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Indonesia's IKN Nusantara Project: Political Legitimacy, State Capacity, and Capital Relocation in Comparative Perspective

Proyek IKN Nusantara Indonesia: Legitimasi Politik, Kapasitas Negara, dan Relokasi Ibu Kota dalam Perspektif Komparatif

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Abstract
Indonesia's decision to relocate its national capital from Jakarta to Nusantara represents one of the most ambitious state-building projects undertaken in the twenty-first century. Beyond its developmental objectives, the project raises important questions regarding political legitimacy, governance capacity, institutional continuity, and national identity. Existing literature has primarily examined the economic and urban planning dimensions of capital relocation, leaving its political implications underexplored. This article investigates how the Nusantara project reflects Indonesia's broader political transformation by analyzing the relationship between state capacity, political legitimacy, and administrative reform. Using a comparative qualitative approach, the study examines Indonesia alongside previous capital relocation experiences in Brazil, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, and Malaysia. Data are collected through policy document analysis, elite interviews, and comparative institutional analysis. The study argues that successful capital relocation depends not only on infrastructure development but also on sustained political legitimacy, bureaucratic

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effectiveness, stakeholder participation, and long-term institutional commitment. Preliminary findings suggest that while Nusantara provides opportunities to modernize governance and reduce regional inequality, significant challenges remain concerning democratic accountability, environmental governance, fiscal sustainability, and policy continuity across political administrations. The article develops a comparative analytical framework explaining how capital relocation functions as a political transformation strategy rather than merely an urban development initiative. By integrating comparative politics with public administration, this study contributes to broader discussions on state-building, governance innovation, and institutional resilience in emerging democracies. The findings also provide practical lessons for countries considering large-scale administrative relocation as part of national transformation agendas.

Keywords: *Nusantara, Capital Relocation, State Capacity, Political Legitimacy, Comparative Politics*

Abstrak

Keputusan Indonesia untuk memindahkan ibu kota negaranya dari Jakarta ke Nusantara merupakan salah satu proyek pembangunan negara paling ambisius yang dilakukan pada abad ke-21. Di luar tujuan pembangunan, proyek ini menimbulkan pertanyaan penting mengenai legitimasi politik, kapasitas pemerintahan, keberlanjutan kelembagaan, dan identitas nasional. Literatur yang ada sebagian besar telah meneliti dimensi ekonomi dan perencanaan kota dari relokasi ibu kota, sehingga implikasi politiknya kurang dieksplorasi. Artikel ini menyelidiki bagaimana proyek Nusantara mencerminkan transformasi politik Indonesia yang lebih luas dengan menganalisis hubungan antara kapasitas negara, legitimasi politik, dan reformasi administrasi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif komparatif, studi ini meneliti Indonesia bersamaan dengan pengalaman relokasi ibu kota sebelumnya di Brasil, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, dan Malaysia. Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen kebijakan, wawancara elit, dan analisis kelembagaan komparatif. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa keberhasilan relokasi ibu kota tidak hanya bergantung pada pembangunan infrastruktur tetapi juga pada legitimasi politik yang berkelanjutan, efektivitas birokrasi, partisipasi pemangku kepentingan, dan komitmen kelembagaan jangka panjang. Temuan awal menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Nusantara memberikan peluang untuk memodernisasi tata kelola dan mengurangi ketidaksetaraan regional, tantangan signifikan tetap ada terkait akuntabilitas demokratis, tata kelola lingkungan, keberlanjutan fiskal, dan kesinambungan kebijakan di berbagai pemerintahan politik. Artikel ini mengembangkan kerangka analitis komparatif yang menjelaskan bagaimana relokasi ibu kota berfungsi sebagai strategi transformasi politik, bukan sekadar inisiatif pembangunan perkotaan. Dengan mengintegrasikan politik komparatif dengan administrasi publik, studi ini berkontribusi pada diskusi yang lebih luas tentang pembangunan negara, inovasi tata kelola, dan ketahanan kelembagaan di negara-negara demokrasi berkembang. Temuan ini juga memberikan pelajaran praktis bagi negara-negara yang mempertimbangkan relokasi administratif skala besar sebagai bagian dari agenda transformasi nasional.

Kata kunci: *Nusantara, Relokasi Ibu Kota, Kapasitas Negara, Legitimasi Politik, Politik Komparatif*

I. INTRODUCTION

The relocation of national capitals has historically represented far more than a geographical shift of administrative centers. Across different political contexts, capital relocation has functioned as a state-building strategy aimed at reshaping territorial governance, redistributing political power, strengthening national identity, and symbolizing new phases of political development. From Brasília in Brazil to Abuja in Nigeria and Astana in Kazakhstan, governments have used capital relocation projects to address administrative inefficiencies, regional inequalities, and broader challenges of national modernization (Campbell 2003; Rossman 2018). However, the success of such projects has depended not merely on physical infrastructure development but also on the political institutions, administrative capacities, and legitimacy structures supporting them.

