how a labor migration policy serves as a critical tool of statecraft in the complex arena of regional cooperation and international relations. This paper argues that Roskin's framework, while foundational, is enriched when analyzed alongside more specific international relations concepts, such as labor diplomacy, the mechanics of migration governance, and the pursuit of soft power. By integrating these perspectives, the OCS can be understood not just as a matter of national interest, but as a complex case of modern statecraft in which domestic and foreign policy are deeply intertwined.

This study therefore seeks to: (1) analyze the OCS through the lens of Roskin's national interest framework; (2) critically evaluate the policy's effectiveness by integrating concepts of migration governance, labor diplomacy, and soft power; and (3) identify the key bilateral and domestic impediments to its successful implementation.

METHOD

This study employs qualitative research design utilizing qualitative content analysis as its primary analytical technique. This approach was chosen for its suitability in conducting an in-depth examination of policy documents and textual data to understand the underlying meanings, motivations, and strategic contexts of Indonesia's One Channel System (OCS) policy (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The objective is to move beyond a surface-level description of the policy and to explore

the complex interplay of national interests, bilateral dynamics, and institutional challenges embedded within various texts.

The data collection process was guided by specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and credibility of the sourced documents. The inclusion criteria were: (1) documents published between 2017 and 2024 to cover the period surrounding the enactment of Indonesia's Law No. 18/2017 on Migrant Worker Protection and the latest MoU with Malaysia; (2) official publications from government bodies (BP2MI, IOM, Indonesian and Malaysian ministries), bilateral agreements, and academic journal articles; and (3) reputable news reports that provide factual accounts or direct quotes from policymakers. Documents were excluded if they were purely opinion-based without evidentiary support, published outside the specified timeframe, or unrelated to the Indonesia-Malaysia labor migration corridor.

Table 1. Types of documents and primary sources used in the OCS policy analysis

No.	Document Type	Primary Source	Key Relevance to the OCS Study
1.	Bilateral Agreement (MoU)	Government of Indonesia & Malaysia (BP2MI) (2022)	The legal basis for implementing the OCS as the single placement and protection mechanism. The study analyzes Malaysia's non-compliance by maintaining the SMO.
2.	International Organization Report	International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2023)	Provides empirical data on the scale of the problem, such as the persistent high percentage (over 30%) of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia.
3.	Indonesian Government Publication	Badan Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia (BP2MI) (2022-2024)	Offers the official state perspective on the OCS's objectives and acknowledges challenges like low legal literacy among prospective migrants
4.	Indonesian National Law	Law No. 18/2017 on Migrant Worker Protection (2017)	Establishes Indonesia's domestic legal framework for migrant worker protection, providing the strategic foundation for the OCS initiative
5.	Critical Academic Literature	(Saepudin et al., 2024)	Provides a critical analysis of bilateral friction and the violation of the <i>Pacta Sunt Servanda</i> principle by Malaysia due to the SMO.
6	Regional Comparative Studies	Setyawati (2013) , Leonardo (2024)	Used to contrast international OCS against the more advanced migration governance model of the Philippines, supporting the argument on international prestige and soft power

The data analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage process. First, all selected documents were compiled and organized to create a comprehensive database. The

core of the analysis involved a hybrid coding procedure that combined both deductive and inductive approaches (Fereday et al., 2006). Initially, deductive codes were developed based on the theoretical framework of this study, with primary codes including "National Security," "Economic Interest," and "International prestige" derived from Roskin's theory. This allowed for a structured analysis guided by the research questions. Subsequently, an inductive coding process was conducted, in which the researcher read through the data line by line to identify emergent themes not captured by the initial framework. New codes such as "Bilateral Policy Friction," "Recruitment Broker Influence," and "Migrant Legal Literacy" emerged directly from the data.

For instance, the code "economic interest" specifically captured text segments related to remittance flow formalization, contributions to GDP, financial inclusion efforts, and the macroeconomic risk reduction associated with undocumented funds. "National Security" was operationalized to capture discussions on human trafficking, illegal migration control, sovereign control over borders, and the protection of citizens abroad (Tarom, 2025).

The emergent inductive codes served a critical function: they identified the primary impediments to achieving the deductive codes. For example, "Bilateral Policy Friction" (the OCS vs. SMO duality) was recognized as a direct constraint on both "National Security" and "International prestige" (Saepudin et al., 2024). Similarly, themes related to "Worker Agency" and "Informal Networks" emerged, challenging the state-centric economic rationale by revealing migrants' preference for faster, informal remittance channels (Carling & Collins, 2018).

To ensure the analytical rigor and validity of the findings, several measures were implemented. Content validity was enhanced by sourcing information from a diverse range of document types, enabling cross-verification of claims. Furthermore, data triangulation was systematically applied by comparing information across these different sources, for example, contrasting official government statements in MoUs with on-the-ground realities described in news articles and IOM reports (Patton, 2015). This process helped to identify convergences and divergences, providing a more robust and nuanced understanding of the OCS implementation. The coding framework was also iteratively refined by the researcher to ensure consistency and coherence throughout the analysis.

This triangulating procedure was crucial to ensure analytical rigor. For example, the official government claim of policy coherence articulated in the 2022 MoU was systematically contrasted with news reports documenting Malaysia's simultaneous use of the SMO and IOM reports highlighting the persistent high rate of undocumented workers. This contrast enabled the study to distinguish between the policy's stated intent (design) and its actual outcome (the implementation gap).

