

# Sports and Cultural Diplomacy Integration in Post-Pandemic COVID-19 International Events: Evidence from Indonesia's MotoGP Mandalika 2022

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## Abstract

This study analyzes Indonesia's strategic deployment of the 2022 MotoGP Mandalika as an integrated sports-cultural diplomatic tool and examines its effectiveness in promoting tourism recovery and strengthening international relations in the postpandemic era. A qualitative research approach was employed, incorporating semistructured interviews with key stakeholders. Data triangulation was performed via primary interview data and secondary sources from August 2023-January 2025, and the impacts of the event were analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of soft power, sports diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy. The analysis revealed that the MotoGP Mandalika event successfully contributed to a 1.46% increase in regional GDP and generated an additional 4.5 trillion Indonesian rupiah in economic value. The integration of local cultural elements, including the participation of 300 SME groups and traditional performance, enhanced the event's diplomatic impact. The study identified effective multistakeholder collaboration among government agencies, international organizations, and local communities as a crucial success factor. The findings demonstrate that integrating sports and cultural diplomacy through international sporting events can effectively serve multiple national interests, from economic recovery to diplomatic relationship enhancement to national security. The successful implementation of MotoGP Mandalika provides a model for developing nations seeking to leverage sporting events for diplomatic purposes while promoting sustainable tourism development in the postpandemic era.

*Keywords:* International relations; sports and cultural diplomacy; tourism development; soft power; MotoGP; Indonesia.

## 1. Introduction

In the global political landscape and the dynamics of international relations, the concept of soft power has become an important instrument for states to build influence through the appeal of culture, values, and policies (Nye, 2004b). In contrast to hard power, which relies on military and economic power, soft power operates through cultural and sports diplomacy, which can transcend geopolitical boundaries (Garamvölgyi et al., 2022). Sports diplomacy, as a derivative of this concept, has proven effective in shaping global perceptions, as reflected in China-US Ping-Pong Diplomacy (1971) and India-Pakistan Cricket Diplomacy (1987) (Gauttam et al., 2024; Kiani & Nazari, 2024; Pamment, 2019; Postlethwaite et al., 2023; Wang & Lu, 2008). In Indonesia, international sporting events such as the Motorcycle Grand Prix (MotoGP) are not only competitions but also strategic vehicles for restoring the image of tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic (Caraka et al., 2023; Chandra et al., 2023; Kena et al., 2024; Pratama & Harahap, 2023).

Although the potential of sports diplomacy as a soft power has been widely studied, empirical studies on its role in restoring a country's image after a global crisis are still limited (Grix et al., 2021; Murray, 2013). In particular, comprehensive analyses of the synergies of sports and cultural diplomacy in developing countries facing multidimensional postpandemic challenges are lacking. Previous research has focused more on the economic aspects of mega-events (Baker et al., 2024) or nation branding (Satrio, 2021) but ignored the political-international dimensions of organizing MotoGP as part of a foreign policy strategy. In addition, MotoGP research in Malaysia (Abd Wahab & Harza, 2019) and Indonesia (Kena et al., 2024) has not integrated Nye (2004a) soft power framework with a multidisciplinary approach to measure the impact of sports diplomacy on the image of tourism.

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In view of this, the utilization of Indonesia's sports and cultural diplomacy as soft power instruments in organizing the 2022 MotoGP event should be examined further. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze Indonesia's strategy in using the Mandalika 2022 MotoGP as a tool of sports culture diplomacy and measure its impact on the image of tourism in the new normal. The analysis focuses primarily on the strategic role of various stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector participants, and international organizations, in the successful implementation of this sports diplomacy initiative. This research provides unique insights into sporting events as diplomatic tools in the postpandemic era while examining their broader implications for national development and international relations.

## 2. Research Method

### 2.1. Study design and setting

This study uses a qualitative research method by collecting sources of information and references regarding Indonesia's sports and cultural diplomacy through the Mandalika MotoGP (Sukmawati et al., 2024). The research will be conducted from August 2023 to January 2025. The data collection process in this research was carried out in Mataram Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (with interviews with informants), the West Nusa Tenggara Provincial Tourism Office, the Customs and Excise Supervision and Service Office of Type C Customs C Mataram, and the Central Statistics Agency West Nusa Tenggara.

