

BORDER POLITICS IN TRANSMIGRATION AND BORDER AREAS: A CASE STUDY OF THE NUNUKAN BORDER

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Highlight

Nunukan border governance combines hard-power security measures with soft-power development strategies. Surveillance, infrastructure, and defense-capacity gaps limit effective control of the Indonesia–Malaysia frontier. Transmigration functions as a territorial-development instrument that strengthens state presence and local socioeconomic activity.

Abstract

Nunukan Regency, situated in North Kalimantan Province, Indonesia, directly borders the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Despite its geostrategic significance, development in Nunukan remains considerably behind that of neighboring Tawau City, Malaysia, amid illegal border crossings, the Ambalat Sea dispute, poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited public services. To analyze border politics in transmigration and national border zones, with a particular focus on Nunukan Regency. A qualitative research design was adopted using field observations and semi-structured interviews conducted between August and December 2025, together with government reports, statistical publications, and peer-reviewed literature. Data validity was ensured through triangulation. Border governance combines hard- and soft-power strategies. Military deployment, patrols, and territorial surveillance support sovereignty and mobility control, but gaps in surveillance technology, infrastructure, and defense capacity limit effectiveness. Inadequate education, healthcare, and transportation deepen development disparities and economic dependence on Malaysia. **Conclusion:** Transmigration policy extends beyond population redistribution and functions as a territorial-development instrument that strengthens state presence and stimulates socioeconomic activity in border areas.

Keywords

border policy; transmigration; border security; border zone development; Nunukan Regency

INTRODUCTION

From the viewpoint of the discursive representations of statehood, borders have been considered a reflection of the socio-cultural image of the state, not only as markers through which the territorial continuity of the nation can be defined, but also as tangible statements of a nation's image and developmental goals (Kolosov, 2019). This vision was expressed by former President Soetigna Joko Widodo in 2021, which underlined that the boundaries of Indonesia have to be declared as one of the symbols of national pride and must be developed as an economic hub (Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary, 2021). This policy stance of security, economic development, and social progress is central to the understanding of scholars of border politics (Çaykent, 2022; Günay & Witjes, 2017; Mayer et al., 2019; Staudt, 2017). Border politics is a complex field of research that encompasses issues of state sovereignty, migration control, technological development, and socioeconomic disparities. To ensure border integrity, the state's territorial security agenda requires technological advances to be successfully implemented (Çaykent, 2022; Günay & Witjes, 2017). Meanwhile, economic differences between

inter-regional areas serve as significant push factors contributing to the migration process and can fuel illicit inter-border transfers, such as the trafficking of (sex) workers, as well as human trafficking, drug trafficking, and conditions of exploitation of migrant workers (Staudt, 2017). Coordinated policy actions encompassing several policy elements are required to address these dynamics.

Nunukan Regency is one of the most remote administrative regions in Indonesia, sharing land and sea borders with Malaysia's States of Sabah and Sarawak (20 sub-districts). Although geopolitically important, the regency still suffers from significant infrastructure issues, especially related to healthcare, education, transport and trade facilities, as described by Agustina (2025), Amin (2024), Herdiansyah (2025), Rauf (2025), and Sucipto (2025). Two of the sub-districts—Krayan and South Krayan—are significantly more isolated. Given these circumstances, researchers and decision-makers have been discussing the need to shift the paradigm of border areas from being merely buffer zones to having a central role in inclusive economic growth and being part of the national development strategy (Brigham, 1919; Brunet-Jailly, 2010; Murei, 2025). Considering the conditions of these structures, Nunukan Regency is also a 3T (disadvantaged, outermost, and remote) area in Indonesia. This classification is based on geographic remoteness, social vulnerability, and economic underdevelopment (Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, 2023). To overcome these disparities, the Indonesian government has revitalized its transmigration policy, which is no longer simply considered a "population redistribution policy" but also a policy to overcome the inter-regional development gap. (Ministry of Transmigration 2025).