While this study employed a qualitative content analysis of textual data, rendering formal ethical review not directly applicable, the research rigour requires acknowledging an intrinsic methodological limitation: the reliance solely on secondary data prevents the direct capture of the granular, lived experiences of Indonesian migrant workers directly by the OCS policy. This absence of primary,

first-hand perspectives which would typically require ethnographic or phenomenological methods means the analysis is primarily state-centric, focusing on policy design, inter-state friction, and national interests. To address this inherent gap and move beyond a one-dimensional analysis, future empirical research is crucial. This should prioritize qualitative and ethnographic methods to explore how migrants navigate, resist, or adapt to the OCS, complemented by large-scale migrant-focused surveys and longitudinal studies that track welfare impacts over time (Luo, 2019).

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This research aims to examine the OCS policy from the perspective of Indonesia's national interest, focusing on three main dimensions: national security, the economy, and international prestige. Based on the National Interest theory developed by Michael G. Roskin (1994), this research will analyze how Indonesia's migration policy reflects the country's national interests, including the protection of migrant workers, remittance management, and Indonesia's international diplomacy. Roskin emphasizes that national interests are dynamic and can change in response to the country's global situation. With this approach, it is expected that Indonesia's migration policy will be revealed as not focusing solely on worker protection but also serving as a strategic step to support the country's social and economic stability.

The National Interest Theory developed by Roskin (1994), holds that foreign policy and migration are influenced not only by domestic factors, but also by the international situation. In this context, Indonesia's OCS policy can be seen as an effort to regulate labor migration more efficiently and legally, thereby strengthening Indonesia's diplomatic relations with migrant-receiving countries and supporting the country's economic and social goals.

Within the Roskinian framework, National Security extends beyond mere military defense to include the protection of citizens abroad and the maintenance of domestic social stability (Roskin, 1994). In the context of the OCS, this dimension is operationalized by focusing on the state's proactive efforts to mitigate non-military transnational threats. This includes controlling irregular migration and securing borders against the destabilizing effects of illegal flows; combating human trafficking and labor exploitation; and ultimately ensuring the human security and welfare of Indonesian nationals in the receiving country (Tamba, 2019; Tarom, 2025). The OCS serves as an instrument of preventive security, in which structured labor governance extends of the state's primary duty to protect its citizens and sovereignty.

Economic Interests are fundamentally defined by the state's efforts to maximize economic advantage and support the welfare of its population. For Indonesia, this dimension centers critically on remittances, which serve as a vital financial lifeline and a major contributor to GDP (World Bank, 2017). OCS serves this interest by strategically formalizing the flow of these funds. Key indicators for this dimension include enhancing financial inclusion and channeling remittances through formal banking systems to reduce macroeconomic risk, reducing reliance on

the informal sector, and contributing to long-term domestic investment and poverty reduction. The OCS's goal is thus to institutionalize the economic benefits of migration while mitigating the volatility associated with informal transfers.

International prestige relates to a state's effort to strengthen its diplomatic position, global reputation, and influence (Roskin, 1994). In the OCS context, this dimension is realized by projecting an image as a responsible, norm-abiding state committed to human rights and ethical recruitment. The policy serves as an instrument to: enhance diplomatic credibility by aligning with global standards (e.g., the Global Compact for Migration and ILO Conventions), strengthening diplomatic leverage in bilateral negotiations with receiving countries, and demonstrating a commitment to gender-sensitive protection. Achieving international prestige through the OCS is therefore contingent on translating aspirational policy design into credible outcomes on the ground, thereby leveraging labor policy as a form of Soft Power (Nye, 2004).

The OCS is strategically designed to build Indonesia's International prestige and project Soft Power by framing itself as a responsible, rule-abiding state committed to ethical recruitment and human rights standards, often drawing favorable comparisons to models like the Philippines. However, this pursuit of prestige is fundamentally undermined by two interconnected constraints that highlight the limitations of Indonesia's approach.

First, persistent bilateral friction is a fatal flaw. Malaysia's sustained operation of the parallel System Maid Online (SMO) directly contravenes the 2022 Memorandum of Understanding and represents a critical failure in mutual policy enforcement. This dual-track system exposes Indonesian workers to the high risks the OCS was created to mitigate, thus actively damaging the diplomatic credibility the policy seeks to build. This failure to secure full bilateral compliance erodes the integrity of the agreement and contravenes international legal principles such as *Pacta Sunt Servanda*.

Second, the domestic implementation gap exposes the disconnect between state ambition and capacity. International prestige is earned through credible outcomes, not merely aspirational policies. Reports of weak enforcement, poor inter-agency coordination, and the continued operation of illegal brokers expose a critical failure by "street-level bureaucrats" to translate the OCS protocol into practice. This persistent failure to protect workers on the ground undermines Indonesia's claims of value-based foreign policy, rendering the pursuit of prestige through OCS a potentially self-defeating endeavor.

While OCS is an essential assertion of sovereign control aimed at protecting citizens and securing the state, the analysis through the Human Security lens reveals a fundamental tension: the risk of state overreach. A centralized system, prioritizing data collection and regulatory control, can inadvertently function as a tool of governmentality, extending state surveillance and disciplinary power over its migrant population. This top-down control, while intended for security, risks stifling worker agency and limiting individual autonomy. Therefore, the policy's effectiveness in advancing national security is constrained by the unintended

consequence of trading protection for greater control, creating a fundamental tension between state protection and personal freedom. The bilateral implementation gap further cripples this, as Malaysia's System Maid Online (SMO) invalidates the very concept of a single, secure channel.

