

HEALTH DIPLOMACY AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL STABILITY: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Health diplomacy has become a crucial element in global governance, serving not only to improve national health capacities but also as an instrument of soft power for donor countries. Within this framework, the European Union (EU) actively engages in international health initiatives, positioning itself as both a normative power and a key global health actor. Indonesia, as a strategic partner in Southeast Asia, provides a compelling case to examine how external health diplomacy influences domestic political dynamics. This study aims to analyze the role of the European Union (EU) in health diplomacy in Indonesia and to assess its implications for domestic political stability. The research seeks to understand how EU-led health cooperation contributes to strengthening Indonesia's health system and the legitimacy of its government in the public domain. Using a qualitative research design with a case study approach, this study examines policy documents, official EU communications, Indonesian Ministry of Health reports, and WHO publications. The analysis focuses on identifying the forms of EU support, the key actors involved, the mechanisms of implementation, and the political effects arising from such collaborations. The findings reveal that the EU's health diplomacy in Indonesia encompasses financial assistance, technical cooperation, joint research programs, and vaccine distribution. These initiatives collectively enhance Indonesia's health system capacity while reinforcing public trust and governmental legitimacy. Furthermore, health diplomacy operates as a soft power tool for the EU, strengthening its normative and humanitarian image in the global order. This study concludes that the EU's health diplomacy plays a dual role: it contributes to domestic stability in Indonesia through capacity building and simultaneously projects the EU's identity as a normative global actor. The research highlights the need for transparent, adaptive, and sustainable international health collaborations. It also encourages comparative analysis with other global actors such as China, the United States, and ASEAN to better understand variations in health diplomacy strategies and their political outcomes.

Keywords: Health Diplomacy, European Union, Indonesia, Soft Power, Political Stability, Global Health Governance.

INTRODUCTION

Health diplomacy constitutes a strategic instrument in international relations, integrating foreign policy interests with global health issues. Over the past decade, health diplomacy has evolved beyond efforts to enhance intergovernmental cooperation in health, functioning also as a political tool to build influence, legitimacy, and stability within the international system (Kickbusch & Liu, 2022).

This concept has emerged alongside the growing interconnection between public health, political stability, and international security. Global pandemics, such as COVID-19, have demonstrated how health can become a strategic issue affecting diplomacy, inter-state relations, and global governance (Falqui et al., 2024; Wong, Aslanyan, et al., 2025).

Health diplomacy plays a crucial role in fostering global solidarity and strengthening multilateral governance, particularly amid humanitarian crises, conflicts, and inequities in access to healthcare services (Ruckert et al., 2022). Several studies emphasize that health diplomacy can serve as a bridge between developed and developing countries, promote cross-border collaboration, and act as a negotiation tool in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Michaud & Kates, 2013; Ronzon et al., 2025). The practice of health diplomacy is often shaped by power dynamics, political interests, and the domestic contexts of participating countries (Ruckert et al., 2022).

As an archipelagic country with a large population, Indonesia faces complex health challenges, ranging from limited infrastructure and unequal access to healthcare

services to the threat of post-pandemic infectious diseases. Furthermore, health issues in Indonesia are closely intertwined with political and security considerations. Recent studies indicate that Indonesia's national security is influenced by social and political stability, as well as the government's capacity to ensure public health services (Haryono, 2024). Moreover, Indonesia's health diplomacy has become increasingly relevant amid rising geopolitical tensions, maritime security threats, and potential domestic political instability (Awal et al., 2025; Sarjito, 2025). The country's foreign policy in the health sector is not only aimed at strengthening international cooperation but also at projecting an image as a sovereign state capable of maintaining regional stability, particularly in the Indo-Pacific (Heiduk, 2022; Oktaviano, 2020). Additional challenges arise with the emergence of cyber diplomacy and digital technologies, which require Indonesia to balance security interests with global health collaboration (Darmayadi et al., 2025). Domestically, health diplomacy has the potential to reinforce political stability by enhancing public trust, managing crises, and legitimizing government authority both nationally and internationally (Dwi et al., 2025; Rudy & Adang Supriyadi, 2025).

