

# Indonesian Diaspora and Economic Diplomacy: A Systematic Literature Review of Transnational Networks, Soft Power, and Development

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**Abstract.** The growing importance of diaspora communities in international relations has increased scholarly interest in their contributions to economic diplomacy and national development. However, research on the Indonesian diaspora remains fragmented across migration studies, public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and development studies. This study aims to systematically review the literature on the role of the Indonesian diaspora in economic diplomacy by examining the interconnections among transnational networks, soft power, economic engagement, and development outcomes. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach based on the PRISMA 2020 framework, relevant publications were identified, screened, and synthesized from major academic databases. The findings reveal that Indonesian diaspora communities function as strategic transnational actors whose contributions extend beyond remittances and traditional migration activities. The literature indicates that diaspora engagement operates through four interconnected dimensions: (1) transnational networks that facilitate the flow of knowledge, information, capital, and opportunities; (2) soft power generation through cultural diplomacy, education, and public diplomacy; (3) economic engagement through trade promotion, investment facilitation, entrepreneurship, and tourism development; and (4) development outcomes, including innovation diffusion, human capital development, competitiveness enhancement, and economic growth. The review also highlights the growing role of digital technologies in strengthening diaspora engagement while identifying persistent institutional and policy constraints. The main originality of this study lies in the development of an integrated Diaspora Economic Diplomacy framework linking transnational networks, soft power, economic engagement, and development outcomes. This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive interdisciplinary perspective and establishing diaspora economic diplomacy as an emerging field of inquiry.

**Keywords:** Indonesian diaspora; economic diplomacy; transnational networks; soft power; development outcomes

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing interconnectedness of the global economy has strengthened the role of diaspora communities as strategic actors in international relations. Once viewed primarily as sources of remittances, diasporas are now recognized for their broader contributions to trade, investment, entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer, innovation, and international networking (Cahyanto et al., 2023; Radić & Bogdan, 2024). Their transnational position enables them to connect home and host countries through economic, social, and cultural linkages, making them valuable non state actors in supporting both national development and international engagement.

This shift has important implications for economic diplomacy. Contemporary economic diplomacy extends beyond state led negotiations and increasingly involves non state stakeholders, including businesses, civil society, and diaspora communities (Sabaruddin, 2017). Through their

dual embeddedness in home and host country contexts, diaspora members facilitate market access, promote investment, strengthen business partnerships, and reduce institutional and cultural barriers. At the same time, diaspora communities contribute to soft power and public diplomacy by promoting national culture, education, and professional achievements, thereby enhancing Indonesia's international image and credibility (Huijgh, 2017).

Empirical evidence demonstrates the multidimensional contributions of the Indonesian diaspora. Indonesian culinary communities in the Netherlands have strengthened Indonesia's cultural branding through gastrodiploamacy (Yayusman et al., 2023), while diaspora engagement in education has fostered positive international perceptions of Indonesia (Indraswari & Aryani, 2019). Other studies show that diaspora networks support tourism recovery, international cooperation, and broader development initiatives by facilitating knowledge exchange and transnational collaboration (Cahyanto et al.,

2023). Collectively, these studies indicate that diaspora communities generate diplomatic, economic, and developmental benefits that extend well beyond conventional migration outcomes.

Despite this growing literature on Indonesian diaspora communities, important research gaps remain. Existing studies are largely fragmented across migration, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, education, tourism, citizenship, and migration governance, with limited attention to how these dimensions collectively contribute to economic diplomacy (Dewansyah, 2019; Wardhani, 2023; Yayusman et al., 2023). Moreover, most studies examine diaspora engagement from isolated perspectives, resulting in the absence of an integrated framework linking transnational networks, soft power, economic engagement, and development outcomes. The literature is also dominated by qualitative case studies, providing rich contextual insights but offering limited synthesis of broader patterns and theoretical relationships. Consequently, there is still no comprehensive understanding of how Indonesian diaspora communities contribute to economic diplomacy across different sectors and contexts.