The OCS's economic objective to formalize remittances through the banking system to enhance economic stability and financial inclusion is a clear strategic goal for the Indonesian state. However, this top-down economic rationale often clashes with migrant workers lived realities and agency. Migrants frequently perceive formal banking channels as inaccessible, costly, and complex, especially for their families in rural areas. Consequently, they exercise their agency by relying on informal remittance networks built on social capital and trust, which they perceive as faster and more reliable (Carling & Collins, 2018). This fundamental disconnect demonstrates the policy's limitation: its failure to account for worker-centric perspectives risks its effectiveness in capturing a large portion of remittance flows, thus not fully achieving its economic goals.

This research is expected to provide new insights into the relationship between Indonesia's migration policy and the country's national interests, as well as provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced in implementing the OCS policy. In this research, the OCS policy is examined as a strategic tool that reflects Indonesia's national interest through three lenses. First, in terms of national security, OCS helps reduce illegal migration and the risks of exploitation and human trafficking, thereby safeguarding Indonesian citizens abroad and reinforcing domestic social stability. Second, the policy supports economic interests by enabling a regulated flow of remittances through formal financial systems, thereby contributing significantly to household incomes and national economic growth. Third, in terms of international prestige, OCS demonstrates Indonesia's commitment to upholding human rights and labor protection standards, thereby enhancing the country's diplomatic image and credibility on the global stage. Thus, the application of Roskin's theory provides a comprehensive analytical lens for understanding how labor migration policy serves the broader strategic objectives of the state.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the analysis of the One Channel System (OCS) organized around the three pillars of Indonesia's National Interest, as defined by Michael G. Roskin (1994). The structure is designed to be dual layered: (1) identifying the strategic motivations of the state for each interest dimension, and (2) providing a critical evaluation of the policy's effectiveness using complementary theoretical lenses. Each dimension begins by articulating the Roskinian objective (e.g., OCS as a tool for economic formalization or security enhancement). This descriptive alignment is immediately followed by a critical assessment that interrogates the policy's real-world limitations. For instance, the analysis of National Security critically examines the tension between state protection and the risk of state overreach and bilateral failure (SMO), which invalidates the single-channel concept.

Similarly, the discussion on economic interests moves beyond the goal of remittance formalization to criticize the policy's failure to account for migrant agencies, showing how informal networks undermine state economic objectives. Finally, the analysis of international prestige focuses on the gap between policy ambition and credible outcomes, highlighting how implementation failures by "street-level bureaucrats" negate Indonesia's soft power aspirations. This integrated approach ensures the discussion moves beyond simple policy evaluation, thereby fulfilling the study's objective of analyzing OCS as a complex and often constrained instrument of modern statecraft.

Table 2. National Security in the Perspective of National Interest

National Interest Dimension (Roskin)	OCS Strategic Objective (Ambition)	Implementation Challenge / Limitation (Reality)	Complementary IR Lens Applied
National Security	To mitigate transnational threats (human trafficking) and secure social stability by formalizing all recruitment through a single, secure channel.	Bilateral Policy Friction: Malaysia's continued use of the parallel <i>System Maid Online</i> (SMO) invalidates the concept of a single channel and perpetuates risks. Risk of State Overreach: Centralized control may stifle worker agencies and extend state surveillance (governmentality).	Human Security, Migration Governance
Economic Interests	To maximize economic gain by formalizing the flow of remittances through official banking channels to enhance financial inclusion and national growth	Conflict with Worker Agency: Formal channels are often perceived by migrants as too complex, inaccessible, and costly. Migrants rely on informal networks, risking the policy's effectiveness in capturing full remittance flows.	Worker Agency, Labor Diplomacy
International prestige	To project an image as a responsible, norm-abiding state committed to ethical recruitment and human rights standards, enhancing diplomatic credibility	Implementation Gap / Credibility Loss: Persistent weak enforcement, inter-agency incoordination, and the visibility of illegal brokers damage the policy's credibility, making the pursuit of prestige self-defeating	Soft Power, Policy Diffusion

Source: Saepudin, 2010; Saepudin et al., 2024; Rynanthie, 2025

In the context of the National Interest theory developed by Michael G. Roskin (1994), national security is one of the fundamental elements that must maintain every state to ensure its survival against both external and internal threats. Roskin emphasizes that the state must be able to respond to threats to sovereignty, social

stability, and the citizens' safety, by maintaining a balance between domestic interests and international obligations.

Threats to national security in the global era often come not only from military threats, but also from factors such as illegal migration that can increase social and economic tensions. This is in line with the explanation of threats originating from non-state actors that threaten individuals and states (Amaritasari, 2017).

National security is not limited only to external physical threats, such as invasion or military conflict, but also includes social security, which is an effort to protect the welfare of its citizens, especially those abroad (Tarom, 2025). In this case, the One Channel System (OCS) policy implemented by Indonesia in Malaysia aims to protect Indonesian migrant workers, who make up a significant portion of the workforce in the domestic and informal sectors in Malaysia, from potential exploitation and abuse. Migrant workers who do not work through official channels or do not have valid documents are often victims of human trafficking, physical abuse, and fraud.