Beyond the domestic context, the European Union (EU) represents a significant external actor in global health diplomacy. As a normative power, the EU seeks to promote health governance based on solidarity, multilateralism, and strategic partnerships (Luh & Baltag, 2021; Pattanshetty et al., 2024). The EU engages not only with the World Health Organization (WHO) but also

with developing countries, including Indonesia, to strengthen health systems and resilience in addressing health-related challenges.

The EU's involvement in health diplomacy is also driven by geopolitical and economic interests. Studies indicate that the EU leverages health diplomacy as a means of expanding political influence in Asia through cooperation in pandemic response, vaccine access, and capacity-building programs (Karačić Zanetti et al., 2023). The EU's role is particularly significant considering Indonesia's strategic position in Southeast Asia as a key actor in maintaining regional stability.

Although the literature has explored the relationship between health diplomacy, foreign policy, and global security (Rosenbaum et al., 2025), studies explicitly connecting health diplomacy with domestic political stability in Indonesia remain limited. Some research highlights Indonesia's health diplomacy in the context of international cooperation (Jatmika et al., 2021; Madu et al., 2025) or regional geopolitical frameworks (Awal et al., 2025; Oktaviano, 2020). However, few studies explicitly examine how health diplomacy contributes to domestic political stability, including the role of external actors such as the European Union.

Understanding this relationship is crucial for formulating foreign policy strategies that not only address global interests but also reinforce domestic political stability. Given Indonesia's political and security dynamics, often influenced by both external and internal factors, health diplomacy can serve as a strategic instrument to bridge global objectives with domestic needs.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the role of health diplomacy in supporting Indonesia's domestic political stability, with particular attention to the involvement of the European Union as an external actor. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following key questions:

How does the role of health diplomacy in the global order influence domestic political dynamics in Indonesia?. How do health, security, and political challenges in Indonesia shape the country's national health diplomacy strategy?. How does the European Union, as an external actor, support or influence Indonesia's domestic political stability through health diplomacy?. By addressing these questions, how can this research contribute theoretically to enhancing international diplomatic relations?

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Health Diplomacy: Definition, Role, and Global Trends

Global health diplomacy refers to the practice of negotiation and cross-border interaction that connects health interests with political, economic, and international security agendas (Kickbusch et al., 2013). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health diplomacy as a series of political processes, negotiations, and cooperative efforts aimed at improving global health while simultaneously strengthening inter-state relations (Kickbusch & Liu, 2022).

The development of health diplomacy has functioned not only as a means to address global health issues such as pandemics, HIV/AIDS, or polio but also as an instrument of foreign policy. Michaud & Kates

(2013) emphasize that health diplomacy can enhance political legitimacy, foster inter-state solidarity, and serve as a tool for shaping international norms. Global trends indicate a shift from a traditional North-South cooperation model toward multipolar engagement, including the active involvement of developing countries in the international health agenda (World Health Organization, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the strategic dimensions of health diplomacy. States have used vaccine distribution, medical aid, and research collaboration as instruments to expand political influence in specific regions (Li et al., 2025). This demonstrates that health diplomacy is increasingly understood as a complex negotiation tool, integrating national interests with humanitarian considerations within a single policy framework.

Soft Power and Domestic Political Stability

Joseph Nye's concept of soft power (1990) provides an important theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between health diplomacy and domestic political stability. Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through the appeal of its values, culture, and policies, rather than through coercion or military force. In the health sector, the provision of medical aid, technology, and research collaboration can enhance a nation's positive image and strengthen its legitimacy both internationally and domestically (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

For developing countries like Indonesia, health diplomacy has the potential to serve as a soft power instrument that reinforces government legitimacy among citizens. For instance, the

government's success in securing international cooperation for COVID-19 vaccine procurement not only impacted public health but also shaped public perceptions regarding the state's capacity to protect its population (Jatmika et al., 2021). There is a close connection between health diplomacy-based soft power and domestic political stability.