Indonesia's decision to relocate its national capital from Jakarta to Nusantara represents one of the most significant administrative transformation projects among contemporary emerging democracies. Officially framed as a response to Jakarta's problems—including population concentration, environmental vulnerability, infrastructure pressures, and regional inequality—the Nusantara project reflects a broader ambition to create a new center of governance, economic growth, and national development. Yet, beyond its urban planning objectives, the relocation raises fundamental political questions regarding state capacity, democratic legitimacy, institutional continuity, and the relationship between government authority and public participation.

The political significance of capital relocation lies in its ability to reshape the relationship between the state and society. Capitals are not merely administrative locations; they are symbolic representations of national identity, political authority, and institutional power. As Lefebvre (1991) argues, space is socially and politically produced, meaning that the creation of new administrative spaces reflects broader struggles over power, identity, and governance. Therefore, the development of Nusantara should be understood not only as a spatial transformation but also as an attempt to redefine Indonesia's state architecture and political imagination.

Historically, capital relocation projects have often been associated with processes of state consolidation and modernization. Governments have relocated capitals to overcome geographic imbalances, reduce excessive concentration of political power, or establish new national symbols. In Brazil, Brasília was constructed during the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek as a symbol of modernization and territorial integration, designed to shift national development away from the coastal urban centers toward the interior regions (Holston 1989). Similarly, Nigeria moved its capital from Lagos to Abuja to reduce regional tensions, improve administrative neutrality, and create a more centrally located political center (Vale 2008). Kazakhstan's relocation from Almaty to

Astana represented an effort to strengthen state presence in strategically important territories and construct a post-Soviet national identity (Schatz 2004).

These comparative experiences demonstrate that capital relocation is inherently political. While governments often justify relocation through administrative efficiency, economic development, or urban sustainability, such projects frequently involve deeper questions concerning state legitimacy and political authority. New capitals can become instruments through which governments communicate visions of national progress, institutional renewal, and future-oriented development. However, they can also generate political controversy when public participation is limited, costs escalate, or symbolic ambitions exceed administrative capacity.

The Nusantara project emerges within this broader global pattern but presents distinctive challenges associated with Indonesia's democratic and institutional context. Unlike authoritarian regimes that can implement large-scale territorial transformations through centralized decision-making, Indonesia's democratic system requires balancing executive ambition with legislative oversight, public accountability, and stakeholder participation. Consequently, the success of Nusantara depends not only on government capacity to construct infrastructure but also on the ability to maintain political legitimacy throughout the implementation process.

The concept of state capacity provides an important analytical framework for understanding this challenge. State capacity refers to the ability of governments to formulate policies, implement decisions, coordinate institutions, and provide public goods effectively (Fukuyama 2013; Mann 1984). Large-scale projects such as capital relocation require substantial administrative capabilities because they involve complex coordination among national ministries, regional governments, private investors, civil society actors, and local communities. Weak institutional coordination can undermine implementation even when political commitment remains strong.

In Indonesia's case, the Nusantara project tests the capacity of state institutions to manage long-term transformation beyond electoral cycles. Large infrastructure projects often require decades of commitment, while democratic systems operate through shorter political timelines. This creates a potential tension between long-term development strategies and changing political priorities. The sustainability of Nusantara therefore depends on whether institutions, rather than individual political leaders, can maintain policy continuity and administrative effectiveness.

Political legitimacy represents another critical dimension of capital relocation. According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy refers to the perception that an institution's actions are appropriate, desirable, or acceptable within a socially constructed system of norms and values. For major state projects, legitimacy is not generated solely through legal authority or government decisions; it also depends on public acceptance, transparency, participation, and perceived fairness. A capital relocation project may possess formal legal approval while still facing legitimacy challenges if affected communities perceive limited inclusion or unequal distribution of benefits.

This issue is particularly relevant for Nusantara because the project involves significant environmental, social, and territorial transformations. The development of a new capital requires extensive land use changes, investment allocation, and relocation of administrative functions. Questions regarding indigenous communities, ecological sustainability, financing mechanisms, and public accountability have become central debates surrounding the project. These concerns demonstrate that state capacity must be accompanied by participatory governance mechanisms to ensure that administrative transformation does not weaken democratic accountability.