Seimenggaris, one of the transmigration centers, and West Nunukan have been established for more than ten years but still suffer from low infrastructure development, both in terms of transportation and social and economic facilities (Diansyah & Buniyamin, 2025a). The lack of social and economic services in Nunukan also directly causes an increasing inequality gap compared to Tawau City in Sabah, Malaysia. From a regional security perspective, this gap has tangible implications for regional security because it creates opportunities to support illegal trafficking, including narcotics and persons, via unofficial off-channel channels that lie beyond the scope of border security control (Balang, 2025; Diansyah & Buniyamin, 2025b; Yudistira, 2024). Moreover, Nunukan has become a transit area for illegal Indonesian migrant workers (Diansyah & Buniyamin, 2025b) because of its relative affluence compared to Malaysia. In addition to the development dimension, Nunukan is set in a wider geopolitical risk context. Ambalat waters, located between Kalimantan and Sulawesi, are very strategic waters linking the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean via the Lombok Strait. This strait is part of the Indonesian Archipelagic Sea Lane (ALKI) II, which is very suitable for a nuclear submarine due to its depth of up to 1400 meters (Adjie, 2020). China's unilateral interests in the South China Sea and the operations of maritime force AUKUS, which consists of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have made the sea lanes more sensitive from a strategic perspective (Achmad & Setuningsih, 2023; Himawan, 2025; Liliansa, 2023; Panneerselvam & Supriyanto, 2025; Phillips, 2022). Existing scholarship sensitively illustrates the complexity of the relations of power that shape politics at the borders of transmigration and the outermost regions. A relational strategy to negotiate border porosity is a common trajectory for migrants, producing "unseen" and "adaptive migrant politics" (Alexandridis, 2025; Ilcan et al., 2025; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010).

Research from other parts of the world, including Ethiopia and Yunnan, China, indicates that more restrictive border policies can encourage the development of new methods of smuggling and avoidance (Mengiste, 2021; Ptak et al., 2020). The 'border-filter' emphasizes that borders are not geographical entities but rather selective systems of control introduced by nation-states that are socially and politically constructed and affirmatively develop mobility regulation criteria and practices (Roumettie, 2025). The governance of the border is aggravated by the presence of external geopolitical pressure, manifesting from the European Union, the United States, neighboring states, or with an intraethnic dimension, which may affect border governance in several ways, including increasing inequalities and tensions among ethnic groups (Landherr, 2024; Menjívar, 2014). From the local point of view, the pattern of border politics as a hybrid of security concerns and development programs is interwoven in Indonesia. At the local level, the border as a pattern of politics that can be described as a hybrid of security and welfare-oriented development is interwoven. Studies on the governance of Indonesia's land borders with Malaysia and PNG/Timor-Leste highlight the need for security enforcement and socioeconomic development in Indonesia (Kurniasih & Umar, 2022; Rokhaniyah et al., 2023; Subagyo, 2021). The Sebatik Integrated Marine and Fisheries Center is a good case of how economic instruments can be used to improve the bargaining power of bilateral relations between Indonesia and Malaysia (Yanti and Muawanah, 2020). For remote island areas, a participatory development approach has also been recommended to encourage psychological integration and minimize social marginalization (Siswanto et al., 2024). Few studies, and none specifically about transmigration policy and border politics within a monolithic frame of analysis, have emerged despite this volume

of literature. The current study fills this gap by examining the relationship between sovereignty, security governance, and socioeconomic development in Nunukan Regency, one of the most complex and strategic border regions in Indonesia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design, integrating both primary and secondary data to develop a comprehensive understanding of border politics in Indonesia's transmigration and outermost border areas, specifically within Nunukan Regency. A qualitative approach was selected because the research questions are concerned with the meanings, mechanisms, and contextual dynamics of border governance—phenomena that resist reduction to quantifiable variables and require interpretive depth. Primary data were gathered through two principal methods: field observations and semi-structured interviews. Field observations were conducted in areas directly adjacent to the Indonesian-Malaysian border, including the Seimenggaris sub-district and Nunukan District—both of which function as transmigration sites and outermost border areas. Observations documented the state of physical infrastructure, security installations, community settlement patterns, and the visible presence of state institutions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between late August and early December 2025 using purposive sampling, a technique appropriate when the researcher requires informants with specific knowledge, roles, or experience. Two primary selection criteria governed informant eligibility: (1) substantive knowledge of border policies in Indonesia's transmigration and outermost areas within Nunukan Regency, and (2) lived experience of the social, economic, and security conditions prevailing in these areas. Based on these criteria, interviews were conducted with ten key informants representing government, military, and community sectors.

