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Deconstruction of Engagements with Public Opinion in Foreign Policy Analysis: A Critical Essay from the Perspective of Vernacular Approach

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Abstract

This research pursues the footprints of methodological limitations in the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature, concerning how the literature engages with public opinion. It primarily hypothesizes that the FPA approaches the public through "someone else's scripts" and "methodological elitism", consequently poorly capturing "how ordinary individuals narrate" foreign policy issues and ignoring their genuine "voice and agency". Accordingly, employing Vernacular Security Studies (VSS) empowered with Derrida's deconstruction, this paper evaluates its hypothesis by examining empirical papers on public opinion in FPA. Ultimately, it propounds that certain FPA papers exhibit methodological deficiency, resulting from their approach to the public, conceptualization, and data collection process. By doing so, this paper expects to trigger a growing interest in developing more diverse, inclusive, and grassroots-oriented approaches in this domain. Such an approach might draw attention to diverse publics' different voices and experiences and point out a new research agenda called "Vernacular Foreign Policy".

Keywords: Vernacular Security, Derrida, Foreign Policy, Public Opinion, Methodology

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Introduction

The Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is a well-established sub-discipline of International Relations (IR) that explores key questions about the essence of decision-making, the actors holding power in foreign affairs, and the capabilities of decision-makers (Allison 1969; Putnam 1988; Holsti 2009; Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017). In particular, this literature examines the extent to which the public functions as a genuine actor and assesses its qualifications to make decisions

on foreign issues. On the other hand, Vernacular Security Studies (VSS) is a new branch of Critical Security Studies (CSS) that offers a novel perspective on security relations, highlighting how definitions of security and related concepts can vary based on local political and historical contexts (Jarvis and Lister 2012; Stevens and Vaughan-Williams 2014; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018). Moreover, considering Jacques Derrida's focus on the importance of context, the multiple meanings of concepts, and the exposure of hierarchical and violent relationships in these conceptualizations (Kilduff 1993; McQuillan 2000), it seems beneficial to incorporate Derridean deconstruction into VSS to highlight the uniqueness of individuals.[1] This emphasis on individual uniqueness prompts a critical question: Could the FPA's engagement with the public be methodologically problematic from the perspective of the VA?

Triggered by this question, this study investigates certain aspects of the FPA papers in terms of its engagement with the public.[2] The investigation here is based on three columns. Firstly, it is worthy to critically question how FPA approaches the nature of the public in response to the VA's call to notice diverse publics with cultural richness and multifarious voices (see Gillespie and O'Loughlin 2009; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018; Aradau and Huysmans 2019). Is the public seen as a referent object, an actor in foreign policy, or merely a means of legitimization? Likewise, is the public accepted as a heterogeneous and variable or homogeneous and fixed entity? Investigating conceptualizations prevalent in the FPA, secondly, is significantly critical to consider the VA's urging underlining the importance of constructing conceptualizations empty enough to reflect the plural and diverse voices of individuals (Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2016: 11; Luckham 2017; Jarvis 2018: 10; Vaughan-Williams 2021: 4). Do FPA studies, in conceptualizing relevant foreign issues, leave empty spaces to be filled in by ordinary individuals, or do they foreground certain privileged conceptualizations as reproduction tools of elite discourse? Thirdly, examining the data collection processes of the FPA is a critical matter, considering the VA's concern on research processes encouraging individuals to articulate their own narratives and their context-specific nuances (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015: 7). To what extent do FPA papers limit the public to certain choices, or do they enable the public to disclose their own cultural and historical experiences?

This inquiry, hence, stands out as a highly significant contribution, primarily because with analytically novel insights derived from VA, it exposes the three-pronged methodological deficiency in the FPA and also has the potential to pave the way for new discussions on how to resolve them. Indeed, in a sense, a nuanced, novel take on the VA fills an important gap in the FPA

1 From this point, this paper uses the expression Vernacular Approach (VA) to refer to the combination of Vernacular Security Studies and Derridean deconstruction.