Through the OCS, Indonesia seeks to organize the process of placing Indonesian migrant workers through legal and regular channels. This helps reduce the potential for migrant workers to be caught up in human trafficking networks and labor exploitation, which can worsen Indonesia's social stability and national security. This social security has become even more critical for migrant workers abroad, as they are among the citizens whose rights and welfare must be protected.

OCS serves as a preventive measure to ensure that Indonesian migrant workers do not work illegally or through unauthorized recruitment agencies, which often exploit them with promises of high salaries or non-transparent working conditions. By implementing a more organized system, Indonesia can reduce its reliance on illegal recruitment and thereby lower its vulnerability to various forms of abuse (BP2MI, 2022). Therefore, this policy can be seen as a strategic step to maintain the social security of Indonesian migrant workers abroad, thereby strengthening Indonesia's national security.

It is important to note that illegal migration can be detrimental to a country's national security. Unregistered or illegally employed migrant workers are often unprotected by the laws of the receiving and origin countries. This opens up opportunities for abuse, such as worker exploitation, human trafficking, or even the organization of criminal activities (ILO, 2006). The issue of illegal migration and the resulting vulnerabilities are highly relevant to the case of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI), particularly within the context of bilateral relations with Malaysia. The scale of undocumented workers exacerbates the threat to Indonesia's National Security. Data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) consistently shows that over 30% of all PMIs in Malaysia work without official documentation, creating a large population vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. This threat constitutes a direct violation of the state's National Security and Human Security duties to its citizens, which underpins Indonesia's strategic decision to introduce the One Channel System (OCS) (BP2MI, 2022).

The OCS was designed as a strategic response to preventive security threats by asserting regulatory sovereignty over of all labor migration (Tarom, 2025). Theoretically, the OCS allows the state to shift from a reactive to a preventive security posture, directly aiming to reduce illegal migration and the associated risks of exploitation (Roskin, 1994). However, this security objective is critically undermined by bilateral implementation failure. Malaysia's continued use of the System Maid Online (SMO) creates a loophole that effectively invalidates the concept of a secure single channel, ensuring that security threats from illegal migration and exploitation persist. Thus, while the policy's motivation is protection, bilateral friction weakens the OCS's ability to achieve its National Security goals.

Illegal migration can also increase transnational criminality, as illegal migrant workers are more vulnerable to becoming victims of international crimes involving human trafficking and smuggling networks (Sarah, 2021).

The OCS, by formalizing the labor recruitment process, helps reduce illegal migration by ensuring that all Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia use legal, regulated channels. By verifying document status and the recruitment process, the OCS helps to reduce the potential for illegal migration, thereby reducing the risk to national security. Unorganized illegal migration often undermines the integrity of the law, complicates migration control, and adds to the social and economic burden on receiving countries, such as Malaysia.

On the Indonesian side, with a structured system in place, the state can more easily control the number of migrant workers leaving and ensure they are placed in legal, protected sectors. As such, the OCS policy contributes to safer labor migration management, reduces potential risks for Indonesian migrant workers, and improves social security in the country by reducing the number of illegal workers.

Indonesia's national security is also affected by bilateral cooperation with destination countries for migrant workers, specifically Malaysia. Indonesia, through its OCS policy, not only focuses on protecting migrant workers, but also establishes better diplomatic relations with Malaysia, thereby strengthening Indonesia's national security. Through this cooperation, Indonesia can minimize problems related to illegal migration and improve the monitoring system for the placement of migrant workers. It also strengthens Indonesia's position in international dialog and negotiations on migrant workers' rights (Tamba, 2019).

Indonesia's national security in terms of labor migration also depends on how well Indonesia and Malaysia coordinate their policies to ensure that the rights of Indonesian migrant workers are protected. The OCS aims to create a safer, more controlled migration system, that benefits Indonesian workers and maintains stable bilateral relations with Malaysia. With better cooperation, both countries can more easily address issues related to illegal migration, human trafficking, and labor rights violations, all of which have the potential to threaten the stability of Indonesia's national security.

In addition, the OCS helps maintain Indonesia's domestic social security by ensuring that labor migration is controlled and well organized. Migrant workers who work illegally or unregistered often do not have access to necessary legal protections

or social facilities, which can add to social instability. With more formalized policies, migrant workers placed through OCS gain fundamental rights, including access to medical care, insurance, and legal protection, thereby reducing social injustice and increasing public confidence in the country's labor migration system.

Overall, the OCS policy strengthens Indonesia's national security by ensuring that migrant workers are protected from exploitation and abuse, while strengthening diplomatic cooperation with receiving countries. By improving and strengthening migration management, Indonesia can minimize the social and security risks posed by illegal migration and protect national interests in the long run. Thus, the OCS policy not only plays a role in improving the welfare of migrant workers but also plays an important part in maintaining Indonesia's national stability and security.

Economic Interests in the Context of Remittances

From the perspective of National Interest theory, according to Michael G. Roskin (1994), one of the main elements in a country's foreign policy is economic interest. These economic interests include all efforts of the state to maximize its economic benefits by managing resources efficiently and creating conditions that support the welfare of its people. One-way countries do this by using remittances, money sent by migrant workers to their home countries.

