



## Nusantara: A Study of Maritime Geopolitics and National Identity of Indonesia's Future Capital City

Riswanda Imawan<sup>1\*</sup>, Hendy Achmad Reynaldi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

<sup>2</sup>*Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand*

\*Corresponding Email: [r.imawan.psc23@mail.umy.ac.id](mailto:r.imawan.psc23@mail.umy.ac.id)

### Abstract

This research aims to examine the impact of moving the capital city on Indonesia's geopolitical dynamics and how this move contributes to the transformation of national identity. Rimland Theory is used to analyze the geopolitical aspects, highlighting the importance of the Nusantara's position at the center of the Asia-Pacific region and its potential impact on Indonesia's influence in the region. Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities provides a framework for understanding how the relocation of the capital city could redefine Indonesia's national identity, by introducing an inclusive narrative that transcends the dominance of Javanese culture. This research uses a qualitative approach with document analysis and interviews with political, social and cultural experts. The findings show that relocating the capital city has the potential to accelerate equitable development and strengthen Indonesia's position in the international arena. In addition, the relocation of the capital city also opens up opportunities to create a more inclusive national narrative, by recognizing cultural diversity outside Java. The novelty of this research lies in the application of both theories to examine the role of the archipelago as a new symbol that represents transformation in the geopolitical aspects and national identity of Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Capital city, geopolitics, indonesia, national identity, nusantara.

### 1. Introduction

In August 2019, Indonesia announced a monumental decision that would reshape the country's trajectory for decades to come: the relocation of its national capital from Jakarta to a newly planned city named Nusantara (Sekretariat Kabinet, 2022a; Sekretariat Negara, 2019). This move is far more than a logistical or administrative undertaking; it represents a profound shift in national identity, geopolitical structure, and Indonesia's development aspirations on the global stage. The decision addresses longstanding challenges plaguing Jakarta, including chronic traffic congestion, pollution, and serious environmental issues such as land subsidence (Bunnell, Aung-Thwin, Clendenning, Goh, & Smith, 2022). Although Jakarta has served as Indonesia's political and economic heart since independence, it now faces overwhelming problems that can no longer be resolved within the framework of an overburdened and deteriorating metropolitan center. Additionally, environmental

concerns and the need for an alternative administrative hub are urgent factors behind the relocation (Avery & Moser, 2023; B, Budiman, Idris, Nasir, & Khaerunnisa, 2022; Sulistiyono & Rochwulaningsih, 2013)

The relocation to Nusantara in East Kalimantan directly seeks to rebalance the political and economic power that has long been concentrated in Java. Nusantara is envisioned not only as the new administrative capital but also as a symbol of renewal and regional equity in national development (Ratcliffe, 2022). Positioned at the geographic center of Indonesia and far removed from Java's dominance (Basuki, 2023), Nusantara is expected to reinforce the spirit of cultural diversity and unity that underpins this vast archipelagic nation. With over 17,000 islands and hundreds of ethnic groups, Indonesia faces significant challenges in forging a national identity that accommodates such diversity. Jakarta has long represented Javanese culture, which is often perceived as dominating the national narrative. By relocating the capital to Nusantara, the government has the opportunity to redefine Indonesia's identity by emphasizing the cultural richness beyond Java, which has often been marginalized in central policymaking.

Historically, capital cities play a critical role in shaping a nation's identity. Capitals are more than just administrative centers; they are symbols of a country's values and aspirations, reflecting its historical journey, cultural heritage, and national ideals (Afrimadona, 2021; Maheshwari & Singh, 2021; Salim, Bettinger, & Fisher, 2019; Skey, 2017). Capitals such as Washington, D.C., Paris, and Cairo are not only seats of government but also powerful representations of their countries' global identities. Similarly, Nusantara is expected to become not only the new seat of government but also a new face of Indonesia – one that is inclusive and modern, embodying a nation committed to renewal while embracing diversity and the potential of all its regions.

However, the decision to relocate a capital is not without precedent. Several countries have undertaken similar moves for strategic, political, or symbolic reasons (Lyons, 2019). For example, Brazil relocated its capital from Rio de Janeiro to the purpose-built Brasília, and Kazakhstan shifted its capital from Almaty to Astana (now Nur-Sultan). Such relocations were often driven by the need to alleviate problems in the old capital, stimulate development in underdeveloped regions, and shape a more modern and decentralized national image (Ratcliffe, 2022). For Indonesia, the relocation to Nusantara is part of a broader effort to address regional development disparities and enhance representation for all segments of its diverse population.