2 To address the main research problematic, it was deemed appropriate to methodologically examine the studies within FPA literature that engages with the public. In this process, journals considered relevant to the research question, such as "The Public Opinion Quarterly," "Foreign Policy Analysis," "Journal of European Public Policy," "Journal of Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties," and "International Journal of Public Opinion Research," were scanned. The articles found and those to which connections could be established based on these articles were extensively reviewed. The selection of these articles aimed to examine studies that purportedly reveal public opinion on phenomena not only relevant to VA interests, such as security and threats, but also essentially related to certain foreign policy issues. In this respect, it should also be noted that the claims presented here are limited with the examined literature and not directed at the entire FPA literature.

by discussing the extent to which the FPA distorts the heterogeneity and agency of the public, the extent to which the elite-centered conceptualizations impose certain lenses to the public, and the extent to which the data collection methods that dominate the literature are far from revealing their diverse perspectives. Moreover, these queries establish a significant avenue to reconsider public agency in foreign policy with all its cultural richness and diversity, to revise conceptual frameworks in the literature to pave the way for non-elite conceptualizations, and to discuss more inclusive, open, and in-depth data collection techniques.

Public Opinion Discussions in Foreign Policy Analysis

In FPA, decision-making mechanisms cover a multi-layered process including international, systemic, and individual levels. (Singer 1960: 454–460; Waltz 2001) In this regard, public opinion has played a crucial role at each level. The literature shows that public opinion is one factor affecting the decision-making outcomes of foreign policy analysis. (Allison 1969, 1971; Allison and Halperin 1972; Mo 1994)

In exploring these factors that influence FPA, firstly, Graham Allison (1969, 1971) identifies the public as a crucial force in shaping decisions. Through his rational actor model, he suggests that public opinion plays a major role in a leader's decision-making process. A rational leader, aiming to maximize value, must also secure public support, making public opinion a key factor in guiding their choices. Since leaders rely on public backing, Allison (1971: 10–32) contends that public opinion plays a crucial role at the individual level in decision-making. Secondly, the bureaucratic-politics model as described by Graham Allison and Morton Halperin (1972) emphasizes the role of elites and internal factors in decision-making. It highlights how bureaucrats, elites, and individuals interact with each actor pursuing distinct interests shaped by their roles and priorities. Thus, decision-making involves both bureaucratic agencies and individual actors, including leaders, the system, and the public (Allison and Halperin 1972). Lastly, the two-level game theory highlights the public's important role in decision-making at both domestic and international levels. Robert Putnam (1988) explains that after leaders negotiate internationally (Level 1), they must secure approval from domestic actors (Level 2). Foreign policy decisions are shaped not only by international actors but also by domestic political dynamics. Leaders must balance these levels since domestic factors, like interest groups and political parties, influence international negotiations. In democracies, elections motivate leaders, and the public holds agenda-setting power, using it to push for decisions that align with their preferences (Mo 1994; Putnam 2009).

The other aspect of the literature examines how qualified the public is to make decisions on foreign affairs. Firstly, "the Almond-Lippmann consensus" (Almond 1950; Lippmann 1955) establishes a ground for the "pessimistic" nature of public opinion. This ground supports the view that the public is neither capable nor qualified to make decisions on foreign policy (Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida 1989; Holsti 2009; Erdoğan 2013: 39–43; Dropp, Kertzer, and Zeitzoff 2014; Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017). Secondly, the "optimistic perspective" (Holsti

2009) foregrounds that the public is competent to make foreign policy decisions by relying on their logical reasoning (Kertzer 2013). The public is motivated by a desire for consistency and victory in foreign policy, positioning them as key decision-makers (Eichenberg 2005; Tomz 2007). Thirdly, the "rationally ignorant" approach, referring to the public's predictability, argues that public opinion is not objective, as people tend to follow parties, elites, and media that align with their views (Rosenau 1961; Zaller 1992; Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017). Therefore, the nature of public opinion can be questioned, as elite, party, and media influences shape public decisions, raising doubts about the possibility of pure public opinion.