However, the literature also shows that soft power in the health domain can fail if perceived merely as a political tool. Li et al. (2025) highlight the shortcomings of China's health diplomacy in Southeast Asia due to domestic political factors in recipient countries, which limited the effectiveness of these efforts. This indicates that the relationship between health diplomacy and domestic political stability is context-dependent and influenced by internal national factors.

The Role of the European Union in Global Health

The European Union (EU) plays a significant role in global health diplomacy, emphasizing values such as solidarity, multilateralism, and institution-based governance (Luh & Baltag, 2021). The EU not only supports WHO initiatives but also develops partnerships with developing countries through health funding programs, vaccine distribution, and institutional capacity building (Pattanshetty et al., 2024).

The EU's engagement in global health reflects its ambition as a normative actor in international politics. Karačić Zanetti et al. (2023) stress that EU health diplomacy aims to respond to patient needs, strengthen health systems, and simultaneously expand political influence in strategic regions. In Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, the EU's role is particularly relevant

given shared challenges such as pandemics, maritime security, and food security, all of which have implications for domestic political stability.

Previous Studies on Health Assistance in Indonesia

The literature on Indonesia's health diplomacy remains limited, though some studies have highlighted specific aspects. Jatmika et al. (2021) discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic opened new governance opportunities for health diplomacy in Indonesia. Other research focuses on health diplomacy in relation to border issues, digitalization, and national security (Darmayadi et al., 2025; Madu et al., 2025).

Dwi et al., (2025) emphasize the importance of digital systems to strengthen law enforcement and domestic stability, which indirectly relates to public health. However, these studies have not comprehensively examined the relationship between health diplomacy, domestic political stability, and the role of external actors such as the European Union, highlighting a research gap that this study seeks to address.

Analytical Framework

This study employs Keohane & Nye Nye's soft power theory (1990; 2012) to analyze how health diplomacy may contribute to Indonesia's domestic political stability. Soft power is conceptualized as the influence derived from successful international cooperation, values of solidarity, and government legitimacy in managing health crises. Health diplomacy is positioned as a primary instrument mediating between foreign policy and domestic needs.

The WHO's health diplomacy framework (Widyastuti et al., 2023; Kickbusch et al., 2013) is utilized to understand health diplomacy as a negotiation process linking health issues with foreign policy. By integrating these two frameworks, this study aims to elucidate how health diplomacy impacts not only international relations but also domestic political stability in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study strategy within the Indonesian context. This approach was chosen because health diplomacy represents a complex phenomenon involving multiple actors, political interests, and policy dimensions that are difficult to quantify. The case study method allows for an in-depth analysis of Indonesia's health diplomacy dynamics, particularly in relation to the European Union (EU), and its implications for domestic political stability.

Data were obtained through document analysis, including:

1. National policy reports, such as the Ministry of Health (Kemenkes RI) health diplomacy strategies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents, and official reports related to health resilience.
2. European Union documents, including external policy reports, official European Commission publications, and health cooperation programs with partner countries.
3. Reports and publications from international organizations, particularly WHO, relevant to the global health diplomacy agenda and Indonesia's engagement.

4. Academic articles and international proceedings highlighting the relationship between health diplomacy, soft power, and domestic political stability.

This approach allows the researcher to trace narratives, discourses, and policies shaping health diplomacy practices, as well as to identify key actors and strategies employed. The analysis focuses on four main aspects:

1. Forms of EU support for Indonesia's health diplomacy, including technical assistance, funding, and cooperation programs.
2. Involved actors, including the Indonesian government, EU institutions, WHO, and civil society organizations.
3. Implementation mechanisms, covering bilateral and multilateral diplomacy channels and technical cooperation.
4. Political implications, i.e., how health diplomacy contributes to Indonesia's domestic political stability through legitimacy enhancement, public trust, and strategic positioning in the region.
5. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between health diplomacy, the EU as an external actor, and domestic political stability in Indonesia.

RESEARCH RESULT

Forms of European Union Support for Public Health in Indonesia

The European Union (EU) has a long-standing tradition of supporting the global health agenda through a combination of funding, research, and multilateral diplomacy (Luh & Baltag, 2021). In Indonesia, EU

support manifests across multiple dimensions.