### 2.2. Data collection

This research data consists of two components, namely, secondary data derived from a literature study or desk research online from official web pages of government institutions and other organizations and offline from newsletters, magazines, and others, whereas primary data are obtained from interviews conducted in a semistructured manner with informants from the West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Provincial Tourism Office and Mataram Customs related to the research topic.

### 2.3. Research instruments

Qualitative research instruments require a focus on the issues raised by informing the reader about the research design, the use of qualitative research, and its main objectives. A research sample and all data collection and recording techniques that involve the analysis process and appropriate techniques are needed to present, analyze, verify, and convey the results of the research. Unlike other designs, the qualitative method includes the opinion of the researcher regarding the involvement and type of qualitative techniques used. The interview guidelines are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** List of questions

Data Theme	Question List	Intended Information
Indonesian Sports Diplomacy through the organization of the Mandalika 2022 MotoGP with the following details:	1. How is MotoGP an instrument for Mandalika development?	1. Tourism Office of West Nusa Tenggara Province
1. Sports as a tool for development	2. Can the existence of the Mandalika Circuit be profitable for the local and central government?	2. Central Bureau of Statistics of West Nusa Tenggara Province
2. Sport as a tool for <i>soft power</i>	3. Does this event bring in many local and foreign tourists?	3. Mataram Customs, Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara
3. Sport as an instrument to promote dialog and closer integration in multicultural societies, and at the international level	4. Is the organization of MotoGP in COVID-19 conditions acceptable and safe?	
4. Sport as a tool to promote peaceful relations at the international level		

### 2.4. Data extraction and data analysis

Data triangulation was performed during the data reduction process (Lune & Berg, 2017). This is because researchers attempt to compare the empirical data that have been collected and then interpret and synthesize the information and data on the basis of the research questions and theories used in this study. In accordance with Carter et al. (2014) and Cho & Lee (2014), this triangulation aims to minimize bias and misinterpretation of findings from various sources.

Therefore, this approach can increase the credibility of the results of this study. Data extraction and analysis were carried out by collecting, reducing, and comparing primary and secondary data generated from desk research and/or interviews. All the data are presented in the form of tables, images, and descriptive narratives.

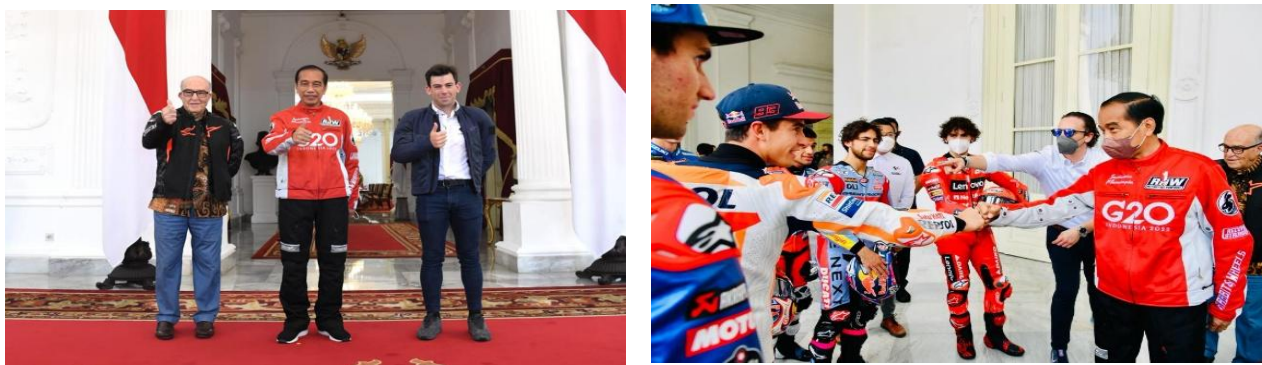
### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1. Indonesia's sports diplomacy in organizing the Mandalika MotoGP after COVID-19