This relocation also offers Indonesia a chance to adopt more sustainable and innovative urban planning principles. Nusantara is designed as a smart and green city, incorporating cutting-edge technology in urban governance and infrastructure. Amid growing concerns about environmental sustainability, Nusantara is envisioned as a model for eco-friendly urban development with a strong focus on social and

economic sustainability (Rifaidd, Abdurrahman, Baharuddin, & A. Kusuma, 2023; Tura & Ojanen, 2022). Additionally, Nusantara is set to become a hub for technology and innovation, propelling Indonesia into the digital era and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This transition supports the growth of technology-driven sectors that aim to enhance Indonesia's global competitiveness (Syaban & Appiah-Opoku, 2023). Indonesia's move to establish a modern, sustainable capital also signifies its rising status on the international stage. As a key member of ASEAN and a major power in the Asia-Pacific region, a forward-looking capital reinforces Indonesia's commitment to sustainable development and respect for diversity. Thus, the capital relocation is not only about solving domestic challenges but also about asserting Indonesia's position in the global geopolitical landscape (Rachmawati et al., 2021).

Economically, the relocation is expected to serve as a catalyst for equitable development across the country (Afrimadona, 2021). By situating the administrative and economic center closer to the eastern regions of Indonesia, the project may spur investment and infrastructure development beyond Java. Nusantara has the potential to emerge as a new growth center, promoting underdeveloped sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and renewable energy in regions that have historically received less attention.

Nevertheless, while the capital relocation holds much promise, it also presents significant challenges. Building Nusantara will require massive investment, collaboration between central and regional governments, and active public participation. There are concerns about possible environmental and social impacts, particularly regarding local communities in Kalimantan, which must be carefully considered. Effective policymaking is needed to ensure that the development of the new capital reflects Indonesia's diversity and prioritizes the well-being of its people. Overall, relocating Indonesia's capital to Nusantara is a bold step filled with challenges, yet it holds the potential to reshape the nation's future. It is a symbol of socio-political and economic transformation aimed at fostering national unity and strengthening Indonesia's international standing. Nusantara is poised not only to serve as a new capital but also to represent the future of Indonesia—modern, inclusive, and sustainable—reflecting the spirit of unity in diversity.

In light of the profound political, social, and economic implications of relocating Indonesia's capital to Nusantara, it is essential to identify and examine the transformations that may emerge in this context. Therefore, this study focuses on two key aspects: the geopolitical impact of the capital relocation and its influence on the formation of Indonesia's national identity. The guiding research question for this study is: *"How does the relocation of the capital to Nusantara affect Indonesia's geopolitical transformation and the construction of its national identity?"* This study aims to analyze how the capital relocation may shift the distribution of political power, stimulate

more balanced regional development, and potentially redefine the narrative of national identity amid Indonesia's cultural and ethnic diversity. Furthermore, the main objective is to understand how Nusantara, as the new capital, functions not only as an administrative center but also as a symbol of transformation—reinforcing national unity and fostering a more inclusive identity within Indonesia's pluralistic society.

## **2. Method**

The methodological approach employed in this article adopts a qualitative framework, utilizing a literature-based analysis of both primary and secondary sources to examine the impact of Indonesia's capital relocation to Kalimantan. Given that the project is still in its initial and developmental phases, the study is constrained in terms of direct data collection. Nevertheless, the author relies on a diverse array of sources, including press releases, news articles, official government statements, and information available on government websites. Primary data sources are limited to official reports and state documents, as the relocation process is ongoing. To complement this, the author incorporates various secondary sources such as books, journals, conference proceedings, and articles from credible electronic news platforms.

The temporal focus of this study centers on the period beginning in 2019, when the capital relocation plan was officially announced by President Joko Widodo (Sekretariat Kabinet, 2022b, 2022a). This timeframe is particularly relevant to the research objective, which aims to provide depth and context to the existing findings. The use of academic databases such as SCOPUS and Harzing to collect references from books, journals, theses, and proceedings ensures the scientific credibility and reliability of the sources, thereby enhancing the overall validity of the study. The selected descriptive analytical approach is consistent with the qualitative nature of the research, enabling the author to systematically organize, interpret, and present the collected data.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Geopolitical Implications of Indonesia's Capital Relocation to Nusantara**

The relocation of Indonesia's capital to Nusantara, officially announced in 2019, represents a monumental shift that goes beyond administrative reorganization—it reflects a profound transformation in Indonesia's geopolitical strategy. In this context, the Rimland Theory developed by Nicholas Spykman provides a critical lens through which to analyze this move, emphasizing the role of geographic and maritime factors in strengthening Indonesia's position within the Asia-Pacific region and the broader global order. This theory posits that control over coastal areas—or the rimland—is pivotal in determining a nation's geopolitical power, asserting that countries with

dominion over maritime borders tend to exert greater influence in global decision-making processes (Astarita & Marconi, 2024).