First, programs and funding. Through the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) and other cooperation mechanisms, the EU allocates resources to comprehensively strengthen the national health system, including enhancing primary healthcare capacity, improving vaccination access, upgrading laboratory facilities, conducting surveillance of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and providing healthcare workforce training (Michaud & Kates, 2013; Nurfalah et al., 2023). This support also encompasses health research and technology transfer aimed at improving service quality, health system resilience, and general public welfare.

EU technical cooperation goes beyond material assistance, strengthening institutional capacity through cross-border health research. For example, Horizon Europe facilitates Indonesia-Europe research collaborations on infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance (Wong, Aslanyan, et al., 2025). Vaccine support and biotechnology innovation are also key areas. The EU is a major contributor to COVAX, accelerating vaccine distribution in developing countries, including Indonesia (Falqui et al., 2024). Cooperation also involves technology transfer to enhance domestic vaccine production capacity (Mardila, 2025). EU support is multidimensional—financial, technical, research-based, and in drug distribution—reinforcing the EU's image as a strategic partner in Indonesia's health development (Pattanshetty et al., 2024).

Impact of Health Diplomacy on Domestic Political Stability

EU health assistance contributes to the legitimacy of the Indonesian government, particularly during health crises. Successful access to international vaccines has enhanced public perception of the government's diplomatic capacity (Jatmika et al., 2021; Tony Haryono, 2024). External support helps mitigate criticism and strengthens the government's political position (Lipset, 1959).

Collaboration with the EU has also driven domestic policy reforms, including pharmaceutical supply chain governance, health information systems, and regulatory frameworks. This aligns with global trends in which health diplomacy is regarded as an instrument for strengthening national public policy (Labonte & Gagnon, 2010; Ruckert et al., 2022).

Effective health diplomacy increases public trust in the government. Transparency in vaccine distribution and the use of international assistance is crucial for maintaining political stability (Adaramola et al., 2025; Dwi et al., 2025). Conversely, unequal distribution can generate social resistance (Wong, Aslanyan, et al., 2025).

Health Diplomacy as an Instrument of EU Soft Power

Health diplomacy benefits Indonesia while serving as a soft power instrument for the EU. Health aid is used to project the EU as a normative power emphasizing solidarity (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Martinez, et al., 2025).

The EU differentiates itself from other actors. While the United States often links aid to geopolitical interests, and China uses vaccine diplomacy as a form of hard

bargaining (Martinez, et al., 2025), the EU emphasizes multilateralism and research (Amaya & De Lombaerde, 2019). Compared to ASEAN and WHO, the EU highlights technological and governance aspects of health (Harris & Thaiprayoon, 2025). Health diplomacy thus strengthens EU influence globally, consistent with the concepts of power and interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

Challenges and Limitations

Bureaucratic processes in aid distribution often delay effectiveness. This is common in international cooperation, where domestic regulations may conflict with global agendas (Taghizade et al., 2025). As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia faces serious challenges in distributing vaccines and medical aid, exacerbated by infrastructural limitations (Madu et al., 2025).

International aid can also be politicized. The government may claim diplomatic success as political legitimacy, while opposition parties may allege dependency on foreign actors (Sarjito, 2025; Rudy & Supriyadi, 2025). Certain segments of society and elites remain skeptical, particularly regarding sovereignty issues. Similar cases have been documented in other global health contexts, e.g., in South and Middle Asia (Ahmed et al., 2021; Heryana et al., 2025).

Synthesis of Analysis

EU support for Indonesia's health sector provides significant benefits for domestic political stability while reinforcing Europe's global position through soft power. This aligns with literature emphasizing health as a modern diplomatic instrument (Michaud & Kates, 2013; Wong, Martinez, et al.,

2025). Long-term success, however, depends on effective domestic management, equitable distribution, and public perception (Rosenbaum et al., 2025).