The Indonesian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic's economic impact demonstrated a strategic approach to economic recovery through sports diplomacy and tourism development. In his Financial Note Introduction speech on August 14, 2020, President Joko Widodo emphasized tourism development as a key strategy for stimulating Indonesia's economic recovery, particularly through the development of 3A aspects (attraction, accessibility, and amenities) in five superpriority destinations (DSPs) (Biro Pers Media dan Informasi Sekretariat Presiden, 2021; Sabon et al., 2018). The Mandalika Circuit project, as one of these DSP initiatives, exemplified how infrastructure development could be accelerated even during the pandemic, culminating in its official inauguration by President Jokowi on November 12, 2021 (Biro Pers Media dan Informasi Sekretariat Presiden, 2021; Ramadhan & Kusumah, 2022).

The implementation of this sports diplomacy initiative was facilitated by a structured organizational framework. The Indonesia Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), operating under the INJOURNEY Tourism Development Corporation, was appointed as the primary manager. This state-owned enterprise specializes in developing and managing integrated tourism complexes and works in conjunction with the Mandalika Grand Prix Association (MGPA) and Dorna Sport to oversee motor sport events. The ITDC's vision of becoming a world-class tourism destination manager is aligned with the broader national strategy of leveraging sporting events for economic recovery (Nugraha, 2022).

The diplomatic significance of the Mandalika MotoGP was particularly evident in President Jokowi's reception of MotoGP riders and Dorna Sports representatives at Merdeka Palace, Jakarta. This diplomatic engagement represented a strategic application of sports diplomacy, as conceptualized by Havard Mokleiv and Scott Gates, where sports serve as a soft power tool for both domestic and international influence. President Jokowi's deliberate choice to wear a G20-branded jacket during these meetings sent a clear diplomatic message about Indonesia's readiness to host major international events (**Figure 1**) (Biro Pers Media dan Informasi Sekretariat Presiden, 2021).

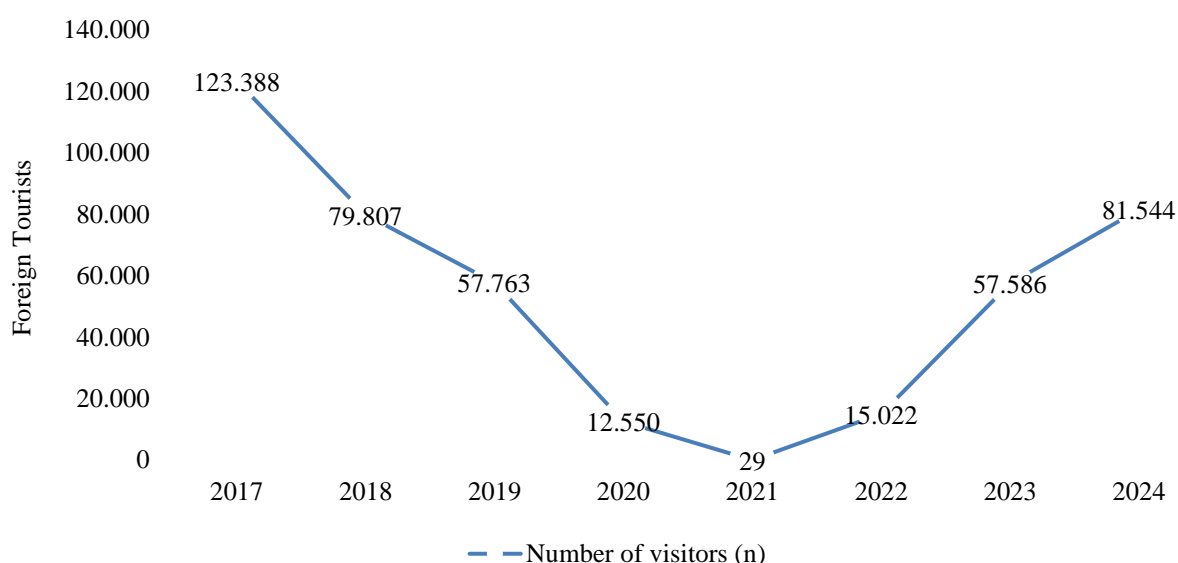


**Figure 1.** President Jokowi's welcome and hospitality at the opening of the Pertamina Grand Prix of Indonesia at Mandalika.