In short, the literature reflects a complex relationship between public opinion and foreign policy analysis, emphasizing how public sentiment shapes decision-making while also presenting diverse perspectives on the public's capacity to effectively engage in foreign policy discussions. However, as previously noted, the empirical literature faces certain methodological limitations in its engagement with public opinion. This is precisely where VA offers valuable insights.

Vernacular Security Approach

The expression "Vernacular Security" is proposed by Nils Bubandt (2005: 276–279) to indicate and compare the contradictory security-related findings arising from different political histories. It is mostly identified with revealing the security understanding of ordinary individuals shaped in their "local" context (Jarvis and Lister 2012; Stevens and Vaughan-Williams 2014; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018). The local context is genuinely crucial, as security and related concepts like threat, fear, and anxiety are viewed as heterogeneous and socially constructed, defined differently by various actors over time and shaped by varying political histories (Bubandt 2005: 277; Jarvis 2018: 10–13).

This approach to security paves the way for defining security and related concepts within their local contexts, referring to the "Vernacular Turn" in CSS. It is where VSS continues to evolve under various themes: security conceptualizations (Jarvis and Lister 2012; Luckham and Kirk 2013; Baker and Lekunze 2019), border studies (Cooper, Perkins and Rumford 2014; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018; Vaughan-Williams 2021), threats (Stevens and Vaughan-Williams 2014; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015), terrorism/counter-terrorism (Jackson and Hall 2016; Jarvis and Lister 2016; Da Silva and Crilley 2017; Downing 2020; Bogain 2020; Oyawale 2022; Downing, Gerwens and Dron 2022), human security (Rudnick and Boromisza-Habashi 2017) and so on.

To analytically enrich VSS, this paper combines it with Derridean deconstruction. Broadly, deconstruction appears to be a philosophical way of investigating social constructions (Balkin 2004: 319; Küçükalp 2015: 601; Rutlï 2016: 51–54). It addresses how a conceptualization is constructed and how it is possible to reconstruct it (Küçükalp 2015: 600). Two steps can be advanced here:[3] Firstly, by questioning conceptual contradictions and

3 This points to a simplification applied by this study to increase understandability, rather than a strategy offered by Derrida.

hierarchies in social constructions, deconstruction examines which concepts are privileged and which are marginalized, and in this process aims to raise the voices of the marginalized and reveals implicit meanings (Kilduff 1993: 15–16; McQuillan 2000: 5; Balkin 2004: 200; Küçükalp 2015: 601–603). Secondly, while deconstruction draws attention to the plural possibilities of meanings, with Derrida's argument that "there is nothing outside the text", it emphasizes the importance of context by suggesting that meanings are context-dependent and that structures change as the context changes (Balkin 2004: 321–324; Lawlor 2014: 126–127; Küçükalp 2015: 602–604; Rutli̇ 2016: 65). For these reasons, this paper argues that Derridean deconstruction and VSS seem subsidiary to each other.

From this combined perspective, VA matters in three senses: Firstly, it is important because it reflects the security narratives of ordinary individuals in their own words, thus enriching the depiction of global insecurities (Jarvis 2018: 1–4, 16, 17). Indeed, given the intersubjective nature of security, the centralization of a particular group renders other voices invisible and leads to relations of violence with narrow definitions (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015: 4; Jackson and Hall 2016: 13; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018: 2). However, the VA diversifies security portrayals by including marginalized individuals in the conceptual construction. Secondly, reflecting on the security understandings of ordinary individuals reveals the disruptive and reconstructive effects of local approaches to elitism (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015; George 2017). By examining the differences between elite and local knowledge, it aims to explore the potential for alternative policies addressing the genuine needs of marginalized people (Jarvis and Lister 2016). Thus, VA questions the elitism in security policies and offers a powerful subversive potential. Lastly, VA enables more inclusive and grassroots policymaking. Policies addressing citizens' needs will be more effective and inclusive, otherwise, elitist policies do not resonate locally and are content with a false image (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015: 3–4). Policies based on local understandings, on the other hand, offer more inclusive and effective solutions (Stevens and Vaughan-Williams 2014: 170–171). Thus, it has an important potential to enrich policymaking.