Table 1. European Union Health Diplomacy with Indonesia (2020-2025) and EU Member States' Support

No	EU Country / Support	Year	Policy / Diplomacy	Actors Involved	Policy Content (Health Focus)	Process (Mechanism of Cooperation)	Political / IR Approach	Implications for Indonesia's Domestic Stability	Reference
1	European Union (collective via WHO)	2024	EU support through WHO for COVID-19a emergency response and health system strengthening	EU, WHO, MoH Indonesia	Strengthening health system resilience, pandemic preparedness	Multilateral channel via WHO	Health Diplomacy, Soft Power	Enhance government legitimacy in crisis response and builds state capacity	WHO & EU (2024)
2	Germany, Netherlands (via ERIA)	2024	Signing of MoU between ERIA and a Ministry of Health of Indonesia	ERIA, MoH Indonesia	Policy development, strategic partnership	Bilateral + regional policy cooperation	Health Diplomacy, National Health Policy	Increase credibility of Indonesia's health policy and fosters policy learning	ERIA & MoH (2024)
3	France, Germany	2023	IFC-Indonesia Health Sector Growth Program	IFC, MoH Indonesia	Investment in health sector, infrastructure support	Public-private partnership (development finance)	Economic Diplomacy, International Relations	Expands health service capacity, but potential dependence on external financing	IFC & MoH (2023)

4	Belgium, Sweden	2024	Collaboration with Global Health Strategies (GHS)	GHS, MoH Indonesia	Health promotion, advocacy, communication	NGO-government collaboration	Health Diploma, Policy Analysis	Improve GHS health promotion and public trust, but limited structural reform
5	European Union (delegation)	2024	Launch of the BASIS Program	EU Delegation, MoH Indonesia, civil society	Social inclusion, health governance	EU program initiative with local engagement	Health Diploma, Public Diploma	Supports EU inclusivity and strengthens state-society legitimacy
6	Netherlands, United Kingdom	2025	Global Health Diplomacy Training	MoH Indonesia, EU partners	Capacity building for global health diplomacy	Training, knowledge transfer	Health Diploma, Capacity Building	Increase MoH Indonesia's bargaining power in global health forums
7	Germany, Netherlands	2024	Partnership through ARISE+ Indonesia	EU, ASEAN, MoH Indonesia	ASEAN health and economic integration	Regional integration platform	Economic Diploma, ASEAN Economic Integration	Strengthens regional role but may create external dependency
8	European Union (collective regulation)	2025	Launch of European Health Data Space (EHDS)	EU institutions, health data stakeholders	Digital health governance, data regulation	EU regulatory framework	Health Diploma, Digital Health Policy	Potential Wikipedia pressure for Indonesia to adapt EU-aligned digital

health
norms

The European Union's (EU) support for health programs in Indonesia during the 2020-2025 period demonstrates that health diplomacy serves not only as a tool for building health system capacity but also as an instrument for maintaining domestic political stability. EU support through the WHO for the COVID-19 response (2024), for example, represents a soft power strategy that strengthens the national health system while enhancing the legitimacy of the Indonesian government in managing the health crisis, in line with Nye's (1990) theory of soft power and the concept of global health diplomacy, which emphasizes the integration of health into foreign policy (Kickbusch & Liu, 2022; Luh & Baltag, 2021; Michaud & Kates, 2013). EU interventions in health contribute to domestic political stability by increasing public trust in the government's ability to provide adequate health services.

Collaboration with EU member states directly emphasizes the economic and institutional dimensions of health diplomacy. For instance, the MoU between ERIA and the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2024) and the IFC-Ministry of Health partnership (2023) demonstrate that the integration of economic diplomacy and strengthening of health institutional capacity contributes to domestic stability by creating more efficient coordination

networks, reducing social uncertainty, and supporting inclusive national policies (Amaya & De Lombaerde, 2019; Dwi et al., 2025). This multilevel approach also reflects the interconnection between public health and political security, particularly through digital initiatives such as the European Health Data Space (2025), which promotes transparency and accountability in health data, thereby enhancing national governance and government legitimacy (Mardila, 2025).