Indonesia, the largest exporter of migrant workers in Southeast Asia, relies heavily on remittances from its migrant workers, especially those working in Malaysia. Remittances are a significant source of income for many families in Indonesia, especially in areas that depend on migrant workers to sustain family economies (Ryanthie, 2025). Therefore, policies related to Indonesian labor migration, such as the One-Channel Placement System (OCS), are not only important for protecting migrant workers, but also have a significant impact on Indonesia's economic growth.

Remittances sent by Indonesian migrant workers are a major contributor to the country's economy. Remittances have a significant impact on poverty reduction, family income and on gross domestic product (GDP) in Indonesia. Remittances sent by Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) constitute a significant and increasingly vital driver of the national economy. Recent data underscores this significance, with PMI remittances estimated at approximately IDR 253.3 trillion (US\$15.7 billion) in 2024, a notable increase from the previous year. This substantial financial flow highlights the strategic economic importance of labor migration. Key regional contributors in Indonesia include of West Java and East Java, while the primary destination countries for these funds are Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Both the central regulatory bodies, including Bank Indonesia and the Ministry of Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (KP2MI), have officially acknowledged this positive trend, with projections indicating a sustained trajectory of growth into 2025 (Uly & Setiawan, 2025). With many Indonesian migrant workers working in countries such as Malaysia, these remittances are a significant source of income for

many families, especially in rural areas that depend more on income from abroad (World Bank, 2017).

The significance of these remittance flows is not only a national concern for Indonesia but is also a central issue within the global migration governance context. By formalizing these financial transfers, the OCS policy aligns with key international norms. Specifically, it supports Objective 20 of the UN Global Compact for Migration, which calls upon states to promote "faster, safer and cheaper" remittance transfers and foster the financial inclusion of migrants (United Nations, 2018). The logic behind the OCS—facilitating legal status and access to banking for workers—is a direct mechanism to achieve this global goal, shifting remittances from precarious informal networks to regulate more secure channels.

Regionally, this policy also resonates with the principles of the ASEAN Community. While not a formal remittance treaty, ensuring that workers can securely manage and send their earnings is a core element of worker protection under the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ASEAN, 2018). It also supports the broader ASEAN vision for greater financial inclusion across the region (Chia & Plummer, 2015). Therefore, the OCS should be viewed not merely as a domestic economic tool, but as an instrument through which Indonesia demonstrates its compliance with and commitment to international best practices in remittance governance.

However, while remittances have a substantial positive impact on the Indonesian economy, these money flows often go unrecorded in an organized economic system, especially for migrant workers who work illegally or through unauthorized recruitment agencies. Migrant workers who work without legal documents or who work through illegal channels are often unable to send money through official channels, leading to uncontrolled and hidden remittances.

One of the main objectives of the OCS policy is to formalize labor migration and ensure that Indonesian migrant workers work through legal and organized channels (BP2MI, 2022). By facilitating the recruitment and placement of migrant workers through a centralized, official system, OCS enables them to send their money through legitimate financial channels, such as banks and official monetary institutions. This not only increases security for migrant workers but also improves transparency and reduces the potential for fraud in remittances.

Furthermore, the objective of formalizing labor migration channels through the OCS must be contextualized within the broader framework of global and regional migration governance norms. The policy is not merely a domestic or bilateral initiative; it represents Indonesia's strategic effort to align its practices with established international standards. At the global level, the OCS aligns with Objective 6 of the UN's Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), which explicitly calls on states to facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and ensure decent work conditions (Thouez, 2018). By creating a single, regulated pathway, Indonesia aims to eliminate exploitative practices by unregulated brokers, thereby operationalizing the GCM's principles.

At the regional level, the OCS serves as a concrete implementation of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. This consensus obligates member states, such as Indonesia and Malaysia to ensure the availability of legal and safe migration pathways (Wong & Sin, 2021). Therefore, the OCS can be interpreted as Indonesia's fulfillment of its regional commitments. By aligning its policy with these global and regional norms, Indonesia not only enhances the protection of its citizens but also strengthens its diplomatic credibility and prestige as a responsible actor committed to multilateral governance.

Indonesia's implementation of the One Channel System (OCS) should be understood within the broader context of evolving global and regional labor migration governance norms. The policy does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it reflects Indonesia attempt to align its national practices with international standards for ethical recruitment and worker protection. At the global level, the OCS resonates strongly with the objectives of the United Nations' Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), particularly its call for fair and ethical recruitment mechanisms to ensure decent work (United Nations, 2018). By centralizing and formalizing the recruitment process, the OCS can be framed as a direct implementation of the GCM's principles at the bilateral level.

Similarly, at the regional level, the policy aligns with the spirit of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. This consensus obligates member states, including Indonesia and Malaysia, to ensure access to legal migration channels and to regulate recruitment agencies (ASEAN, 2018). The OCS, therefore, serves as a tangible manifestation of Indonesia's commitment to these regional standards. By positioning the OCS as compliant with both global and regional norms, Indonesia not only strengthens the protection of its workers but also enhances its diplomatic standing and international prestige as a responsible, norm-abiding state in the global community.

A structured, legalized system through OCS enables better monitoring of remittance flows. The Indonesian government can identify the number of migrant workers sent to Malaysia and other countries and ensure that they can send money to their families in more securely and legally. These legitimate remittances help create more stable employment and encourage domestic financial investment.

A critical impact of formalizing the labor migration system is the increased flow of controlled, recorded remittances into the Indonesian economy. When migrant workers can send money through official channels, they also strengthen the country's economy by incorporating these flows into the national banking system, enabling the funds to be used for investment and economic development in Indonesia. For example, remittances received by migrant workers' families can be used to support daily needs, education, and healthcare, which, in turn, helps to reduce poverty levels and improve quality of life.