According to Spykman, the rimland of Asia, stretching from East to South Asia, constitutes a strategically vital zone in international relations, due to its critical function in managing major international trade routes and shaping regional influence. The theory underscores that states controlling these coastal regions gain significant geopolitical advantages, particularly in terms of economic influence and security (Zheng-yu, 2006). Accordingly, the relocation of Indonesia's capital to Nusantara, situated in East Kalimantan, confers a new strategic position that enhances the country's influence across the Asia-Pacific region. Kalimantan, located at the geographic center of the Indonesian archipelago, offers a gateway to maritime routes connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans. This aligns with the Rimland Theory's assertion that dominance over trade routes linking major global regions is fundamental to enhancing a nation's geopolitical standing.

East Kalimantan, as the designated site of Indonesia's new capital, offers strategic advantages not present in Jakarta. Despite its status as Indonesia's economic and political hub, Jakarta—located on the western coast of Java Island—faces critical challenges, including severe traffic congestion, pollution, and more alarmingly, significant land subsidence, rendering the city increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters (Avery & Moser, 2023). In contrast, Nusantara presents a safer and more centralized location, affording Indonesia the opportunity to develop more sustainable and decentralized infrastructure, while addressing longstanding disparities in development between Java and other regions.

### **3.2 Maritime Strategy and Indonesia's Geopolitical Influence Following the Capital Relocation to Nusantara**

The relocation of Indonesia's capital to Nusantara enhances the country's strategic leverage within the Asia-Pacific geopolitical framework. The Asia-Pacific region is increasingly critical to the global economy, with international trade routes involving China, India, and other ASEAN countries (Bunnell et al., 2022). Situated closer to the core of Asia's maritime corridors, Nusantara offers Indonesia a geographic advantage in exerting greater control over the flow of goods and energy across its territory.

According to the Rimland Theory, states that dominate coastal areas and trade routes possess substantial influence over regional economic and geopolitical dynamics (Holmila, 2020). By positioning Nusantara in the center of the Indonesian archipelago, Indonesia not only reduces its dependency on the western coastal region but also fosters more equitable economic development across the nation (Ratcliffe, 2022). Moreover, Nusantara's strategic location—more closely connected to Asia's

principal trade routes—strengthens Indonesia’s role in international relations, particularly in maritime cooperation and broader diplomatic engagements.

### **3.3 Changing Power Dynamics and Regional Influence**

As an archipelagic nation with vast cultural diversity, Indonesia faces significant challenges in strengthening a national identity that encompasses its ethnic and cultural plurality. The Rimland Theory offers a perspective on the potential shift in the geopolitical balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region. By relocating its capital to Nusantara, Indonesia is altering the dynamics of power within its governance and the distribution of development, which has historically been heavily concentrated on the island of Java. This strategic move is expected to accelerate a more equitable development across regions, enabling areas beyond Java to grow more rapidly (Nurjaman & Rusata, 2023). As the new capital, Nusantara highlights the strategic importance of coastal mastery for Indonesia’s geopolitical dominance in the Asia-Pacific region (Bunnell et al., 2022), aligning with the core tenet of the Rimland Theory, which posits that coastal regions are key to determining global power and influence (Holmila, 2020).

### **3.4 National Identity Reform**

Identity serves as a foundational element for actions undertaken by various stakeholders. A city's identity can be understood as the amalgamation of inherited assets, historical narratives, distinct characteristics, and cultural uniqueness, which differentiate it from other cities and possess the power to unite people and places (Clark, Gootman, Bouchet, & Moonen, 2020). In this context, this article seeks to explore how the relocation of Indonesia’s capital to Nusantara, in Kalimantan, may contribute to the transformation of the country’s national identity. Benedict Anderson provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how symbolic actions can shape and redefine collective identity (Anderson, 2019; Cooper, 2023). The relocation carries profound implications for redefining national identity, particularly in shifting the narrative that has long centered on Javanese identity (Ratcliffe, 2022). Java’s cultural and political dominance has historically positioned it at the core of Indonesia’s identity (Sulistiyono & Rochwulaningsih, 2013). However, the move to Nusantara signals a departure from this Java-centric identity (Ratcliffe, 2022), paving the way for a more inclusive national narrative (Sekretariat Kabinet, 2022b). The Indonesian archipelago, with its multitude of islands and cultures, serves as the foundation for reimagining a new Indonesian identity that transcends regional affiliations.