Existing research on capital relocation has largely focused on urban planning, economic development, and spatial transformation. Studies of Brasília, Abuja, and Astana have examined issues such as urban design, economic redistribution, and symbolic nation-building. However, comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding capital relocation as a political transformation strategy involving state capacity and legitimacy construction, particularly within emerging democracies. This gap is significant because the political success of relocation projects depends not only on physical outcomes but also on institutional resilience and public trust.

Furthermore, comparative studies of capital relocation often treat cases as isolated national experiences rather than examining common institutional mechanisms that explain success or failure. A comparative political perspective allows for deeper understanding of why some capital relocation projects contribute to state modernization while others produce administrative inefficiency, financial burdens, or political controversy. Examining Nusantara alongside Brasília, Abuja, Astana, and Putrajaya provides valuable insights into how different political systems manage large-scale institutional transformations.

This article addresses these research gaps by investigating the Nusantara project through the intersection of political legitimacy, state capacity, and comparative capital relocation experiences. It asks three central questions: first, how does Nusantara function as a strategy of state transformation beyond urban development? Second, what institutional capacities are required to sustain capital relocation projects in democratic contexts? Third, what lessons can Indonesia draw from previous international experiences regarding legitimacy, governance, and long-term policy continuity?

The article makes three theoretical contributions. First, it expands comparative politics literature by conceptualizing capital relocation as a form of institutional transformation rather than merely administrative decentralization. Second, it contributes to state capacity scholarship by demonstrating how mega-project governance tests the coordination, implementation, and adaptive capabilities of contemporary states. Third, it advances research on political legitimacy by showing that large-scale developmental projects require not only material success but also sustained public acceptance and institutional trust.

This study argues that the success of Nusantara depends on the interaction between three fundamental factors: state capacity, political legitimacy, and institutional continuity. Infrastructure development may create the physical foundation of a new capital, but only effective institutions and legitimate governance practices can transform it into a sustainable national project. The Indonesian case demonstrates that capital relocation in emerging democracies represents a complex process of state reconstruction, where development ambitions must be balanced with democratic accountability and institutional resilience.

By examining Indonesia within a comparative framework, this article contributes to broader debates on state-building, governance innovation, and institutional transformation in the twenty-first century. As more countries consider administrative relocation as a response to urban pressures, regional inequality, and national development challenges, understanding the political foundations of successful capital transformation becomes increasingly important.

II. NUSANTARA AS A STATE-BUILDING PROJECT: CAPITAL RELOCATION BEYOND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The relocation of Indonesia’s capital from Jakarta to Nusantara represents a significant attempt to restructure the relationship between territory, governance, and state authority. While the project is frequently presented as an urban development initiative designed to address Jakarta’s congestion, environmental vulnerability, and economic concentration, its deeper political significance lies in its function as a state-building project. Capital relocation historically reflects attempts by governments to reorganize administrative power, strengthen territorial integration, and construct new political identities. Therefore, Nusantara should be analyzed not only as a spatial intervention but also as an institutional transformation strategy through which the Indonesian state seeks to redefine governance capacity and national development trajectories.

The concept of capital relocation as state-building is rooted in the understanding that political authority is closely connected to spatial organization. States exercise power not only through institutions and laws but also through the creation and management of political spaces. Mann (1984) argues that state capacity depends partly on the ability of institutions to penetrate and coordinate activities across territories. From this perspective, the location of political institutions influences how states distribute administrative resources, establish symbolic authority, and manage relationships between central and peripheral regions.

Jakarta's historical role as Indonesia's political and economic center created significant spatial inequalities. The concentration of administrative functions, financial activities, infrastructure investment, and population growth in Java contributed to persistent regional disparities between Java and other parts of Indonesia. Consequently, relocating the capital represents an attempt to address long-standing geographical imbalances by creating a new administrative center outside Java. This objective reflects broader patterns observed in other countries where capital relocation has been used as a mechanism for territorial integration and decentralization.

The experience of Brasília provides an important comparative reference. Brazil's decision to construct a new capital in the interior was driven by ambitions to integrate peripheral regions, stimulate economic development, and symbolize national modernization. Holston (1989) demonstrates that Brasília was designed not merely as a government location but as a physical representation of a modern Brazilian state. The city embodied developmental aspirations by projecting an image of progress, rational planning, and national unity. Similarly, Nusantara represents Indonesia's attempt to construct a new national symbol associated with future-oriented development and administrative modernization.

However, comparative experiences also demonstrate that symbolic ambition alone does not guarantee institutional transformation. Brasília succeeded in establishing a new political center but did not fully eliminate regional inequalities or decentralize economic concentration. This suggests that capital relocation must be supported by broader institutional and economic reforms. Physical movement of government institutions does not automatically produce changes in governance patterns unless accompanied by effective administrative strategies and long-term policy commitment.