In addition, the more stable income derived from legitimate remittances allows migrant workers and their families to access more economic opportunities. This can increase financial independence and facilitate education and skills training for

future generations, ultimately contributing to Indonesia's long-term economic growth.

Remittances sent by Indonesian migrant workers help increase family income and reduce dependence on state aid. This demonstrates the positive influence of remittances on family economic stability and local economic growth (Yufifi et al., 2022). With a significant remittances, the country can feel the positive impact through increased domestic consumption which boosts the economy.

Furthermore, remittances also contribute to other economic sectors, such as education and health. Remittances by migrant workers not only increase family income but also open opportunities for better education and more adequate health services, which in turn contribute to long-term economic development (Ginting, 2019). Therefore, policies that strengthen Indonesia's labor placement system and encourage the safe and efficient delivery of remittances are highly relevant to the country's economic interests.

Migrant workers who work illegally or unlawfully are often unable to enjoy their rights, such as decent wages, access to healthcare, and legal protection. They are also often unable to send their money through official channels, thereby reducing their contribution to the Indonesian economy. The OCS, by facilitating legitimate recruitment and reducing the number of illegal migrant workers, helps address these issues by ensuring that migrant workers who go abroad work through official channels and can remit their money more efficiently.

Reducing illegal migration also helps reduce reliance on the informal sector, which often exacerbates economic inequality and destabilizes the domestic economy. By regulating the placement of migrant workers, the OCS helps the country optimize the economic potential of a more organized and legitimate migrant worker sector.

The OCS policy also strengthens Indonesia's economic relations with countries that receive migrant workers, particularly Malaysia. By creating a more structured and transparent system, Indonesia can build greater trust with migration destination countries. This improved relationship enables closer economic cooperation, including in managing remittances, which will benefit the Indonesian economy and enhance diplomatic cooperation with migrant-receiving countries.

International Prestige and Diplomacy

Within the framework of the National Interest theory, Roskin (1994) argues that a critical element in a country's foreign policy is international prestige. This prestige relates to the way a state strengthens its diplomatic position and influences the global stage. States not only act to fulfill their domestic needs, but also to maintain a global image and international leadership that supports national interests. International prestige reflects a state reputation and can increase its influence in international relations and facilitate the achievement of diplomatic goals.

In the context of Indonesia's policy related to the One Channel System (OCS), this policy not only aims to protect Indonesian migrant workers but also to

strengthen Indonesia's international diplomatic position. This policy illustrates Indonesia's commitment to protecting human rights, especially the rights of migrant workers, a significant global issue. The implementation of OCS as a more structured and legitimate system enhances Indonesia's international prestige by demonstrating its commitment to managing labor migration more effectively and in accordance with international standards.

Indonesia's strategic pursuit of international prestige through the One Channel System (OCS) is a direct response to a significant and persistent image deficit surrounding its governance of migrant workers. For decades, Indonesian labor migration has been globally associated with systemic issues of worker abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking (Setyawati, 2013). This chronic problem led to frequent diplomatic crises, damaged Indonesia's reputation, and undermined its diplomatic leverage in bilateral negotiations, compelling the state to use the OCS as an instrument of Soft Power (Nye, 2004).

At the regional level, the severe and public nature of abuse cases often strained diplomatic ties, particularly with Malaysia. Indonesia's previous moratoriums on sending workers were signs of governance failure, implicitly acknowledging that Indonesia's regulatory system was inadequate. The OCS, therefore, represents an attempt to regain control and to demonstrate adherence to the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2017). By designing a unified, rights-based system, Indonesia seeks to position itself as a responsible, rule-abiding regional leader, moving away from its reputation as a state unable to protect its citizens.

At the global level, the persistent reports of trafficking and abuse placed Indonesia under pressure to conform to international standards, particularly those established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). The OCS, with its emphasis on legal channels, rights-based documentation, and a gender-sensitive approach, is a strategic calculation to align Indonesia's policy with these multilateral norms (Tarom, 2025). Aligning with these standards enhances Indonesia's diplomatic credibility and provides greater leverage in demanding better protection from receiving countries.

The OCS is thus designed to be a symbolic projection of the Indonesian state's commitment to Human Rights. By showcasing a structured and legitimate system, Indonesia attempts to legitimize its demand for greater protection from receiving countries and enhance its overall diplomatic image and standing on the global stage (Roskin, 1994). The pursuit of prestige here is not merely vanity, but a necessary correction to past governance failures that threatened Indonesia's foreign policy goals.

Indonesia has many migrant workers working in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and other Middle Eastern countries. These migrant workers often face deplorable working conditions, including exploitation, abuse, and human rights violations (Longgarini et al., 2023). The OCS policy aims to reduce this exploitation by formalizing recruitment and placement channels for migrant workers. As such, the OCS reflects Indonesia's commitment to protecting the rights of its workers

abroad and ensuring that Indonesian migrant workers work in safer and more secure conditions.

Through the implementation of OCS, Indonesia not only protects its workers but also demonstrates to the world that the country is serious in respecting and complying with international standards for the protection of migrant workers. Indonesia strives to be a country that relies not only on labor exports but also pays attention to the welfare and human rights of its migrant workers. This action demonstrates Indonesia's leadership on migrant worker issues and enhances its international prestige.