In a nutshell, VA points to an important research agenda by reflecting on the perspectives of ordinary individuals, emphasizing disruptive contextuality, and promoting inclusive policymaking. Especially, considering its nature emphasizing individual uniqueness and agency, embracing conceptual diversities, and opening doors to methodic daintiness, it can serve as a critical mainstay for the evaluation of FPA. In this line, the upcoming chapter establishes this critique.

The Vernacular Critique of Foreign Policy Analysis Literature

The critique below is structured in three categories: the nature of the public, the way of conceptualization, and the data collection process.

The Nature of the Public

The approach of FPA to the whatness of the public establishes the first category. Each author in the discipline has an implicit or explicit answer to the question of what the public is. Is it the referent object of policymaking, the actor in politics, or merely a factor whose opinion is gathered for various reasons? In line with this answer, most probably they justify the question of why the relevant engagement with the public is important. At this point, engaging with public opinion to justify elitist claims differs significantly from engaging solely to capture the opinions of a political actor on a major issue (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015: 4; Vaughan-Williams 2021: 4). Whereas the former tends to consolidate and legitimize the entrenched elite-dominated configurations of policymaking by utilizing public opinion, the latter reflects a different tendency that might aim to reveal deep-seated fractures between elite and non-elite arguments and scrutinize the very foundations of elitist policymaking (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015: 2-3; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018: 18). That is, an engagement as a legitimization tool tends to seek particular responses and steer public narratives in predetermined directions, whereas an engagement as listening to a political actor tends to create a ground for truly genuine dialogue, enabling deeper understandings, and the reexamination of entrenched assumptions. On the other hand, the literature's view on whether the public is a fixed and homogeneous entity indicates a key benchmark with important effects on its conceptualization and data-collection process (Gillespie and O'Loughlin 2009). Viewing the public as a fixed, homogeneous entity with predefined borders and opinions, first and foremost, prevents recognizing its cultural richness and the diverse voices it holds (Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018: 10; Aradau and Huysmans 2019). In other words, such a uniformity assumption tends to direct engagements toward seeking monolithic responses, thereby limiting the unveiling of internal heterogeneities and context-dependent shifts in public opinion. In both cases, the engagement with the public becomes problematic, as it fundamentally misconstrues the agency and the complexity of the public.

However, criticizing FPA as if it completely ignores the agency of the public is not matched with empirical evidence. Rather, the examined literature contains diverse approaches, with some viewing the public as a political subject, others as a referent object in foreign affairs, and some merely as a legitimate source. For example, Jens Hainmueller and Daniel Hopkins (2015: 533) approach the public as a political subject, as they "put respondents in the position of immigration officials" in their experiment, to investigate how ordinary individuals behave towards certain immigrants as if they were immigration officers. Similarly, Joshua Kertzer and Thomas Zeitzoff (2017), though the importance coefficient decreases, approach the public as an independent subject not completely driven by elites. Accordingly, they see claims that the public is a collection of people whose views are entirely shaped by top-down elite discourses and narratives as an exaggeration of "the public's passivity" (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017: 13). In contrast, they argue that the public produces its own understandings, which implies a bottom-up narrative production and is shaped as a result of "the individual's social context" and "their preexisting attitudes" (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017: 13). Likewise,

Benjamin Page and Jason Barbaras (2000) display "citizens' preferences about foreign policy" as important to investigate and the public as an important reference object whose attitudes should be "reflected" in policy preferences, despite emphasizing the dominance of elites in the decision-making process and their ability to shape public opinion (Page and Barabas 2000: 340–41). On the other hand, some (De Graaf, Dimitriu, and Ringsmose 2015; Wang and Moise 2023) approach the public as a mere domestic source from which elites derive legitimacy for their decisions. For instance, in analyzing public opinion on the autonomy and direction of EU foreign and security policies in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Chendi Wang and Alexandru Moise (Wang and Moise 2023: 1680) argue that public opinion can "instigate or constrain" policy decisions and that disregarding these public narratives could "damage the legitimacy" of future European policies and seriously "jeopardize European integration". In short, FPA shows a diverse range of approaches to the public, countering critiques that it only uses public opinion to justify elitist claims, despite a limited number of cases examined here.