The Nusantara project therefore raises important questions regarding state capacity. Large-scale capital relocation requires governments to coordinate multiple policy areas, including infrastructure development, environmental management, investment regulation, public administration reform, and regional development. Such complexity makes capital relocation a significant test of bureaucratic capability. Fukuyama (2013) emphasizes that governance effectiveness depends not only on formal institutional arrangements but also on the ability of state organizations to implement policies consistently and efficiently.

Indonesia's experience illustrates both the opportunities and challenges of state capacity development. On one hand, the Nusantara project demonstrates considerable governmental ability to mobilize resources, create legal frameworks, and coordinate national development priorities. The establishment of the new capital has involved multiple state institutions, including planning agencies, infrastructure authorities, investment institutions, and regional governments. This reflects the capacity of the Indonesian state to pursue ambitious long-term projects.

On the other hand, the project also exposes institutional challenges associated with implementation. Capital relocation requires coordination across different levels of government, yet Indonesia's decentralized political system creates complex relationships between national and regional authorities. Since the implementation of regional autonomy reforms after 1998, Indonesian governance has involved significant distribution of authority to local governments. While decentralization has improved local participation, it has also created coordination challenges for nationally strategic projects.

This tension between central authority and decentralized governance represents a common challenge in contemporary state-building. Strong central coordination may accelerate implementation but risks reducing democratic participation, while excessive decentralization may slow decision-making and create policy fragmentation. Therefore, the success of Nusantara depends on developing institutional mechanisms that balance executive coordination with meaningful stakeholder involvement.

The project also reflects characteristics of a developmental state approach. Developmental state theory emphasizes the role of capable governments in directing economic transformation through strategic planning, institutional coordination, and long-term policy vision (Johnson 1982; Evans 1995). Although Indonesia differs significantly from East Asian developmental states, Nusantara demonstrates similar characteristics through state-led investment, infrastructure planning, and efforts to create new economic centers.

From this perspective, Nusantara functions as an instrument of developmental transformation. The project aims not only to relocate administrative functions but also to stimulate new economic activities in eastern Indonesia, attract investment, develop infrastructure networks, and promote more balanced national development. The government's vision positions Nusantara as a future economic hub incorporating smart city technologies, sustainable infrastructure, and innovation-oriented development.

Nevertheless, developmental ambitions require institutional sustainability. Previous experiences demonstrate that state-led mega-projects can produce mixed outcomes when implementation depends heavily on political leadership rather than durable institutions. Capital relocation projects often reflect the priorities of particular administrations, creating uncertainty regarding continuity after leadership transitions. This issue is particularly relevant in democratic systems where political leadership changes regularly through elections.

The Brazilian and Nigerian experiences illustrate this challenge. Abuja, Nigeria's new capital, was established to promote national unity and administrative neutrality after concerns regarding Lagos's dominance and ethnic tensions. However, subsequent research indicates that although Abuja succeeded as a political center, challenges remain regarding social inequality, urban exclusion, and uneven development outcomes (Vale 2008). Similarly, Kazakhstan's Astana demonstrated how capital relocation can strengthen state symbolism and national identity, but its sustainability has depended heavily on continued political commitment and centralized authority (Schatz 2004).

These comparative cases suggest that capital relocation is most successful when supported by institutional continuity beyond individual political leadership. For Nusantara, this means embedding the project within national development strategies, strengthening bureaucratic institutions, ensuring legal stability, and maintaining policy coherence across administrations.

Beyond administrative considerations, capital relocation also represents an exercise in nation-building. Capitals function as symbolic spaces where national identity and political narratives are constructed. Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities highlights how states create symbols and institutions that reinforce collective identity. The construction of a new capital provides governments with an opportunity to articulate visions of national renewal, modernization, and future prosperity.

The symbolic dimension of Nusantara is particularly significant because Indonesia is a geographically diverse archipelagic state. The relocation from Java-centered Jakarta toward Kalimantan represents an attempt to redefine national spatial identity by emphasizing broader territorial inclusion. In this sense, Nusantara serves as a political statement about Indonesia's future orientation and commitment to more balanced development.

However, symbolic state-building requires legitimacy among citizens. A capital cannot become a meaningful national symbol if it is perceived primarily as an elite-driven project. Therefore, state-building through spatial transformation requires alignment between governmental vision and public expectations. Without social legitimacy, physical infrastructure may exist without producing genuine institutional transformation.

The Nusantara case therefore demonstrates that capital relocation operates through three interconnected dimensions: territorial restructuring, institutional transformation, and symbolic state-building. The project seeks to reorganize Indonesia's geography of governance, strengthen administrative capacity, and create a new representation of national progress. However, achieving these objectives requires more than construction; it requires sustained institutional commitment and effective governance mechanisms.