The OCS policy also plays a vital role in bilateral diplomacy between Indonesia and migrant-receiving countries, especially Malaysia. By introducing a more structured placement system, Indonesia is attempting to address issues that have long been a source of tension between the two countries, namely the recruitment of migrant workers and the protection of workers' rights. A more organized and legal system allows receiving countries, in this case Malaysia, to have better control over the placement of migrant workers and ensure that Indonesian workers receive better legal protection.

Indonesia can strengthen diplomatic relations with the receiving country through this policy, as Malaysia also benefits from a more organized and transparent system for the placement of migrant workers. Through this cooperation, the two countries can more easily address issues related to illegal migration and worker exploitation, which had previously often strained their bilateral relationship. With the OCS policy, Indonesia demonstrates its responsibility in managing migrant worker issues, thereby improving its diplomatic image in the eyes of receiving countries.

In addition, the OCS policy also reflects Indonesia's role as a country committed to international standards, such as those set by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN), in protecting the rights of migrant workers. In the context of international relations, countries that demonstrate commitment to human rights and worker protection are often valued by the global community, which increases their international prestige.

Indonesia, by introducing a more structured system through the OCS, demonstrates to the world that it complies with international standards for protecting the rights of migrant workers. This gives Indonesia positive prestige, showing that the country is not only focused on domestic economic growth but also on social sustainability and the welfare of its citizens, both at home and abroad.

International prestige also increases Indonesia's diplomatic leverage in international negotiations. When Indonesia demonstrates its commitment protecting migrant workers' rights through the OCS policy, the country can strengthen its position in international treaties and trade agreements. By being a country that cares about the welfare of its workers abroad, Indonesia can more easily build alliances with other countries that also care about human rights and worker protection issues.

As a country with a significant number of migrant workers, policies that support the protection of migrant workers' rights also give Indonesia an advantage in economic diplomacy. Such cooperation not only maintains bilateral relations with migrant receiving countries but also strengthens Indonesia's position in international forums related to migration policy (Ismail, 2019).

The OCS policy also gives Indonesia confidence in negotiating with migrant-receiving countries. By showing that Indonesia has taken concrete steps to regulate labor migration in a legal and structured way, the country can build international trust and strengthen its position in bilateral cooperation with these countries.

Furthermore, the pursuit of international prestige through OCS is significantly undermined by persistent implementation gaps. There is often a vast difference between policy design and its practice by "street-level bureaucrats" on the ground (Lipsky, 2010).

The assertion that persistent implementation gaps undermine the pursuit of international prestige through the OCS is measured not by simple quantitative metrics, but by observing the resulting credibility gap and diplomatic policy failure. International prestige is earned through credible outcomes, not merely aspirational policy design (Nye, 2004).

The most tangible evidence of erosion lies in the failure to enforce mutual compliance in bilateral agreements. Malaysia's sustained operation of the parallel System Maid Online (SMO) directly contravenes the core mechanism of the 2022 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This visible conflict signals a diplomatic setback, demonstrating that Indonesia's regulatory projection lacks the necessary influence to command respect for its flagship policy on the regional stage (BP2MI, 2022). This policy dualism undermines the very notion of a secure, regulated channel that the OCS aims to project globally (BP2MI, 2024).

The second measure is the chasm between policy language and on-the-ground reality. Widespread documentation by human rights organizations and media reports detailing the continued operation of illegal brokers, coupled with evidence of poor inter-agency coordination and weak enforcement by "street-level bureaucrats," contradicts Indonesia's claim of being a responsible steward of migrant rights (Setyawati, 2013; Tamba, 2019). This failure exposes the policy as potentially a symbolic facade, thereby nullifying the Soft Power dividends and transforming the pursuit of international prestige into a self-defeating endeavor. The persistent failure to protect workers on the ground effectively negates the policy's primary communicative goal.

Reports of weak enforcement, lack of coordination between agencies, and the continued operation of illegal brokers highlight a major gap between the policy's intent and its actual outcomes. This failure to effectively implement the policy on the ground not only harms workers but also damages the very international credibility and prestige that Indonesia seeks to build, making the policy's objective self-defeating.

However, international prestige is built on credible outcomes, not merely on aspirational policies. Persistent implementation gaps across multiple fronts aeverly

undermine the OCS's potential to enhance Indonesia's reputation. At the bilateral level, the policy suffers from weak enforcement, as Malaysia's continued use of the parallel System Maid Online (SMO) directly contravenes the 2022 MoU and demonstrates a critical failure in mutual policy enforcement. This external governance challenge is compounded by significant internal shortcomings, particularly a documented lack of coordination between Indonesian agencies on the ground, which prevents a unified and effective implementation of the OCS protocol. This high-level governance vacuum creates fertile ground for the continued operation of illegal brokers, who thrive on exploiting these systemic loopholes. Interconnected failures spanning from bilateral agreements to inter-agency cooperation and on-the-ground enforcement demonstrate a profound gap between the policy's intent and its actual outcomes, ultimately damaging the very international credibility that Indonesia seeks to build.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the core finding that the effectiveness of the OCS is critically constrained by bilateral friction, implementation gaps, and a conflict with migrant agency, several strategic policy recommendations are proposed to enhance the system's viability and ensure credible outcomes.