Regarding the second aspect of the first critique, it is fair to say that nearly all investigated FPA papers tend to homogenize the masses, despite acknowledging some diversity (Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Lahav and Courtemanche 2012; Hellwig and Sinno 2017; Egan, Konisky and Mullin 2022). Even though this diversity is not as strong as it is emphasized in VA, it mostly divides the public into sub-groups in line with certain criteria. However, these sub-groups are treated as homogeneous entities, overlooking their diverse voices in the pursuit of extensive data collection. Indeed, in measuring the immigration attitudes of the American public, Trent Ollerenshaw and Ashley Jardina (2023) divide them into five different categories: Democrats, Republicans, Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. They accept the diversity of the American public between these groups; however, they obviously ignore the diversity within these groups (Ollerenshaw and Jardina 2023: 1050–52). In short, even though FPA seeks to catch major variances within the public, it is fair to criticize its ignorance of intra-group diversities. These problematic views on the public, in both situations, undermine the engagement with the public from the very beginning of the research process and ultimately lead to misrepresentations.

The Way of Conceptualization

Conceptualization of the relevant issues in FPA establishes the second main category of the critique. The way of conceptualization is critically significant to understand whether individuals are encouraged to articulate their narratives with their own words (Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2016: 11; Luckham 2017; Jarvis 2018: 10; Vaughan-Williams 2021: 4). Indeed, conceptualizations may easily transform into a technocratic way of reproducing elite discourses that claim to speak in the name of the public (Jarvis and Lister 2012; Jarvis 2018: 4; Vaughan-Williams 2021: 9). To clarify, if conceptualizations adopt a narrow elitist focus, they not only prioritize certain contextual perspectives that align with established power structures but also marginalize the alternative, disruptive perspectives and nuanced experiences of diverse publics. This imposition of a "someone else's script" constitutes a form of violence,

echoing and recycling dominant discourses, ostensibly representing public opinion while subverting the authenticity and agency of the public (Kilduff 1993: 15; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015; Jarvis and Lister 2016). Thus, the resulting marginalization of diverse voices and limiting of individual narratives creates unsuitable conditions for bottom-up investigations that aim to uncover and accurately represent public opinion and causes contenting with poor images of relevant realities (Browning and McDonald 2013; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015: 3; Vaughan-Williams 2021: 3).

Considering the empirical studies investigated, it would not be unfair to argue that the literature suffers from applying prejudiced conceptualizations of the issues at stake, rather than allowing the public to form its own understanding of specific issues. The empirical papers to support this argument are categorized below under three themes:[4] (in)security understandings, threat perceptions, and foreign/security issues. Firstly, certain papers examining (in)security understandings of the public (Bar-Tal, Jacobson, and Freund 1995; Davis and Silver 2004; Tsfati, Tukachinsky, and Peri 2009) reflect the problem of biased conceptualizations in depth. For instance, Darren Davis and Brian Silver (2004: 44–45), in exploring which civil liberties Americans accepted to sacrifice for greater security in the aftermath of 9/11, impose a particular security conception, delimiting their security concerns with "flying on an airplane", "the safety of food and drinking water", "going into tall buildings", and "being in large crowds or stadiums", rather than allowing them to disclose their own understandings. But, why should an American's security be analyzed through such a conceptual delimitation? For example, would not the interruption of a local exporter's goods due to this terrorist act, or the psychological consequences of the trauma experienced by a child, be considered serious security concerns to those individuals? Moreover, is it irrelevant to ask what civil liberties these individuals accept to sacrifice so as to avoid these threats? Indeed, considering this issue within this elitist framework causes us to miss out on a myriad of such details of the genuine voice of the public, which ultimately leads to rendering this voice invisible, and "marginalized".