The relocation of Indonesia’s capital is interpreted here as a transformational act closely tied to shifts in societal identity. This transformation goes beyond geographic



realignment—it constitutes a cultural and symbolic reconstruction. Nusantara, as the new capital, embodies the ethos of unity in diversity and challenges the public to redefine identity beyond regional confines. Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities underscores that a nation is a social construct shaped by collective imagination. In Indonesia's context, Nusantara becomes a symbol of collective imagination fostering a sense of togetherness among its diverse populations. Media, culture, and public policy play crucial roles in shaping this emerging identity (Cooper, 2023). Cooper further elaborates that media can be a powerful tool in disseminating narratives and influencing public perception. The capital relocation offers media a new platform to support the construction of a more inclusive national identity. Cultural expressions—through arts, literature, and popular culture—are central to how Indonesians understand themselves within the context of Nusantara. Public policies, such as educational reforms and cultural initiatives, can further reinforce this transformation by fostering pride and ownership in a more unified national narrative.

Furthermore, the relocation prompts a reevaluation of public spaces and urban planning, contributing to the creation of a physical manifestation of a renewed national identity. The architectural design and urban layout of the new capital can reflect ideals of unity and diversity (Mkrtchyan, 2017). As evidenced in Kazakhstan, symbols embedded in Astana's architectural landscape successfully distanced the city from Soviet influences (Köppen, 2013; Mkrtchyan, 2017). Well-designed public spaces have the potential to embody the rich cultural heritage of the Nusantara region and serve as tangible reminders of the inclusive identity Indonesia aspires to project.

Benedict Anderson's reflections on imagined communities also shed light on the notion of "official nationalism," wherein state-led efforts play a significant role in shaping collective identity (Anderson, 2019). The capital relocation, supported by media narratives, cultural expressions, and revised public policies, represents a deliberate state initiative to define and reconstruct Indonesia's national identity. This process aligns with Anderson's view that nations are imagined communities continually constructed and reconstructed through symbols, narratives, and shared practices (Cooper, 2023).

Ultimately, the relocation of Indonesia's capital to Nusantara is not merely a geographical shift; it is a profound symbolic gesture with the potential to support national identity reform. Anderson's conceptualization of imagined communities provides a robust framework for understanding how such symbolic actions can shape a nation's collective identity (Cooper, 2023). The shift away from a Java-centric narrative toward a more inclusive one—combined with media narratives, cultural expressions, and public policy—helps cultivate a sense of unity and a more visionary identity. The physical and symbolic representation of Nusantara will serve as a

medium to construct a more inclusive Indonesian identity – embracing diversity and envisioning a more cohesive and future-ready nation.

#### 4. Conclusion

The relocation of Indonesia's capital to Nusantara has strategic implications in both geopolitical and national identity contexts. Geopolitically, this move strengthens Indonesia's position in the Asia-Pacific region by enhancing access to major maritime routes and redistributing power from Java to other regions. Within the framework of the Heartland Theory, Nusantara occupies a strategic position that can expand Indonesia's regional influence. Domestically, the relocation offers opportunities for more equitable development and reflects Indonesia's response to evolving global dynamics.

In terms of national identity, Benedict Anderson's concept of *imagined communities* illustrates how Nusantara serves as a collective symbol of a more inclusive Indonesia. The capital relocation marks a shift away from a Java-centric narrative toward the formation of a national identity that reflects cultural and ethnic diversity. Through the support of media, cultural expression, and public policy, this relocation functions as both a symbolic and practical instrument for redefining Indonesia's national identity in a way that fosters unity and forward-looking cohesion.