The successful execution of the 2022 Pertamina Grand Prix of Indonesia at Mandalika demonstrated effective collaboration among multiple stakeholders. The event's organization involved complex negotiations among various international stakeholders, including Dorna Sports, the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM), teams, riders, and global partners, while maintaining careful coordination with local stakeholders and businesses in Japan. The involvement of international organizations as primary event promoters facilitated a neutral diplomatic environment, enhancing Indonesia's position as a capable host nation.

The Mandalika MotoGP is not only a sporting event but also a symbol of Indonesia's economic revival in the international arena. This event contributed to an increase in the gross regional domestic revenue (GRDP) of West

Nusa Tenggara (NTB) of 1.46% and added value to the national economy of 4.5 trillion rupiah. The tourism industry, especially accommodations, food, and beverages, has experienced significant growth, with an increase in the room occupancy rate (TPK) of 22.29%. In addition, MotoGP created a multiplier effect that was felt not only in the NTB but also in other regions, with an increase in business actors of 41%, more than half of whom came from outside the NTB (Ayu Rahmatika, 2024; Taupikurrahman & Suwandana, 2022). Figure 2 shows that the number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia significantly declined from 2017-2021, not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic but also because of the impact of the earthquake in Lombok in 2018. The earthquake caused damage to infrastructure and a decline in tourist confidence; however, the organization of the 2022 and 2023 MotoGP successfully increased international tourist visits to the NTB again, confirming the effectiveness of sports diplomacy in building a positive image of the destination (Krismawati & Panuntun, 2022).



**Figure 2.** International tourist arrivals to Indonesia by entry point

The success of the Mandalika MotoGP positioned Indonesia as a credible host for future international sporting events. This achievement is particularly significant given the region's recovery from the 2018 Lombok earthquakes, which severely impacted tourism infrastructure and visitor confidence (Krismawati & Panuntun, 2022). The event's success has created opportunities for hosting other global sporting events, including the World Superbike Championship (WSBK), Formula E, and Motocross Grand Prix (MXGP). This diversification of international sporting events aligns with theoretical frameworks suggesting that sports diplomacy can enhance national soft power and stimulate economic growth through various channels (Abdi et al., 2019; Chalip, 2004). Thus, sports diplomacy through the Mandalika MotoGP not only strengthens Indonesia's soft power but also paves the way for a greater bargaining position in organizing world-class events in the future.

### 3.2. Indonesia's sports diplomacy in organizing the Mandalika MotoGP after COVID-19

The integration of local wisdom into international sporting events represents a significant dimension of cultural diplomacy that can enhance both the visitor experience and national reputation (Figure 3). The Mandalika MotoGP event demonstrated how cultural heritage can be strategically leveraged to create a multifaceted diplomatic platform that extends beyond traditional sports entertainment (Goytom, 2024). The incorporation of West Nusa Tenggara's cultural elements created a comprehensive cultural sporting experience that strengthened Indonesia's position in global tourism and international relations. The event's cultural diplomacy framework manifested through multiple channels, notably through the participation of 300 local SME groups in the Mandalika Circuit area. Cultural programming included strategic presentations of traditional dance performances at the airport reception and on the racing circuit, effectively showcasing Indonesia's cultural heritage to an international audience (Alhassan, 2023; Goytom, 2024; Knott et al., 2017; Larasati et al., 2023).