To address these gaps, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of the Indonesian diaspora and economic diplomacy literature using the PRISMA 2020 framework. The review integrates four interconnected dimensions transnational networks, soft power, economic engagement, and development outcomes to provide a comprehensive understanding of diaspora contributions to Indonesia's economic diplomacy. By synthesizing findings across disciplinary boundaries, this study moves beyond sectoral analyses and proposes an integrated perspective on Diaspora Economic Diplomacy, in which diaspora communities are conceptualized as strategic non state actors operating simultaneously within diplomatic, economic, and developmental processes.

The originality of this study lies in the development of an integrated conceptual framework that connects diaspora engagement, transnational networks, soft power generation, economic engagement, and development outcomes within a single analytical model. Unlike previous studies that examine these dimensions separately, this review demonstrates their sequential and mutually reinforcing relationships, thereby contributing to the emerging literature on diaspora economic diplomacy. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question:

How has the academic literature explained the role of Indonesian diaspora communities in economic diplomacy through transnational networks, soft power, economic engagement, and development outcomes?

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize and critically evaluate existing research on the role of the Indonesian diaspora in economic diplomacy. The SLR approach was selected because the literature on diaspora engagement, economic diplomacy, transnational networks, and soft power remains fragmented across multiple disciplines. Compared to traditional narrative reviews, SLR provides a transparent, systematic, and replicable process for identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant studies. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility (Page et al., 2021).

The review aimed not only to summarize existing findings but also to identify dominant themes, theoretical developments, methodological trends, research gaps, and future research directions concerning Indonesian diaspora engagement in economic diplomacy. Accordingly, the study combined descriptive and interpretive synthesis to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between diaspora communities, transnational networks, soft power, and development outcomes.

### Research Questions

The review was guided by the following research question: How has the academic literature conceptualized and explained the role of Indonesian diaspora communities in economic diplomacy through transnational networks, soft power mechanisms, and development outcomes? To address this question, the study explored five analytical dimensions: (1) dominant theoretical perspectives, (2) conceptualizations of transnational networks, (3) forms of soft power and diplomatic engagement, (4) economic and developmental outcomes of diaspora activities, and (5) emerging research gaps and future research opportunities.

### Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using

Scopus as the primary database due to its extensive coverage of high quality peer reviewed publications in international relations, migration studies, diplomacy, and development studies. Additional searches were undertaken through Google Scholar and Crossref to support citation tracking and reference verification.

Searches were performed on article titles, abstracts, and keywords (TITLE–ABS–KEY) using combinations of terms related to Indonesian diaspora, economic diplomacy, transnational networks, soft power, public diplomacy, and development. The principal search string was:

"Indonesian diaspora" OR "Indonesia diaspora" OR "Indonesian migrant" OR "Indonesian expatriate" AND "economic diplomacy" OR "diaspora diplomacy" OR "economic engagement" AND "transnational network" OR transnationalism AND "soft power" OR "public diplomacy" OR "cultural diplomacy" AND development OR trade OR investment OR entrepreneurship OR innovation OR "knowledge transfer". The search was conducted between January and March 2026 and focused primarily on publications published between 2015 and 2026.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

To ensure relevance and quality, studies were included if they: (1) were published in peer reviewed journals; (2) were written in English; (3) focused on Indonesian diaspora communities or transnational Indonesian networks; (4) addressed issues related to economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, development, trade, investment, entrepreneurship, or international engagement; and (5) provided empirical, conceptual, or theoretical contributions relevant to the review objectives.

Studies were excluded if they: (1) focused solely on migration without discussing diplomatic, economic, or developmental implications; (2) consisted of editorials, book reviews, conference abstracts, dissertations, or non peer reviewed publications; (3) lacked full text availability; or (4) were unrelated to the Indonesian diaspora context.

### **Study Selection and Quality Assessment**

The article selection process followed the four stages of the PRISMA 2020 framework: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. Duplicate records were removed during the identification stage, followed by title and abstract screening. Remaining articles underwent full text review to assess their relevance, methodological quality, and

contribution to the research objectives. A PRISMA flow diagram was developed to document the entire selection process and enhance transparency (Page et al., 2021).

To ensure the robustness of the findings, each study was assessed according to the clarity of its objectives, theoretical consistency, methodological transparency, analytical rigor, and relevance to diaspora and economic diplomacy research.