First, strengthening Institutional Capacity and Digital Integration. To address the implementation gap and the failure of enforcement by "street-level bureaucrats", it is essential to drastically strengthen institutional capacity and digitalize the placement and protection services. Indonesia should adopt a model similar to the Philippines' POEA e-Services system, which is directly connected to diplomatic missions abroad. This integration requires fully connecting OCS with centralized data systems including BP2MI, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Indonesian embassies in destination countries. This centralized digital structure minimizes the role of opaque intermediaries, streamlines recruitment, and enhances transparency and oversight.

Second, ensuring Legally Binding Bilateral Enforcement. The persistent bilateral policy friction, evidenced by Malaysia's continuation of the parallel System Maid Online (SMO) despite the 2022 MoU, severely undermines the OCS's National Security objective. Future negotiations must pivot from political goodwill to the establishment of legally binding bilateral agreements that incorporate robust enforcement mechanisms and strict accountability. This legal reciprocity is crucial to ensuring compliance, effectively eliminating dual-track systems, and preventing the recurring erosion of the bilateral agreement's integrity.

Third, institutionalizing community-based protection models. In order to address the vulnerabilities faced by migrants and complement state limitations, Indonesia should formalize community-based protection models. Leveraging the existing advocacy, mediation, and legal support provided by religious and diaspora organizations abroad—such as the Muhammadiyah Special Branch in Malaysia — provides an effective complement to state efforts. These community networks often

have greater trust and access to undocumented or distressed workers, functioning as essential frontlines for protection.

Fourth, prioritizing preventive protection and legal literacy. The high rate of undocumented migration and reliance on informal channels stems from low legal literacy among prospective migrants. Preventive protection and legal literacy must be heavily prioritized before deployment. Experiences from Indonesian missions, such as those in Johor Bahru, demonstrate that pre-departure documentation, comprehensive legal briefings, and contract simulations significantly mitigate the risk of exploitation and human trafficking. This addresses the conflict with migrant agency by empowering workers with the necessary information before they enter the migration ecosystem.

Fifth, multi-stakeholder coordination and external alignment. Finally, effective governance requires multi-stakeholder coordination, extending beyond state agencies to include civil society and international partners. Lessons from successful initiatives, such as the Indonesian Embassy's work in Malaysia to ensure educational access for undocumented migrant children, illustrate how cross-border, cross-sector cooperation can enhance social protections and better align labor policy with the national interest. Such coordination is vital to sustaining the credibility that underpins Indonesia's International prestige.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the One Channel System (OCS) stands as a vital and ambitious policy experiment in Indonesia's labor diplomacy, successfully articulating Indonesia's national interest across the three Roskinian pillars. The policy is understood as an expression of strategic ambition to project regulatory sovereignty, secure economic benefits through formal remittances, and enhance international prestige. However, the core finding is that three critical contradictions severely constrain its effectiveness. First, the pursuit of National Security through centralized control risks state overreach and is fundamentally undermined by the external bilateral policy friction—Malaysia's continued reliance on the SMO invalidates the secure single channel concept. Second, the Economic Interest goal of remittance formalization is continually challenged by migrant workers' agency which relies on faster, more accessible informal networks, revealing a disconnect between the state's rationale and workers' reality. Finally, the ambition for international prestige is nullified primarily by persistent implementation gaps and a policy-practice chasm on the ground, in which failures of "street-level bureaucrats" render the OCS a symbolic facade, eroding diplomatic credibility. OCS is thus a necessary assertion of regulatory sovereignty, However, its ultimate success is contingent on bridging the significant gap between state-centric aspirations and the complex realities on the ground, particularly by prioritizing legally binding bilateral enforcement and addressing deep-rooted implementation failures.

Based on these findings, several policy implications emerge. First, Indonesia must intensify its diplomatic efforts to achieve complete bilateral policy coherence, pushing for a legally binding framework that eliminates parallel recruitment

systems like Malaysia's SMO. Second, domestic governance must be strengthened through enhanced capacity building for local agencies and widespread public education campaigns to improve legal literacy among prospective migrants, thereby closing critical implementation gaps. Finally, future policy design must be more worker-centric, incorporating feedback from migrant communities to build systems that are not only secure but also trusted and accessible.

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges its limitations, primarily its reliance on secondary data and policy texts, which restricts its ability to capture the granular, lived experiences of individuals affected by the OCS. This limitation opens several crucial avenues for future empirical research. To move beyond a state-centric analysis, future studies should employ qualitative and ethnographic methods to explore how migrant workers and their families navigate, resist, or adapt to the OCS. Furthermore, specific quantitative or mixed research is needed, such as:

Migrant-Focused Surveys: Large-scale surveys could be designed to measure migrant workers' access to information, their levels of trust in formal versus informal channels, their experiences with recruitment costs under OCS, and their overall sense of security.

Longitudinal Studies: A longitudinal study that tracks a cohort of workers over several years—from pre-departure, through their employment in Malaysia, to their return—would be invaluable. Such research could provide robust data on the long-term economic and social impacts of the OCS, assessing whether it genuinely improves welfare or creates new forms of dependency and control.

In conclusion, the OCS stands as a vital and ambitious policy experiment in Indonesia's labor diplomacy. While its goals are aligned with the national interest, its success hinges on bridging the significant gap between state-level aspirations and the complex realities on the ground. Future research that prioritizes the voices and experiences of migrants will be essential to guide its evolution into a truly effective and humane system of migration governance.

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