Secondly, certain papers examining threat perceptions of the public (Gordon and Arian 2001; Bloch-Elkon 2011; Radnitz 2022), especially those emerging from terrorism (Craft and Wanta 2004; Huddy et al. 2005; Bloch-Elkon 2007; Meyer 2009; Shandler, Kostyuk and Oppenheimer 2023), strengthen the conceptualization critique here. For instance, Leonie Huddy et al. (2005) measure threat perception and political behavior of the public by limiting them to certain elitist frames. The political behaviors they are trying to measure are very clearly the result of elitist debates. Indeed, 9/11 is somehow directly considered to impact the public perception towards "Bush approval", "reactions to Arabs", and the United States' (US) "leading role in solving international problems" (Huddy et al. 2005: 601–3). They do not ask questions that can foreground how 9/11 left a mark on the public; whether these effects will have a direct impact on certain political behaviors; and what kind of behaviors are

4 This categorization has been created by the authors to systematically present empirical support for their arguments. These themes have been particularly preferred because of VA's focus on defining concepts like security, threat, and terrorism on individual and local scales.

proposed among those who think they should. Similarly, Stephanie Craft and Wayne Wanta use a framework to measure the public perception of threat after 9/11 (Craft and Wanta 2004: 458). Indeed, the public may very well generate some concerns specific to its own particular context. However, instead of explicitly disclosing the public voice, perhaps unintentionally, they view the public through the lens of the media, confining public concerns to a narrow framework that includes particular issues such as "air traffic safety", "future terrorist attacks in the US", "the effects on the economy", "a prolonged war in Afghanistan", "the Israel-Palestine conflict", and "the threat of biological and chemical warfare" (Craft and Wanta 2004: 459). In both cases, what is at stake is not so much the genuine reflections of the public anxiety or threat perception generated by 9/11 and its consequences, but rather the extent to which the public support elitist concerns and policies after the attack and the extent to which they adopt the concerns of the media respectively.

Thirdly, the papers examining public attitudes on certain foreign and security issues (Murray and Leduc 1976; Gadarian 2010; Canan Sokullu 2012; Mondak and Hurwitz 2012; Lahav and Courtemanche 2012; Sumaktoyo and Muhtadi 2022; Banai, Votta, and Seitz 2022) built another category of the conceptualization critique. For instance, Chung-li Wu and Alex Min-Wei Lin (2024) collected the views of both Taiwanese and Americans on whether the US would defend Taiwan in a potential conflict between Taiwan and China. However, they unintentionally impose a particular US image on the participants and ask them to adopt one of the different images. Indeed, respondents who said that the US would adopt a defensive stance were required to choose from a range of options regarding the reasoning behind this. The options included President Trump's personal quality of being "very tough on China", the "strategic significance of Taiwan's location in the Asia-Pacific region", Taiwan being an "important economic partner of the US", the fact that "the US and Taiwan are both democratic countries", the US support for "the ruling Democratic Progressive Party", and the US's capability of "defeating China in a military conflict" (Wu and Lin 2024: 137–38). However, these choices overlooked respondents' own historically situated experiences and beliefs. In a nutshell, it seems that literature often imposes biased conceptualizations rather than allowing the public to form its own understandings, ultimately rendering engagement with the public more limited.

The Data Collection Process

The data-collection processes of the FPA papers are the third and last main category of the critique realized here. Even if the previous two hardships before a well-suited engagement are surpassed somehow, the data collection processes may ruin the whole research. It is clear that using predetermined techniques, such as closed-ended or multiple-choice questions, in a research design where diverse publics are expected to share their narratives can create problems by limiting their experiences and imposing certain assumptions (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015: 7). Instead, open-ended questions that allow individuals to express their

