

Geopolitics as an Instrument for Strengthening National Sense and Nationalism in Border Regions

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Abstract:

Border regions often lag behind in development. This leads to socio-economic vulnerability, a weakening of national identity, and a declining spirit of nationalism. To understand this issue, a study was conducted exploring the relationship between a geopolitical approach and strengthening national identity. Through a literature review of cases in the Kalimantan border region, it was found that weak national awareness, especially among young people, needs to be addressed through education and community involvement in policy formulation. Dissatisfaction with the state is a trigger for the crisis of nationalism. A geopolitical approach is seen as capable of strengthening citizens' attachment to the state by emphasizing local potential and active participation. The results of this study suggest the need for a more inclusive strategy and further, in-depth study.

Keywords: Sovereignty, citizens, nationality, civil participation, geopolitics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Border areas are both strategic and vulnerable spaces within the framework of national integrity. There, territorial boundaries serve not only as geographical markers but also as arenas for cross-border cultural, economic, and political encounters. In such conditions, communities' national identities often become blurred due to weak social integration, limited access to public services, and the unfiltered influence of foreign cultures. This situation demands an approach that focuses not only on strengthening infrastructure but also on developing character and national awareness contextually (Yustiani, 2018; Yohanes, 2019; Maring et al, 2024).

A geopolitical approach offers an adequate framework to address these challenges. Geopolitics examines the relationship between geographic space and power dynamics, which, in the border context, can be applied to understand the vulnerabilities and potential of local communities. Indonesia's geographic position as an archipelagic nation makes this approach crucial for formulating policies that are not only responsive to potential conflict but also adaptive to local realities (Hanipah et al., 2022).

The state's presence in border regions is not sufficient through formal instruments or a top-down approach. According to Giddens (1985), globalization and modernity create complex identity challenges, necessitating active community involvement in the national development process. This involvement fosters a sense of belonging and participation in maintaining sovereignty, through policy practices that respect local culture while sustainably instilling national values.

Nationalism does not emerge automatically, but is shaped through social processes and the formation of collective identity. Anderson (1991) states that nationalism grows when people feel part of an imagined community with a shared history and goals. In this context, strengthening national identity in border regions requires strengthening collective memory, local history, and active engagement in national narratives—not merely through slogans, but through meaningful social experiences.

Understanding that border communities are the vanguard of national defense, this paper aims to examine how a geopolitical approach can be utilized to strengthen national identity and nationalism strategically and practically. This approach is expected to build citizen awareness of their crucial role in maintaining national integrity. Through the integration of spatial dynamics and policy orientation, border regions can become centers of national identity strength, rather than simply marginal zones.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Geopolitics offers a conceptual framework that allows for a deeper understanding of how geographic space influences a nation's political, social, and economic dynamics. In the context of border regions, geopolitics serves as a crucial analytical tool for exploring interactions between states and their implications for community identity and solidarity. Although this concept has long been in development, its meaning often varies depending on the interests of the actors using it. In general, geopolitics is defined as the study of the relationship between space and power, both in the form of state projections and the increasingly significant influence of non-state actors (Anggoro, 2017; Soepandji, 2019).

Contemporary geopolitical studies put forward by scholars such as Cohen and Flint broaden understanding of issues of power, resource control, and the legitimacy of actors beyond the state. Cohen highlights the importance of the spatial dimension in political processes, while Flint emphasizes that geopolitics also encompasses the practices and representations of territorial domination. Three important aspects of this perspective include: the relationship between power and space, the increasing role of non-state actors, and the urgency of understanding resource control (see Cohen & Flint in Soepandji, 2019).

National identity and national insight are two concepts closely linked to geopolitics, particularly in regions vulnerable to external influences, such as border areas. National insight encompasses a collective awareness of national identity and unifying values, including a spirit of togetherness and loyalty to the nation. In a global and open context, national identity must be maintained to prevent erosion by external cultures. Hanipah et al. (2022) emphasize that strengthening national identity needs to be directed at understanding the values of Pancasila and local cultural roots in the face of globalization.

In certain situations, particularly in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region, cross-border influences have the potential to obscure the nationalist perspective of local communities. The unchecked influx of culture and information from neighboring countries can undermine the collective narrative that unites citizens as a nation. Therefore, strengthening national values in this region must be supported by educational policies, community development, and adaptive communication strategies to maintain social cohesion.

