

Diaspora-Based Cultural Diplomacy and Multilevel Governance: Evidence from the 2025 Javanese Diaspora Congress

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Abstract: This study examines diaspora based cultural diplomacy through the 2025 Javanese Diaspora Congress, focusing on official engagements at the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat and the involvement of the Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were drawn from media coverage, official Kraton publications, public statements from the regional government, and direct observation by the authors during the diaspora visit. The findings show that the Javanese diaspora acted as non state diplomatic actors by carrying cultural identity and shared historical narratives across borders. The Governor's participation provided institutional legitimacy and political recognition for diaspora engagement. The Kraton strengthened symbolic authority, authenticity, and trust, framing the encounter as culturally sanctioned diplomacy rather than mere ceremony. The study highlights how collaboration among diaspora communities, subnational government, and traditional authority produces a distinctive form of subnational diplomacy grounded in cultural legitimacy.

Keywords:

Cultural Diplomacy; Javanese Diaspora; Kraton Yogyakarta; Soft Power; Subnational Diplomacy

Pendahuluan

Diaspora and Cultural Diplomacy

Diplomacy in the contemporary global system increasingly extends beyond the exclusive domain of nation-states. Diaspora communities, subnational governments, and cultural institutions have emerged as influential actors in shaping transnational engagement through informal and symbolic channels (Adamson, 2019; Hocking, 2004). Among these, diaspora groups play a distinctive role by mobilizing shared identity, cultural memory, and social legitimacy.

Cultural diplomacy refers to the use of cultural expressions, heritage, and values to foster mutual understanding and international influence (Nye, 2004). Unlike

formal state diplomacy, cultural diplomacy relies on attraction and legitimacy rather than coercion. Diaspora communities enhance this process by acting as carriers of cultural narratives that resonate across borders and generations (Brinkerhoff, 2009).

This paper examines diaspora-based cultural diplomacy through the case of the 2025 Javanese Diaspora Congress, with particular attention to official engagements held at the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat and meetings involving the Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY). The study argues that the interaction between diaspora communities, subnational government, and traditional cultural authority constitutes a distinctive form of subnational diplomacy rooted in cultural legitimacy.

Diaspora, Soft Power, and Subnational Diplomacy

Diaspora diplomacy has been conceptualized as the strategic engagement of emigrant communities in advancing cultural and political influence beyond formal state channels (Adamson, 2019). Diaspora actors function as informal ambassadors whose credibility is derived from shared identity and cultural authenticity rather than official mandate.

The concept of soft power emphasizes attraction generated by culture, values, and perceived legitimacy (Nye, 2004). Cultural heritage, rituals, and symbolic practices serve as key resources of soft power, particularly when they are embedded in historically grounded institutions. Diaspora participation amplifies soft power by translating these cultural resources into transnational contexts (Vertovec, 2009).

Subnational diplomacy further expands this framework by recognizing the international roles of regions, cities, and local governments (Cornago, 2010). In the case of Yogyakarta, subnational diplomacy is uniquely shaped by the institutional dualism of modern governance and traditional authority. The Governor of Yogyakarta, who also holds the title of Sultan, embodies this dual role, enabling the integration of administrative governance and cultural leadership within diplomatic engagements (Buehler, 2014).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to analyze diaspora-based cultural diplomacy during the 2025 Javanese Diaspora Congress. The case study method is appropriate for examining complex social and institutional interactions within their real-life context (Yin, 2018).

Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure triangulation. These include national media coverage reporting on the diaspora congress, official

publications and announcements issued by the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, and public statements from the Government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, 2025). Primary qualitative data were also obtained through direct observation and author documentation, as the authors were involved in organizing activities during the diaspora visit.

The analysis focuses on thematic patterns related to cultural diplomacy, subnational governance, and the role of traditional authority in legitimizing diaspora engagement.

Findings

Diaspora as Non-State Diplomatic Actors

The Javanese diaspora participants originated from various regions, including Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. During official engagements at the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, diaspora members participated in culturally sanctioned meetings that reinforced their symbolic connection to Java as a cultural homeland.

These interactions positioned the diaspora as non-state diplomatic actors who conveyed Javanese cultural identity abroad. Rather than articulating formal political agendas, diaspora participants embodied cultural narratives rooted in shared history, language, and tradition, thereby contributing to people-to-people diplomacy (Hocking, 2004; Vertovec, 2009).

The Role of Subnational Government: Governor of Yogyakarta

The involvement of the Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta in meetings with diaspora representatives underscored the importance of subnational leadership in cultural diplomacy. The Governor's participation provided political recognition and institutional legitimacy to diaspora engagement, signaling state endorsement while maintaining a culturally grounded approach.

This finding illustrates how subnational governments operate as diplomatic actors by facilitating cultural exchange and reinforcing regional identity on the international stage (Cornago, 2010). In Yogyakarta, the convergence of gubernatorial authority and cultural leadership strengthens the credibility and coherence of diaspora-based diplomacy.

The Keraton as Cultural Authority in Diplomacy

The Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat served as the central avenue and cultural authority for the diaspora meetings. As a historically rooted institution, the Kraton confers symbolic legitimacy that extends beyond administrative governance. Its role in hosting the diaspora congress framed the engagement as a culturally

sanctioned event rather than a purely ceremonial gathering.

The Keraton's involvement highlights the continued relevance of traditional institutions in contemporary diplomacy. As a non-state actor with moral and cultural authority, the Kraton reinforces authenticity and trust—key elements of effective soft power (Clifford, 1997; Nye, 2004).



Figure 1. Meeting between Javanese diaspora representatives and the Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta at the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat during the 2025 Javanese Diaspora Congress, demonstrating subnational diplomatic engagement rooted in cultural authority.

Source: DiasporaJawa International

Policy Implications

The findings suggest that diaspora-based cultural diplomacy benefits from institutional collaboration between diaspora communities, subnational governments, and traditional authorities. Policymakers should formally recognize diaspora actors as partners in cultural diplomacy strategies, particularly at the regional level.

Local governments can enhance their international cultural presence by integrating traditional institutions into diplomatic engagements. The Yogyakarta case demonstrates that cultural legitimacy strengthens policy narratives and soft power outcomes. Institutional hospitality, symbolic recognition, and culturally grounded venues are critical instruments of effective subnational diplomacy.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that diaspora-based cultural diplomacy operates through a dynamic interaction between non-state actors, subnational governments, and traditional cultural authorities. The 2025 Javanese Diaspora Congress, held at the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat and involving the Governor of Yogyakarta, illustrates how cultural legitimacy and governance intersect in contemporary diplomacy.

By highlighting the role of diaspora communities and subnational actors, this paper contributes to cultural and policy studies by expanding the analytical scope of diplomacy beyond the nation-state. Future research may explore comparative cases to assess how traditional authority shapes diaspora diplomacy in different cultural contexts.

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