#### References

- Afrimadona. (2021). Revisiting Political Polarisation in Indonesia: A Case Study of Jakarta's Electorate. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 40(2), 315–339. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034211007490>
- Anderson, B. (2019). REIMAGINED COMMUNITIES: In *We Average Unbeautiful Watchers* (pp. 152–200). London: UNP - Nebraska. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvg0c0q.10>
- Astarita, C., & Marconi, M. (2024). Reading Spykman in Beijing. *L'Espace Politique*, 49–50, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4000/11r69>
- Avery, E., & Moser, S. (2023). Urban speculation for survival: Adaptations and negotiations in Forest City, Malaysia. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 41(2), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544221121797>
- B, J., Budiman, B., Idris, A., Nasir, B., & Khaerunnisa, A. (2022). The Impact of IKN on Socio-Economic Development in Penajem Paser Utara (PPU) and Kutai Kartanegara. *Journal of Governance and Public Policy*, 9(2), LAYOUTING. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jgpp.v9i2.14083>
- Basuki, I. S. S. (2023). Remembering Jakarta, Imagining Nusantara: Identity, Space and Structure. In *Advances in 21st Century Human Settlements* (pp. 49–64). Springer Nature Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-3533-8\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-3533-8_5)
- Bunnell, T., Aung-Thwin, M., Clendenning, J. N., Goh, D. P. S., & Smith, N. R. (2022).



- Points of persuasion: Truth spots in future city development. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 40(6), 1082–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758221133832>
- Clark, G., Gootman, M., Bouchet, M., & Moonen, T. (2020). The global identity of cities: Seven steps to build reputation and visibility for competitiveness and resilience.
- Cooper, L. (2023). Imagined communities: from subjecthood to nationality in the British Atlantic. *International Relations*, 37(1), 72–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178221098913>
- Holmila, A. (2020). Re-thinking Nicholas J. Spykman: from historical sociology to balance of power. *International History Review*, 42(5), 951–966. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2019.1655469>
- Köppen, B. (2013). The production of a new Eurasian capital on the Kazakh steppe: Architecture, urban design, and identity in Astana. *Nationalities Papers*, 41(4), 590–605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.767791>
- Lyons, K. (2019). Why is Indonesia moving its capital city? Everything you need to know.
- Maheshwari, S., & Singh, P. (2021). Capital access and its mobilization for academic achievement: A case of Indian higher education system. *Research in Education*, 110(1), 58–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523721989386>
- Mkrtchyan, N. (2017). Nation-building projects through new capitals: from St. Petersburg to Yerevan and Astana. *Nationalities Papers*, 45(3), 485–498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2016.1260535>
- Nurjaman, R., & Rusata, T. (2023). *Assembling Nusantara*. Bangkok: Advances in 21st Century Human Settlements Henny.
- Rachmawati, R., Haryono, E., Ghiffari, R. A., Reinhart, H., Permatasari, F. D., & Rohmah, A. A. (2021). Best Practices of Capital City Relocation in Various Countries: Literature Review. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 325, 07004. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202132507004>
- Ratcliffe, R. (2022). Indonesia names new capital Nusantara, replacing sinking Jakarta.
- Rifaid, R., Abdurrahman, A., Baharuddin, T., & A. Kusuma, B. M. (2023). Smart City Development in the New Capital City: Indonesian Government Plans. *Journal of Contemporary Governance and Public Policy*, 4(2), 115–130. <https://doi.org/10.46507/jcgpp.v4i2.141>
- Salim, W., Bettinger, K., & Fisher, M. (2019). Maladaptation on the Waterfront: Jakarta's Growth Coalition and the Great Garuda. *Environment and Urbanization ASIA*, 10(1), 63–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0975425318821809>
- Sekretariat Kabinet. (2022a). Capital Relocation to Go as Planned, President Jokowi Says.
- Sekretariat Kabinet. (2022b). New Capital City of Nusantara to Represent Excellent Nation.
- Sekretariat Negara. (2019). Presiden Jokowi Tegaskan Rencana Pemindahan Ibu Kota di Hadapan Anggota Dewan.

- Skey, M. (2017). 'Mindless Markers of the Nation': The Routine Flagging of Nationhood Across the Visual Environment. *Sociology*, 51(2), 274–289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515590754>
- Sulistiyono, S. T., & Rochwulaningsih, Y. (2013). Contest for hegemony: The dynamics of inland and maritime cultures relations in the history of Java island, Indonesia. *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, 2(2), 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2013.10.002>
- Syaban, A. S. N., & Appiah-Opoku, S. (2023). Building Indonesia's new capital city: an in-depth analysis of prospects and challenges from current capital city of Jakarta to Kalimantan. *Urban, Planning and Transport Research*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/21650020.2023.2276415>
- Tura, N., & Ojanen, V. (2022). Sustainability-oriented innovations in smart cities: A systematic review and emerging themes. *Cities*, 126(August 2021), 103716. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103716>
- Zheng-yu, W. U. (2006). Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory and Its Strategic Implications. *Teaching and Research*, pp. 78–83.