**Figure 3.** Lombok traditional dance performances and the national cost of parades at MotoGP events

The theoretical framework of cultural diplomacy, as conceptualized by Carbone (2017), provides a structured analysis through four key components: agent, agenda, vehicle, and target audience. In the Mandalika MotoGP, the agent component comprised multiple stakeholders, including the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the ITDC, the MGPA, and Dorna Sports, who worked in coordination with international bodies such as the FIM. This multistakeholder approach exemplifies the complexity of modern cultural diplomacy in international sporting events, where success depends on effective coordination between national and international stakeholders.

The agenda component aligns with Nye's concept of soft power, which focuses on promoting Indonesia as an attractive tourism and cultural destination while simultaneously advancing economic development objectives (Nye, 2004a, 2004b). The event's cultural diplomacy agenda was strategically designed to showcase both traditional heritage and modern capabilities, creating what Caraka et al. (2023) described as a comprehensive platform for international engagement. The vehicle component utilized the MotoGP event itself as the primary platform, supplemented by cultural exhibitions and tourism promotion activities. This approach aligns with Grix et al. (2021) assertion that international sporting events can effectively project positive national images through media coverage.

The target audience encompasses multiple stakeholders, both domestic and international, as outlined by Grix et al. (2021) and Sari et al. (2019). The event's global broadcast reached millions of viewers worldwide, whereas local communities in Lombok and West Nusa Tenggara served as cultural ambassadors, creating a bidirectional cultural exchange. The engagement of local communities, in particular, demonstrated how international sporting events can catalyze cultural pride and community development initiatives. The long-term implications of integrating cultural diplomacy into the Mandalika MotoGP extend beyond immediate economic benefits, potentially establishing a

precedent for future international sporting events in Indonesia to follow. This approach creates a sustainable model in which local cultural elements become integral to the event's appeal, generating lasting benefits for both host regions and the nation as a whole. The success of this integration suggests that cultural diplomacy can effectively enhance the value proposition of international sporting events while promoting sustainable cultural tourism.

### *3.3. International relations implications*

The successful execution of the MotoGP Mandalika event has significant implications for Indonesia's international relations. The event demonstrated Indonesia's capacity to leverage sports and cultural diplomacy as complementary soft-power tools in the postpandemic era. This integration has strengthened bilateral relationships with participating nations and international organizations, particularly in the motor industry. The concurrent timing with Indonesia's G20 presidency further amplified its diplomatic significance, highlighting the country's ability to host major international events while managing complex health protocols. Multilateral engagement through sports has created new channels for economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and tourism development, potentially influencing future diplomatic relationships in Southeast Asia.

### *3.4. Limitations*

Several limitations should be considered when evaluating this study's findings. First, the analysis focuses primarily on short-term economic and diplomatic outcomes, whereas long-term impacts remain unassessed. This research is limited by the relative novelty of integrating sports and cultural diplomacy in postpandemic international events, which limits comparative analysis with similar cases. Additionally, the scope of the study does not fully capture the perspectives of international stakeholders or the quantitative measurements of diplomatic effectiveness. The analysis of the impact of cultural diplomacy is based primarily on observable outcomes rather than systematic measurements of perception changes among international audiences. Furthermore, the unique circumstances of postpandemic recovery may affect the generalizability of the findings to future events or different events.

## **4. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that Indonesia successfully leveraged the MotoGP Mandalika event as a platform for integrated sports and cultural diplomacy in the postpandemic period. The strategic combination of international sporting events with local cultural elements created a powerful diplomatic tool that served multiple national interests, from economic recovery to enhancing international reputation. The integration of 3A aspects (attraction, accessibility, and amenities) with cultural diplomacy elements effectively achieves both tourism development and diplomatic objectives. The success of the Mandalika MotoGP demonstrates that well-executed sporting events can serve as effective vehicles for cultural diplomacy and economic development, particularly when they are aligned with broader national strategic objectives and supported by comprehensive stakeholder engagement. This integrated approach to sports and cultural diplomacy may serve as a model for other nations seeking to increase their international influence while promoting sustainable tourism development in the postpandemic era. Future research should focus on developing quantitative metrics for measuring the long-term diplomatic impact of such integrated events and exploring their potential applications in different cultural and geographic contexts.

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