narratives and reveal their cultural and historical repertoires are better suited for this type of research design[5] (Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018: 11). Indeed, such questions have the potential to "maximize opportunities for individuals' own attitudes to come to the fore" (Jarvis and Lister 2012: 162), thereby allowing participants to actively shape the discourse. In contrast, approaches reliant on predefined frameworks risk relegating individuals to the role of "passive subjects", constrained by externally imposed narratives (Vaughan and Stevens 2015: 6). Similarly, starting the data collection processes with certain presuppositions and perhaps generating certain categorizations based on these presuppositions might undermine a sound engagement with the public (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2015: 7). Such assumptions to a certain degree "close off debates" and narrow the scope of engagement, limiting how phenomena are typically understood through the contextually situated articulations of individuals (Vaughan and Stevens 2015: 2). Also, they shape expressions to fit the researcher's perspective and reinforce stereotypes within predefined boundaries. Consequently, this not only misrepresents the plurality and diversity of vernacular motifs but also biases data interpretation, raising concerns about "representation and legitimacy" in public engagement efforts (Jarvis and Lister 2012:163-168; Vaughan and Stevens 2015: 2; Vaughan and Williams 2021: 7-17).

The fact that predetermined, close-ended surveys (Todorov and Mandisodza 2004; Benson and Niou 2005; Bloch-Elkon 2007; 2011; Hoffman and Shelby 2017; Erdoğan 2020; Van Assche and Dierckx 2021; Özen, Dal and Tokdemir 2023; Tokdemir, Metintaş and Köstem 2024; Qi and Garand 2024) rather than open-ended ones dominate the examined literature, limits engagement with the public, even though some have recognized the shortcomings of such techniques and tried to take more nuanced steps in terms of research design, such as using open-ended questions (Cohen-Louck 2019), seeking to capture diversity (Meyer 2009) and seeking to overcome the problem of poor engagement with relevant realities (Çırakoğlu, Demirutku, and Karakaya 2021; Wu and Lin 2024). The supporting points for this argument are structured below in two respects: assumptions to data collection, and type of questions. Firstly, Oscar Fernández et al. (2023) provide an important example of how data collection processes can be problematically built on certain assumptions (also Okyar and Güneş 2016; Vrânceanu and Lachat 2021). They aim to measure how the European public reacted on security issues in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its possible reasons (Fernández et

5 Open-ended approaches are not novel in foreign policy analysis discussions. Ann Tickner, (2005) for instance, emphasizes the importance of posing unconventional questions in feminist methodology and employing diverse methods that diverge from the positivist/traditional frameworks of IR. In this sense, while it may appear that vernacular and feminist methodologies converge, it is crucial to recognize a nuance between them: Feminist methodology emerges as a challenge to the "androcentric or masculine biases" that it claims embedded within traditional frameworks (Tickner 2005: 3, 7). However, the Vernacular Approach neither operates on a dichotomy of femininity and masculinity nor prioritizes any specific experiences or subjects, even though the major tendency of the current literature is to examine ordinary citizens (Jarvis 2018: 11). It merely focuses on eliminating all biases and presumptions and offers a methodology that permits the revealing of vernacular motifs in all their contextuality. Therefore, in this study, and by extension in the Vernacular Approach, the use of open-ended questions and the pursuit of presumption-free research significantly distinguishes it from the objectives of feminist methodology.

al. 2023: 463). However, the data collection process is based on a presupposition that "the framing of policy issues by the media, campaign groups and epistemic communities" can reflect "a combination of public beliefs and perceptions" on certain issues (Fernández et al. 2023: 465). Building on this assumption, they do neither engage directly with the public nor get them to talk, but rather only by gathering data from several "news sources" to "examine citizens' perceptions" (Fernández et al. 2023: 467). However, it places the European public in a passive role, raising doubts about the extent to which it reflects their contextual and genuine motifs on security issues, apart from the method's acknowledged limitations (Fernández et al. 2023: 477). In this sense, categories of the population that were not properly established in the research designs somehow found themselves defending a particular view.