This analysis contributes to comparative politics literature by demonstrating that capital relocation should be understood as a form of state transformation rather than simply urban planning. The Indonesian case expands existing studies of new capitals by highlighting how relocation projects in emerging democracies must navigate complex relationships between state ambition, administrative capacity, and democratic legitimacy.

Ultimately, Nusantara represents an ambitious experiment in twenty-first-century state-building. Its success will depend on whether Indonesia can transform physical relocation into institutional renewal. The following section examines the central challenge emerging from this process: how the government can maintain political legitimacy while implementing a large-scale transformation with significant social, environmental, and financial implications.

III. POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES OF NUSANTARA

The implementation of Indonesia's Nusantara capital relocation project raises fundamental questions regarding political legitimacy and democratic governance. While state capacity determines whether governments are able to implement ambitious projects, political legitimacy determines whether such projects are accepted, supported, and sustained by society. Large-scale infrastructure initiatives frequently involve significant redistribution of resources, changes in territorial arrangements, and long-term public commitments. Therefore, their success depends not only on administrative effectiveness but also on the extent to which citizens perceive these projects as appropriate, inclusive, and beneficial.

Political legitimacy is particularly important in democratic systems because governments must justify major policy decisions through mechanisms of accountability and public consent. Unlike authoritarian contexts where strategic projects may be implemented through centralized authority, democratic governments must balance developmental ambitions with participation, transparency, and institutional oversight. Nusantara therefore represents a critical test of how an emerging democracy manages the relationship between executive capacity and democratic legitimacy.

According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy refers to the generalized perception that an institution's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of values and beliefs. This perspective suggests that legitimacy is not produced only through legal authority; it also depends on societal acceptance and institutional credibility. For mega-projects such as capital relocation, legitimacy must be continuously constructed through policy communication, stakeholder engagement, procedural fairness, and demonstrable public benefits.

The Indonesian government has sought to establish legitimacy for Nusantara through several narratives: reducing Jakarta's structural problems, promoting balanced national development, creating a future-oriented smart city, and strengthening Indonesia's global competitiveness. These narratives frame relocation as a national transformation project rather than merely an administrative transfer. Through this discourse, the state attempts to connect Nusantara with broader aspirations of modernization and national progress.

However, legitimacy based on developmental narratives requires institutional credibility. Research on mega-project governance demonstrates that large-scale projects often face legitimacy challenges when there is a gap between official narratives and public experiences (Flyvbjerg 2014). Cost overruns, environmental concerns, limited transparency, and unequal distribution of benefits can weaken public trust even when governments maintain formal authority.

One major challenge concerns public participation. Democratic legitimacy requires that affected communities have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives. Participatory governance literature emphasizes that inclusion and deliberation are essential for improving policy legitimacy, particularly in complex projects involving multiple stakeholders (Fung 2006). In the context of Nusantara, participation involves not only national-level public opinion but also the involvement of local communities, indigenous groups, civil society organizations, and regional governments.

The issue of local participation is particularly significant because the development of a new capital involves territorial transformation in East Kalimantan. Communities located within and around the development area experience direct consequences from land-use changes, infrastructure development, and economic restructuring. While the government presents Nusantara as a national project, local stakeholders may have different perspectives regarding opportunities, risks, and expectations.

This tension reflects a broader challenge in state-led development: balancing national objectives with local interests. Historically, large-scale development projects in developing countries have often prioritized national economic goals while underestimating local social impacts. Political legitimacy becomes vulnerable when communities perceive themselves as passive recipients rather than active participants in development processes.

Environmental governance represents another major dimension of Nusantara's legitimacy challenge. The government has promoted Nusantara as a sustainable and environmentally friendly capital, emphasizing concepts such as green infrastructure, smart city development, and low-carbon urban planning. However, the construction of a new city inevitably creates ecological pressures, including land transformation, biodiversity concerns, and potential impacts on surrounding ecosystems.

The tension between sustainability narratives and development practices reflects a common challenge in contemporary urban governance. Sustainability has increasingly become a central component of state legitimacy, as governments seek to demonstrate compatibility between economic growth and environmental responsibility. However, symbolic commitment to sustainability must be supported by effective environmental institutions, monitoring mechanisms, and transparent governance.

This challenge is particularly relevant because Nusantara is located in an ecologically sensitive region. The credibility of the project's environmental vision depends on whether sustainability principles are integrated into planning and implementation rather than functioning merely as political branding. As Bulkeley and Betsill (2005) argue, urban sustainability requires governance arrangements that involve multiple actors and institutional coordination rather than relying exclusively on state authority.