### **Data Extraction and Analysis**

A structured data extraction framework was used to collect information on publication characteristics, theoretical perspectives, research methods, forms of diaspora engagement, economic diplomacy dimensions, soft power mechanisms, development outcomes, and identified research gaps.

The extracted data were analyzed using qualitative thematic synthesis. The analysis began with open coding to identify recurring concepts and themes across the literature, followed by axial coding to organize related concepts into broader thematic categories. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) diaspora engagement and transnational networks, (2) soft power and public diplomacy, (3) economic diplomacy and international economic relations, and (4) development outcomes and national competitiveness.

The final stage involved interpretive synthesis, which integrated findings across themes to develop a comprehensive understanding of how Indonesian diaspora communities contribute to economic diplomacy through interconnected economic, cultural, diplomatic, and developmental processes.

### **Reliability, Validity, and Ethical Considerations**

The reliability and validity of the review were strengthened through transparent search procedures, predefined inclusion criteria, systematic coding, and quality assessment. Methodological triangulation was achieved by incorporating conceptual, qualitative, and empirical studies from multiple disciplines. Because the study relied exclusively on publicly available academic publications, ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, all sources were cited accurately and analyzed in accordance with principles of academic integrity and systematic review research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Indonesian Diaspora as Strategic Non State Actors in Economic Diplomacy

A key finding of this review is the growing recognition of the Indonesian diaspora as strategic non state actors in economic diplomacy. While economic diplomacy has traditionally been regarded as a state led activity, recent studies demonstrate that diaspora communities increasingly facilitate international economic engagement through their transnational networks, cultural competencies, and institutional familiarity across home and host countries. Their dual embeddedness enables them to bridge markets, investors, academic institutions, and policy networks while reducing cultural and institutional barriers. Consequently, diaspora engagement has evolved beyond migration related activities to become an important complement to state economic diplomacy.

Empirical evidence consistently shows that Indonesian diaspora communities contribute to economic diplomacy through multiple channels. Culinary diaspora communities promote Indonesia's international image while supporting trade and tourism through gastrodiploacy (Yayusman et al., 2023). Diaspora engagement has also strengthened tourism recovery, international networking, and economic resilience (Cahyanto et al., 2023), while educational initiatives have enhanced academic cooperation and Indonesia's global reputation (Indraswari & Aryani, 2019). Other studies further highlight diaspora contributions to public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and policy reform, reflecting their expanding role in advancing Indonesia's international engagement (Dewansyah, 2019; Huijgh, 2017; Wardhani, 2023).

Cross study synthesis reveals three important patterns. First, diaspora communities have shifted from being viewed primarily as cultural representatives to strategic actors generating tangible economic outcomes through trade, investment, entrepreneurship, and market expansion. Second, their influence is derived from transnational social capital that facilitates knowledge exchange and cross border collaboration. Third, these findings reflect a broader transformation of economic diplomacy from a state centric to a multi stakeholder model involving governments, businesses, civil society, and diaspora communities (Sabaruddin, 2017). Nevertheless, existing research remains fragmented across migration, public diplomacy,

cultural diplomacy, tourism, and education, with limited theoretical integration and insufficient understanding of how diaspora networks translate into economic and diplomatic outcomes.

This review addresses these limitations by advancing the concept of Diaspora Economic Diplomacy, which conceptualizes diaspora communities as simultaneously functioning as network builders, soft power agents, economic intermediaries, and development actors. This integrated perspective demonstrates that contemporary economic diplomacy is increasingly network centric, with diaspora communities serving as strategic connectors that link Indonesia to global economic, institutional, and knowledge networks.

### Transnational Networks as the Foundation of Diaspora Influence

A central finding of this review is that transnational networks form the foundation of Indonesian diaspora influence. These networks connect individuals, businesses, educational institutions, governments, and civil society, facilitating flows of knowledge, information, capital, technology, and opportunities across borders. Evidence shows that diaspora networks contribute to tourism, gastrodiploacy, educational collaboration, policy reform, and cross-border cooperation (Cahyanto et al., 2023; Dewansyah, 2019; Indraswari & Aryani, 2019; Lin, 2023; Mudzakkir et al., 2024; Yayusman et al., 2023).