Secondly, the types of questions used in the data collection process constitute another ground basis. For example, Steven Brechin (2003), in portraying public attitudes toward global warming, despite being aware of the public's "considerable uncertainties" in the face of the elitist "unified voice" on global warming issues, does not apply certain questions that may disclose "genuine" views such as what global warming means to individuals or what feelings it evokes and that may richly reflect these abovementioned uncertainties (Brechin 2003: 106, 112). Rather, he just asks whether it is a serious problem among "other environmental problems" (Brechin 2003: 112). Thus, the types of questions used by Brechin narrow the richness of individual perspectives to a superficial choice of whether global warming is perceived as a threat. Similarly, to understand European support for increased border controls due to Covid-19 and the motivations behind it, Marie Lindholt et al. (2021: 6) use a question about who is responsible for the "corona crisis becoming so severe". Under the "blame" parameter, many reasons are cited, ranging from "China" to their own governments and "the World Health Organization" to "lay individuals" and "the media" (Lindholt et al. 2021: 6, 7, 10). However, could there not be many other reasons individuals consider beyond these limits? For instance, might some explain the issue in religious terms? Perhaps they believe their governments take the matter seriously but lack the capacity to address it effectively. Does reducing the whole issue to a few options not mean stunting an existing richness and forcing individuals to think within these standardized patterns? (Ko 2019)

Distinctively, the last support, Keren Cohen-Louck (2019) stands out as an important exception that strengthens the criticism differently. In understanding the public's perception of the threat from terrorism, he employs open-ended questions like "What do you feel when there are terrorist attacks", "What feelings do you feel during this period", and "How does this period influence you" (Cohen-Louck 2019: 891). And indeed, the results have emerged as adorned with individuals' personal motifs. The method has enabled individuals to reveal the uncontrollability of terrorism in their eyes, their feelings that terrorism can happen anytime and anywhere and that this uncontrollability makes them feel like randomly drawn balls in a lottery (Cohen-Louck 2019: 894–95). It has also disclosed, beyond standardized patterns, a genuine terrorist image in an individual's mind: A man with a stubble beard, a knife in his hand, running as if possessed, shouting "Allah is great" (Cohen-Louck 2019: 896). It should be clear by now

that this kind of terrorism/terrorist image, which stands out with all its contextual richness, cannot be obtained through a data collection process adorned with standard molds. In short, it is reasonable to assert that most of the investigated FPA, despite some exceptions, suffers from deficient data-collection processes that hinder a detailed understanding of relevant realities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, inspired by the potential of the VA to enrich the FPA, this paper sought to highlight the methodological deficiencies of the latter in engaging with the public. The critique is structured around three main points: Firstly, although the FPA often overlooks public diversity, it demonstrates notable variation in its approach towards the nature of the public, countering claims that it solely serves elitist views. Secondly, it is dominated by elite-centered conceptualizations, which result in the regeneration of elite discourse and hinder the expression of ordinary voices. Lastly, it suffers from inadequate data collection processes that restrict the public's ability to express their own perspectives. Ultimately, it is asserted that certain FPA studies exhibit methodological shortcomings in engaging with public opinion due to their homogenizing approaches to the nature of the public, reliance on elitist conceptualizations, and restrictive, flawed data collection processes.

By doing so, this paper contributes to the FPA in a threefold manner: First, it aims to advance FPA by reevaluating the role of the public in foreign policy, contributing to the ongoing debate on whether foreign policy serves the elite or the public, and exploring the potential for diverse public voices to play a more significant role in foreign policy analysis. Second, it emphasizes the need to revise elite-centered conceptual frameworks in FPA to better include diverse public perspectives, thereby contributing to a more balanced approach in future research and enriching the discourse surrounding public engagement in foreign policy. Third, by advocating for the development of inclusive data collection techniques, it aims to effectively capture diverse public perspectives, contributing to the encouragement of innovative methods, including digital tools, to enhance the representation of public voices in foreign policy discourse. Eventually, it seeks to inspire a new research agenda, "Vernacular Foreign Policy", that prioritizes diverse public voices and experiences, contributing to more inclusive approaches.

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