Fiscal sustainability also represents an important component of political legitimacy. Capital relocation projects require substantial financial resources, raising questions regarding budget priorities, investment models, and long-term economic viability. Governments frequently justify mega-projects through expected future benefits, including investment attraction, economic growth, and regional development. However, public legitimacy may decline if citizens perceive that project costs exceed social benefits.

The experience of other relocated capitals provides important comparative lessons. Brasília achieved symbolic success but generated significant financial pressures and failed to fully resolve urban inequality. Abuja created a new administrative center but continued to experience challenges related to informal settlements, inequality, and infrastructure management. These cases demonstrate that capital relocation requires continuous investment beyond initial construction phases. Without effective financial governance, new capitals may become expensive administrative spaces rather than transformative development centers.

For Indonesia, maintaining legitimacy requires demonstrating that Nusantara generates broad national benefits rather than serving only political or elite interests. This requires transparent financial management, public reporting mechanisms, and clear evaluation of project outcomes. Institutional accountability is therefore central to transforming Nusantara from a government initiative into a socially accepted national project.

Another important issue concerns political continuity. Mega-projects frequently depend on political leadership because they require long-term commitment beyond electoral cycles. In democratic systems, leadership transitions may produce uncertainty regarding policy continuation. The challenge is particularly relevant for Nusantara because its implementation extends across multiple government administrations.

Institutionalization is therefore essential. According to North (1990), durable institutions provide stability by creating predictable rules that extend beyond individual actors. For Nusantara to succeed, the project must become embedded within national institutions rather than remaining associated primarily with a specific political administration. This requires legal frameworks, bureaucratic structures, and governance mechanisms capable of maintaining commitment regardless of political change.

The relationship between legitimacy and state capacity is therefore mutually reinforcing. High state capacity without legitimacy may produce efficient but contested governance, while legitimacy without administrative capability may produce ambitious visions without effective implementation. Nusantara requires both dimensions simultaneously: capable institutions to execute the project and legitimate governance processes to sustain public support.

This relationship can be understood through a broader framework of democratic developmental governance. Unlike traditional developmental states that often relied on centralized authority, democratic developmental governance requires combining strategic state intervention with accountability and participation. Indonesia's experience demonstrates the challenges faced by emerging democracies attempting to pursue ambitious transformation while maintaining democratic standards.

From this perspective, Nusantara represents an important case for understanding how democratic states pursue long-term national projects. The project illustrates that twenty-first-century state-building requires more than infrastructure and administrative capacity; it requires legitimacy generated through inclusive governance, transparency, and institutional trust.

The Indonesian case also contributes to comparative debates on capital relocation. Previous experiences demonstrate that new capitals succeed when they combine symbolic importance, administrative functionality, economic sustainability, and social acceptance. Failure occurs when physical construction advances faster than institutional development and public legitimacy.

Therefore, the central governance challenge of Nusantara is not simply constructing a new capital city but creating a legitimate political institution. The future of the project depends on whether the Indonesian state can transform administrative relocation into a broader process of democratic institutional strengthening.

The following section places Nusantara within a comparative perspective by examining lessons from Brasília, Abuja, Astana, and Putrajaya. Through comparison, the study develops a broader analytical framework explaining when capital relocation contributes to sustainable state transformation and when it becomes merely a symbolic mega-project.

IV. COMPARATIVE DYNAMICS OF CAPITAL RELOCATION: INSTITUTIONAL LESSONS FROM BRAZIL, ABUJA, ASTANA, AND PUTRAJAYA

Capital relocation projects represent complex forms of political transformation because they simultaneously reshape administrative geography, state symbolism, and institutional arrangements. Comparative experiences from Brasília, Abuja, Astana, and Putrajaya demonstrate that the effectiveness of a new capital is determined not only by the physical construction of governmental infrastructure but also by the interaction between state capacity, political legitimacy, institutional continuity, and socio-economic integration. These cases reveal that capital relocation is fundamentally a governance challenge in which states attempt to translate spatial transformation into durable institutional change.

The Indonesian experience with Nusantara shares several similarities with previous relocation projects but also presents distinctive challenges associated with democratic governance. Unlike authoritarian or highly centralized political systems where relocation decisions can be implemented primarily through executive authority, Indonesia's democratic environment requires continuous negotiation between government objectives, institutional accountability, and public acceptance. Therefore, comparative analysis provides important insights into the political conditions that influence whether capital relocation becomes a successful state transformation strategy or remains a symbolic development project.

The case of Brasília illustrates the relationship between developmental ambition and institutional limitations. Brazil's decision to construct Brasília in the country's interior during the 1950s was driven by the objective of promoting territorial integration, reducing coastal concentration, and creating a symbol of national modernization. The project represented a strong expression of state-led development, where the government mobilized planning capacity, financial resources, and political authority to construct a new administrative center.