Cross-study synthesis indicates that these networks function as strategic infrastructures supporting economic, cultural, educational, and developmental objectives while enabling knowledge transfer and innovation. However, existing research remains fragmented and gives limited attention to digital connectivity and comparative evidence. This review therefore conceptualizes transnational networks as the foundational infrastructure of Diaspora Economic Diplomacy, arguing that diaspora influence depends less on population size than on the quality, diversity, and sustainability of its networks.

### Diaspora Communities as Instruments of Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

A major finding of this review is that Indonesian diaspora communities function as strategic actors of soft power and public diplomacy, shaping Indonesia's international image through cultural promotion, education,

professional activities, entrepreneurship, and community engagement (Huijgh, 2017; Indraswari & Aryani, 2019). Their transnational position enables them to strengthen people-to-people relations and build international trust.

Empirical studies show that diaspora-generated soft power operates through gastrodiploacy, education, cultural activities, and digital engagement (Cohen, 2019; Triwibowo, 2023; Wardhani, 2023; Winarnita, 2016; Yayusman et al., 2023). These findings reflect a shift toward multi-stakeholder public diplomacy, in which diaspora communities act as informal diplomatic actors and reputation builders. This review therefore advances Diaspora Soft Power Diplomacy, conceptualizing diaspora-generated soft power as a strategic resource that strengthens international trust, economic cooperation, and Indonesia's long-term diplomatic influence.

### **Cultural Diplomacy and Gastrodiploacy as Key Forms of Diaspora Engagement**

This review identifies cultural diplomacy and gastrodiploacy as important mechanisms of Indonesian diaspora engagement, strengthening Indonesia's international image, people-to-people relations, and soft power while creating economic opportunities in tourism, entrepreneurship, exports, and market expansion (Yayusman et al., 2023). Diaspora-led cultural activities, including artistic exchanges, education, heritage promotion, and community initiatives, further enhance Indonesia's global presence and international cooperation (Cohen, 2019; Drianda et al., 2021; Indraswari & Aryani, 2019; Mudzakkir et al., 2024; Wardhani, 2023).

Cross-study synthesis shows that diaspora communities act as cultural intermediaries, transforming cultural identity into trust, national branding, and economic opportunities. This review therefore positions cultural diplomacy and gastrodiploacy within Diaspora Economic Diplomacy, conceptualizing culture not only as a source of soft power but also as a strategic resource for facilitating tourism, trade, entrepreneurship, and broader economic engagement.

### **Diaspora Contributions to Development Outcomes**

A key finding of this review is that Indonesian diaspora communities have evolved beyond remittance providers into strategic development actors. Through transnational networks, they contribute to investment, entrepreneurship,

tourism, knowledge transfer, innovation, and human capital development, connecting Indonesia with global markets, expertise, and resources (Cahyanto et al., 2023; Indraswari & Aryani, 2019; Lin, 2023).

Cross-study synthesis highlights a shift from remittance-based to development-oriented engagement, with knowledge transfer, innovation, economic resilience, global integration, and human capital development emerging as key outcomes. This review therefore advances the concept of Diaspora-Led Development Diplomacy, emphasizing that diaspora value lies not only in financial resources but also in mobilizing knowledge, innovation, social capital, and international networks to strengthen national competitiveness and sustainable development.

### **Diaspora Entrepreneurship as a Driver of Economic Diplomacy**

This review identifies diaspora entrepreneurship as a key driver of economic diplomacy, transforming transnational networks into cross-border trade, investment, innovation, and market opportunities. Through their connections with home and host countries, diaspora entrepreneurs act as economic intermediaries, reducing institutional and informational barriers while facilitating international business and partnerships (Cahyanto et al., 2023; Kusbiantoro, 2025; Putri et al., 2025).

Cross-study synthesis shows that diaspora entrepreneurs convert social capital into economic opportunities, promote Indonesian products, facilitate investment, and support knowledge and innovation transfer. This review therefore advances Diaspora Entrepreneurial Diplomacy, positioning diaspora entrepreneurs as economic intermediaries, investment facilitators, and innovation brokers who transform transnational networks into economic and developmental outcomes while strengthening Indonesia's global economic engagement.