Nationalism as a sociopolitical concept also needs to be approached contextually. It cannot be interpreted simply as a heroic spirit; it must be understood as a process that creates bonds of membership within a pluralistic national community. Kusumawardani and Faturachman (2004) suggest that nationalism be viewed as a social construct that unites all ethnic and cultural groups under a single national identity. In the border context, nationalism serves as an important foundation for building a sense of belonging, loyalty, and a willingness to defend national sovereignty amidst various challenges.

Geographical aspects are a strategic factor determining social and political dynamics at the border. These regions often serve as a meeting point for various interests and identities, including migration, trade, and conflict of interest. In this context, a geopolitical approach provides a relevant analytical tool for understanding the tensions between external forces and local conditions and designing more contextual and adaptive policy interventions (Zuhro et al., 2024).

Finally, integrating a geopolitical approach into policy formulation not only strengthens territorial protection but also increases community participation in national development. By encouraging local citizen involvement in policy planning and implementation, a sense of national ownership can be fostered. This approach enables the realization of inclusive development strategies, responsive to spatial challenges, and relevant to creating resilient border communities that maintain national identity and sovereignty.

3. METHOD

This study is based on a literature analysis referring to primary sources published in reputable scientific journals. The references used generally come from field-based research that provides a contextual overview of the social and political realities in border regions. Due to time and resource constraints, the author was unable to collect primary data through direct observation or in-depth interviews. Nevertheless, this literature-

based approach still allows for an in-depth exploration of the strategic issues raised, relying on field findings from previous studies as the primary analytical foundation.

This paper specifically focuses on cases occurring in the border region between Indonesia and Malaysia, specifically in the provinces of North Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, and West Kalimantan. These three regions have distinct geographic, demographic, and cultural characteristics, but generally face similar challenges in strengthening national identity and maintaining state sovereignty. The study's focus on the Kalimantan border region was chosen due to the high intensity of cross-border interactions and its vulnerability to cultural, economic, and political influences from neighboring countries.

It should be noted that this desk-based study method has several limitations, particularly in terms of direct verification of field data. Therefore, to deepen understanding and strengthen the validity of the analysis results, further empirical research is needed, involving participant observation, in-depth interviews, and an interdisciplinary approach. This effort is expected to provide a more comprehensive and applicable understanding in designing strategies for strengthening nationalism in border areas.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development gap between the central region and the Indonesia-Malaysia border areas, particularly in Kalimantan, continues to be a source of complex socio-economic problems. Border communities still face limited access to adequate infrastructure, public services, and economic opportunities. As a result, they rely on informal economic activities that are unstable and vulnerable to market pressures.

Dependence on traditional economic sectors such as subsistence agriculture and small-scale trade severely limits the competitiveness of border communities. Saherimiko (2014) highlighted that limited market access makes it difficult for local products to compete, especially when low-priced Malaysian products enter more easily. This deepens inequality and significantly reduces community incomes.

Minimal educational facilities and healthcare services exacerbate inequality. Many schools and health centers lack professional staff and supporting facilities. Zuhro (2024) and Zurayah & Rosilawati (2019) noted that this has a direct impact on the quality of human resources and low community productivity, preventing them from breaking out of the cycle of vulnerability.

Meanwhile, rapid infrastructure development on the Malaysian side creates a competitive imbalance for Indonesian products in border areas. Zulkifli et al. (2017) emphasized that this exacerbates the marginalization of local small businesses, unable to compete in an increasingly open market dominated by foreign products. Exposure to foreign cultures not only impacts the economic sector but also changes the value structure and identity of society. The uncontrolled influx of Malaysian culture creates value disorientation, especially among young people. Nur (2020) revealed that this phenomenon causes identity confusion that has the potential to shift the national orientation of local communities.

The presence of foreign media accelerates the internalization of foreign culture among border communities. Innayah (2019) showed that entertainment content from Malaysia attracts more interest than national broadcasts. When foreign cultural symbols are more familiar than one's own culture, nationalism becomes fragile.

The process of instilling national values is hampered by the weak education system in the region. Curricula that fail to emphasize the importance of national insight and the lack of qualified educators make the delivery of national values less effective. Itasari (2021) emphasized that citizens' understanding of their rights and obligations as citizens is low due to a lack of national literacy.

In many cases, the state's absence in responding to social challenges at the border undermines public trust in state institutions. When illegal activities such as smuggling and human trafficking go unchecked, communities tend to feel neglected. Zuhro et al. (2024) note that this situation has the potential to weaken state legitimacy and accelerate the degradation of national identity.

The phenomenon of weakening nationalism in border regions is not a single consequence of exposure to foreign cultures, but rather the accumulation of state absence, weak education, and a failure to create a system capable of responding to local needs. These three factors are interconnected and create conditions that allow for a slow but steady shift in national values.