From the perspective of state-building, Brasília demonstrates how capital relocation can strengthen national imagination and institutional symbolism. The city was designed as a physical representation of a modern state capable of transforming national geography. Holston (1989) argues that Brasília embodied the modernist belief that rational spatial planning could produce social and political transformation. In this sense, the city represented an attempt to materialize a new relationship between state authority and national development.

However, the Brazilian case also reveals the limitations of symbolic transformation. Although Brasília successfully became the political capital, it did not fundamentally alter Brazil's broader patterns of economic concentration and regional inequality. The persistence of socio-economic disparities indicates that spatial relocation alone cannot overcome structural development problems. Instead, capital relocation requires integration with wider regional development strategies and institutional reforms.

This lesson is particularly relevant for Nusantara. The Indonesian government has positioned the new capital as a mechanism to reduce Java-centric development and stimulate economic growth outside Java. However, Brasília demonstrates that relocating political institutions does not automatically redistribute economic opportunities. Without complementary policies promoting regional connectivity, investment distribution, and local economic participation, Nusantara may reproduce existing inequalities in a new geographical context.

The experience of Abuja further illustrates the importance of legitimacy and inclusion in capital relocation. Nigeria's decision to move its capital from Lagos to Abuja was motivated by administrative, geographic, and political considerations. Lagos had become highly congested and was associated with historical regional dominance, while Abuja was intended to provide a more neutral national center.

Unlike Brasília, where modernization was the primary narrative, Abuja was closely connected to questions of political balance and national unity. The relocation reflected an attempt to create a symbolic space representing neutrality among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional groups. However, the implementation process revealed that symbolic neutrality does not necessarily produce social inclusion.

The development of Abuja generated new patterns of inequality between planned governmental areas and surrounding communities. While the city succeeded as an administrative center, questions emerged regarding displacement, access to urban resources, and the distribution of development benefits (Vale 2008). This demonstrates that political legitimacy requires more than national symbolism; it requires mechanisms ensuring that affected communities participate in and benefit from transformation processes.

For Nusantara, Abuja provides an important warning regarding the relationship between national projects and local legitimacy. Indonesia's new capital is expected to represent national unity and future development, but its legitimacy will depend on whether local communities perceive themselves as participants rather than merely subjects of state transformation.

Therefore, institutional mechanisms for consultation, compensation, and inclusion become central components of sustainable capital governance.

The case of Astana in Kazakhstan presents another dimension of capital relocation: the use of spatial transformation as a mechanism of nation-building. Following independence from the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan relocated its capital from Almaty to Astana, partly to strengthen state presence in strategically important territories and construct a new national identity. The new capital became a symbol of sovereignty, modernization, and post-Soviet transformation.

Astana demonstrates the capacity of strong political leadership to mobilize resources and accelerate large-scale development. The project benefited from centralized decision-making and substantial state commitment. In this regard, Astana illustrates how capital relocation can function as an instrument of political consolidation and national identity formation.

Nevertheless, the Kazakh experience also highlights differences between administrative effectiveness and democratic legitimacy. While strong executive authority enabled rapid implementation, limited public participation created a governance model heavily dependent on state-driven narratives. This raises questions regarding institutional sustainability when political conditions change.

The comparison with Astana is significant for Indonesia because Nusantara also contains a strong symbolic dimension. The project represents not only administrative relocation but also a vision of Indonesia's future as a modern, technologically advanced, and geographically balanced state. However, unlike Kazakhstan, Indonesia's democratic institutions require legitimacy to be continuously negotiated through public accountability and institutional checks.

Putrajaya in Malaysia provides a different model by demonstrating that administrative relocation can occur without completely replacing the symbolic role of the existing capital.

Developed as a federal administrative center, Putrajaya was designed to reduce administrative pressure on Kuala Lumpur while improving governmental efficiency. This approach reflects a more incremental model of institutional adjustment compared with Brasília, Abuja, and Astana.

The Malaysian experience demonstrates the importance of functional integration between administrative planning and urban development. Putrajaya successfully created a governmental center with modern infrastructure and administrative efficiency. However, critics have noted that the city has struggled to develop a broader social and economic ecosystem, often functioning primarily as an administrative zone rather than a fully integrated urban community.

This experience provides an important implication for Nusantara. The success of a new capital cannot be evaluated solely through government relocation or infrastructure completion. A sustainable capital requires economic dynamism, social interaction, cultural development, and integration with surrounding regions. Otherwise, the new capital risks becoming a government enclave disconnected from broader societal processes.