### **Digital Transformation and the Emergence of Digital Diaspora Diplomacy**

This review identifies digital transformation as a key driver of diaspora engagement and economic diplomacy. Digital platforms enable Indonesian diaspora communities to maintain transnational connections, facilitating communication, knowledge exchange, professional collaboration, cultural engagement, and business networking while strengthening soft power and public diplomacy (Huijgh, 2017; Triwibowo, 2023).



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Pathway from Transnational Networks to Development Outcomes

Empirical evidence shows that digital technologies support tourism promotion, educational collaboration, knowledge transfer, professional networking, and cross-border cooperation (Cahyanto et al., 2023; Indraswari & Aryani, 2019; Lin, 2023; Mudzakkir et al., 2024; Wardhani, 2023). This review therefore advances Digital Diaspora Economic Diplomacy, conceptualizing digital connectivity as a strategic infrastructure that amplifies diaspora influence and integrates online public diplomacy, economic engagement, and knowledge sharing to support Indonesia's economic diplomacy and sustainable development.

### **Institutional and Policy Constraints on Diaspora Engagement**

This review shows that Indonesian diaspora engagement remains constrained by institutional and policy limitations, despite its growing contribution to economic diplomacy and development. Key challenges include fragmented governance, weak policy integration, and limited institutional coordination (Effendi, 2022; Sabaruddin, 2017).

Cross-study synthesis identifies four major constraints: restrictive citizenship regulations, weak inter-institutional coordination, inadequate migrant protection and welfare governance, and uneven adaptation to digital diplomacy (Dewansyah, 2019; Huijgh, 2017; Jasuli, 2021; Renta & Paksi, 2023; Triwibowo, 2023). This review therefore advances Diaspora Governance for Economic Diplomacy, emphasizing legal and citizenship frameworks, institutional coordination, policy integration, and digital governance as key factors enabling diaspora resources to generate economic, diplomatic, and sustainable development outcomes.

### **Toward an Integrated Framework of Diaspora Economic Diplomacy**

This review demonstrates that the Indonesian diaspora's role in economic diplomacy is best understood through an integrated framework

linking transnational networks, soft power, economic engagement, and development outcomes. Diaspora activities in education, culture, entrepreneurship, tourism, and professional collaboration simultaneously strengthen Indonesia's international image, facilitate knowledge transfer, and expand economic opportunities (Cahyanto et al., 2023; Indraswari & Aryani, 2019; Yayusman et al., 2023).

The synthesis identifies an interconnected pathway: Transnational Networks → Soft Power Generation → Economic Engagement → Development Outcomes. Digital technologies strengthen each stage, while institutional and policy constraints may limit their effectiveness. This review therefore advances Diaspora Economic Diplomacy as an integrated framework that conceptualizes diaspora communities as network builders, soft power producers, economic intermediaries, and development actors, providing a foundation for future research and policies supporting Indonesia's economic diplomacy and sustainable development.

### **CONCLUSION**

This systematic literature review demonstrates that the Indonesian diaspora has evolved into a strategic transnational actor contributing to economic diplomacy and sustainable development. The findings reveal an interconnected pathway in which transnational networks facilitate knowledge, capital, and opportunity exchange; generate soft power; strengthen economic engagement through trade, investment, entrepreneurship, tourism, and partnerships; and ultimately contribute to development outcomes. Digital transformation further expands diaspora engagement, although fragmented governance, limited policy coordination, citizenship-related barriers, and uneven digital governance remain key constraints.

The study's main contribution is the Diaspora Economic Diplomacy framework, which

integrates transnational networks → soft power generation → economic engagement → development outcomes and conceptualizes diaspora communities as network builders, soft power producers, economic intermediaries, and development actors. Future research should empirically validate this framework through comparative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies. From a policy perspective, stronger institutional coordination, digital engagement, entrepreneurship support, and knowledge transfer are essential to maximize the Indonesian diaspora's contribution to economic diplomacy and national development.

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