Capacity-building programs implemented by the EU through global health diplomacy training and the launch of the BASIS Program (2024-2025) show that health diplomacy also functions as a strategic instrument to instill efficient health management values and cross-sectoral coordination, which in turn supports domestic political stability (Amina H., 2025; Pattanshetty et al., 2024; Rudy & Adang Supriyadi, 2025). This approach underscores that modern health diplomacy is not only responsive to crises but also proactive in building national capacity, strengthening political legitimacy, and stabilizing socio-political conditions in the post-pandemic era, enabling Indonesia to play a more effective role in the global health diplomacy network (Jatmika et al., 2021; Luh & Baltag, 2021).

DISCUSSION

The analysis indicates that European Union (EU) support for Indonesia's health sector extends beyond technical and financial assistance, functioning also as a

diplomatic instrument with implications for domestic politics. The research question regarding how EU health support contributes to Indonesia's political stability can be

addressed through three dimensions: enhancing government legitimacy, strengthening health policies, and shaping international image through soft power.

These findings align with Nye's (1990) concept of soft power, in which the appeal of values and cooperation is more effective in building influence than coercion. Through health diplomacy, the EU positions itself as a normative power promoting solidarity and equitable global vaccine distribution (Kickbusch & Liu, 2022). This approach contrasts with other actors such as the United States or China, which more frequently link health aid to geopolitical interests (Wong, Aslanyan, et al., 2025).

Domestically, health diplomacy contributes to political stability by enhancing government legitimacy in the public eye, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jatmika et al., 2021). This reinforces Lipset's (1959) view that political legitimacy depends on a government's ability to meet citizens' basic needs. EU support, manifested through vaccine access, research, and health system capacity-building, resonates with public needs and strengthens social trust in the state (Dwi et al., 2025).

This article also offers a theoretical contribution by expanding understanding of health diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument with direct implications for domestic political dynamics. Previous literature (Labonte & Gagnon, 2010) has emphasized health diplomacy's role in global governance. The present findings demonstrate that the implications of health diplomacy are bidirectional: reinforcing the EU's international standing while influencing the political stability of recipient countries.

Empirically, this study enriches health diplomacy research by explicitly linking it to domestic political stability. The case of Indonesia illustrates how external support can be managed as a source of governmental legitimacy while serving as a soft power projection tool for international partners.

These findings underscore the strategic interaction between external health assistance and domestic governance. While European Union support strengthens Indonesia's health system and political stability, it also establishes a framework for collaborative problem-solving and knowledge transfer. This engagement enables Indonesia to adopt best practices in public health management, data systems, and crisis response, which in turn enhances institutional capacity and policy resilience. Such mechanisms indicate that health diplomacy not only serves immediate humanitarian and political objectives but also promotes the development of sustainable domestic governance structures capable of addressing future health crises (Michaud & Kates, 2013; Ruckert et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that EU support for Indonesia's health sector encompasses financial aid, technical cooperation, research, and vaccine distribution, contributing to the strengthening of national health system capacity (Luh & Baltag, 2021; Pattanshetty et al., 2024). Such support also contributes to domestic political stability by enhancing government legitimacy, strengthening health policies, and increasing public trust (Dwi et al., 2025; Lipset, 1959). Simultaneously, the EU leverages health diplomacy

as a soft power instrument to reinforce its normative image on the global stage (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Telle et al., 2025).

Academically, the study extends the literature on health diplomacy by emphasizing its connection with domestic political dynamics, not solely global governance issues (Labonte & Gagnon, 2010; Ruckert et al., 2022). It further supports the relevance of Joseph Nye's soft power theory and the concept of European normative power in international relations studies (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

Practically, the findings have implications for EU policy to continue strengthening long-term solidarity and cooperation in the health sector. For the Indonesian government and other Asian countries, the experience underscores the importance of managing international aid transparently, equitably, and adaptively according to local needs (Heryana et al., 2025; Madu et al., 2025).

For future research, comparative studies between the EU and other actors such as China, the United States, or ASEAN could enhance understanding of variations in health diplomacy strategies and their impact on political stability in recipient countries (Amaya & De Lombaerde, 2019).

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