The comparative evidence from Brasília, Abuja, Astana, and Putrajaya suggests that capital relocation outcomes are shaped by four analytical dimensions: institutional capacity, legitimacy construction, territorial integration, and policy continuity.

First, institutional capacity determines whether governments can coordinate complex relocation processes. Capital relocation requires administrative competence across planning, infrastructure, finance, environmental management, and public service delivery. Without capable institutions, ambitious projects may experience implementation gaps between political vision and practical outcomes. Second, legitimacy construction determines whether citizens accept and support relocation projects. Democratic legitimacy requires transparency, participation, and accountability. The experiences of Abuja and Brasília demonstrate that physical transformation without social inclusion can produce political tensions.

Third, territorial integration determines whether new capitals contribute to broader national development. A capital must function as more than an administrative center; it must generate economic connections and regional opportunities. Fourth, policy continuity determines whether relocation projects survive political transitions. Since capital development requires decades of implementation, institutionalization beyond individual leaders becomes essential.

Based on these comparative dynamics, Nusantara can be understood as a case of democratic state transformation through spatial restructuring. Unlike previous capital relocation projects primarily driven by modernization or regime consolidation, Indonesia's experience combines developmental objectives with democratic governance requirements. This creates both opportunities and constraints.

The Nusantara project demonstrates that contemporary capital relocation is no longer simply a question of where governments are located. It concerns how states reorganize authority, construct legitimacy, and adapt institutions to future challenges. The Indonesian case therefore contributes to comparative politics by showing that capital relocation in emerging democracies requires balancing state ambition with institutional accountability. Rather than measuring success through physical completion alone, the effectiveness of Nusantara should be evaluated through its ability to produce lasting institutional transformation. A successful capital relocation is ultimately one that strengthens state capacity, enhances democratic legitimacy, promotes inclusive development, and creates resilient governance institutions.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has examined Indonesia's Nusantara capital relocation project as a political transformation strategy rather than merely an urban development initiative. Through a comparative analysis of Brasília, Abuja, Astana, and Putrajaya, the article demonstrates that capital relocation represents a complex process involving territorial restructuring, institutional transformation, legitimacy construction, and state-building. The Nusantara project reflects Indonesia's broader attempt to redefine the relationship between administrative authority, national development, and territorial balance. However, the analysis shows that the success of capital relocation cannot be measured only through infrastructure completion or administrative relocation. Instead, it depends on the ability of the state to transform physical space into sustainable political and institutional capacity.

The comparative findings indicate that successful capital relocation requires the interaction of four critical dimensions: state capacity, political legitimacy, socio-economic integration, and institutional continuity. The experiences of Brasília and Astana demonstrate that strong state capacity can accelerate the construction of new capitals and reinforce national symbolism. However, these cases also reveal that physical transformation does not automatically resolve structural inequalities or guarantee long-term institutional effectiveness. Similarly, Abuja and Putrajaya demonstrate that administrative relocation must be accompanied by inclusive governance and broader economic integration to avoid creating isolated political spaces disconnected from society.

The Nusantara case contributes to comparative politics and public administration scholarship by conceptualizing capital relocation as a form of democratic state transformation. Unlike previous cases often associated with centralized modernization projects, Indonesia's experience demonstrates the challenges faced by emerging democracies attempting to pursue ambitious long-term development agendas while maintaining accountability and public legitimacy. The article argues that democratic capital relocation requires balancing executive capacity with participatory governance, strategic planning with institutional transparency, and national ambitions with local interests.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending existing approaches to capital relocation beyond spatial and administrative analysis. This article proposes that new capitals should be understood as institutional projects where political authority, state capacity, and national identity are reconstructed through spatial transformation. From this perspective, the sustainability of Nusantara depends not only on whether a new administrative center is successfully built, but also on whether it strengthens governance institutions, enhances public trust, and produces inclusive national development outcomes.

For policymakers, the Indonesian experience provides broader lessons for countries considering administrative relocation as a strategy of national transformation. Capital relocation requires long-term institutional commitment, effective coordination mechanisms, transparent financial governance, and meaningful participation from affected communities. Without these elements, relocation projects risk becoming symbolic mega-projects with limited transformative impact. Conversely, when supported by capable institutions and legitimate governance processes, new capitals can become instruments for strengthening state resilience and promoting more balanced development.

Ultimately, Nusantara represents an important experiment in twenty-first-century state-building. Its future success will depend on whether Indonesia can move beyond the construction of a new city toward the creation of a new governance model. The project's significance lies not simply in relocating administrative functions but in demonstrating how democratic states can use spatial transformation to pursue institutional innovation, territorial inclusion, and long-term national development.

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