The geographical proximity between Indonesia and Malaysia is a major factor in the high cross-border cultural flow. Zurayah & Rosilawati (2019) explain that the younger generation is more open to Malaysian cultural values, which is slowly eroding their love for their own national identity. When perceptions of local culture weaken, national symbols lose their appeal.

In this context, it is not surprising that community solidarity tends to be local rather than national. Pamungkas (2015) highlighted that the mismatch between central government policies and the realities on the border has weakened national identity. As a result, people prefer to build solidarity networks based on kinship or local communities.

Finally, it is important to note that education that is not adaptive to the regional context only deepens the crisis of nationalism. When young people are not equipped with strong historical narratives and ideological values, they become more easily influenced by foreign values. Itasari (2021) cautioned that without strengthening national identity from an early age, the nation's future generations will lose their way in facing global dynamics.

DISCUSSION: GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH AS A STRATEGIC SOLUTION

In response to the complexity of problems in border regions, a geopolitical approach provides an analytical framework that unifies geographic, social, and political dimensions within a single policy perspective. Through this approach, the dynamics occurring in border regions can be viewed more holistically, enabling the resulting policies to address issues more relevantly and based on the local context. Geopolitics views national borders not only as spatial aspects but also as social spaces containing various interactions of power and identity.

Utilizing geopolitics in development planning allows for mapping local potential as a basis for strengthening the economy of border communities. Zuhro et al. (2024) emphasize that the strategic position of border regions can be developed into new, inclusive economic centers if managed in a targeted manner and with the involvement of local communities. This opens up space for the creation of growth zones that can strengthen connectivity and narrow disparities between regions.

Local community empowerment must be directed at strengthening economic resilience through cross-border collaboration and community-based investment. Sudiar (2015) emphasized the importance of improving market access and economic infrastructure to ensure border residents are sufficiently competitive in facing global and regional pressures. This approach not only impacts well-being but also encourages active community participation in strategic economic roles.

Strengthening national insight is another crucial dimension that needs to be integrated into geopolitical strategies. Sabara (2020) suggested the need for reforms in the education system and teacher training to instill national values contextually. Locally-based education relevant to the realities of border communities will foster a strong sense of national identity and reduce the psychological distance between the state and its citizens.

Top-down policies often fail to foster a sense of community ownership. Therefore, community involvement in the policy process is essential. Nur (2020) and Rupita (2019) emphasized that a community-based approach and empowering local actors are effective strategies for strengthening emotional ties to the state. Pamungkas (2015) and Sudiar (2015) also emphasized the importance of building nationalism through a fair and participatory process so that citizens feel recognized and valued as part of the nation.

Going forward, an effective geopolitical strategy needs to be directed at strengthening bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries, particularly in infrastructure development, preserving local culture, and strengthening civil defense. Integrating a people-centered geopolitical approach will transform border regions into more than just administrative boundaries, but rather symbols of a strong national identity. In this sense, border communities are no longer positioned as objects of development, but as active subjects in maintaining the integrity and sovereignty of the state.

4. CONCLUSION

Border regions remain a weak point in national development planning, despite their strategic role in maintaining the nation's integrity. Communities in these regions face socioeconomic vulnerability, low national insight, and weak nationalism, all of which are interrelated and have direct implications for national resilience. A geopolitical approach is crucial as an analytical framework for formulating contextual policies, as it comprehensively integrates geographic, political, and social variables.

From an economic perspective, gaps in infrastructure and access to public services are the primary causes of low public welfare. Lack of connectivity to markets and resources exacerbates already vulnerable social conditions. From a geopolitical perspective, border regions can be positioned as strategic zones for economic development based on local potential. This strategy offers opportunities to attract investment, create new jobs, and increase community competitiveness against cross-border economic pressures.

From a national perspective, the influence of foreign cultures and the lack of national values-based education have created identity disorientation, particularly among the younger generation. Geopolitics can provide a gateway to developing more contextual and participatory curricula and educational programs. Involving educational institutions, local governments, and communities in strengthening the national narrative is a crucial step in rebuilding a collective and sustainable sense of national identity.

The crisis of nationalism in border regions reflects the state's failure to deliver social and political justice. When communities feel marginalized, solidarity with the state weakens. A geopolitical approach promotes inclusivity through participatory mechanisms that position communities as subjects of development. With a strategy that emphasizes justice, citizen involvement, and the utilization of local potential, strengthening national identity and state stability in border regions can be realized in a tangible and long-term manner. (*)

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