Table 1. Research Informants by Role, Institution, and Sector

	Informant	Institution / Role	Sector
1	Regent of Nunukan	Nunukan Regency Government	Government
2	Regional Secretary	Nunukan Regency Government	Government
3	Head of Transmigration Office	Nunukan Regency Transmigration Office	Government
4	Commander and Deputy Commander, Border Security Task Force	Indonesian National Armed Forces – Army	Military / Security
5	Head of Nunukan Military District (Kodim 0711)	Indonesian National Armed Forces – Army	Military / Security
6	Operations Staff, Naval Base	Nunukan Regency Naval Base (TNI-AL)	Military / Security
7	Head of Seimenggaris District	Nunukan Regency Local Government	Government
8	Head of Srinanti Village	Village Government, Nunukan	Government
9	Secretary of Sekaduyan Taka Village	Village Government, Nunukan	Government
10	Community Leaders of Sekaduyan Taka Village	Civil Society / Local Community	Community

Secondary data were drawn from government policy documents, official statistical publications from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik), reports from the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, academic journal articles, and relevant online news sources reporting on border developments in Nunukan Regency.

Data quality and validity were ensured through methodological triangulation—a technique that cross-checks and verifies findings by comparing information from multiple sources and methods (Denzin, 1978). The triangulation process involved comparing interview data with field observation records and secondary documentary sources. Where multiple informants provided convergent accounts, findings were considered substantiated. Divergent accounts were treated as evidence of contested interpretations and analyzed accordingly. Following validation, the data were systematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns, structural mechanisms, and relational dynamics characterizing border politics in Nunukan's transmigration and outermost regions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of border politics has the following hard power and soft power dimensions that are complementary. The analysis of border politics has two complementary dimensions, which are hard power and soft power. Hard power is the state's ability to use the military power, police (law enforcement), or coercive forces (coercive instruments). Soft power is a political/development approach to widening sovereign power and raising social

welfare and economic situations. These dimensions are not antithetical but coexist, and both are part of the need for border security and socioeconomic development in the process of managing the outermost areas of Indonesia.

Hard Power: Security and Defense Dimension

Hard power in border governance is more likely to be demonstrated in the presence of the state (which can be persistent), surveillance capacity (capable of monitoring the border), and border enforcement than in the projection of overt military force. In Nunukan Regency, this hard power machine involves three wings of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) that lie at the border of the North Indonesian frontier region with Malaysia, namely Army, Air Force and Navy. In remote border areas, the military is stationed by army territorial units, namely the District Military Command (Kodim) and Sub-District Military Command (Koramil), 24 hours a day. Border Security Posts (Pos Pamantas) are responsible for monitoring land routes, unofficial crossings, and buffer areas and performing national defense functions, while naval bases and marine posts are responsible for guarding maritime boundaries to prevent smuggling and illegal trans-border movement. This military infrastructure performs three essential operational tasks: deterring threats of territorialization, symbolically asserting sovereignty in frontier areas, and proving effective at mobilization response and security events. However military forces are geared towards stabilization and control more than towards offensive operations, due to the terrain and scattered settlement pattern of Nunukan.

Table 2. Summary of Hard Power Capabilities and Limitations in Nunukan Regency

Branch	Current Capability	Key Limitation
Army (TNI-AD)	Light infantry; territorial units (Kodim/Koramil); border security posts	Lack of heavy equipment; limited ISR drones; inadequate surveillance coverage
Navy (TNI-AL)	Patrol vessels; naval base at Nunukan; marine posts	No major combat vessels; maritime domain awareness not sensor-integrated; rotating fleet reliance
Air Force (TNI-AU)	No combat air base in Nunukan; nearest radar at Tarakan (153 km)	Limited local radar/air sensors; slow rapid-response capability; no routine air patrol
Cross-Agency	Manual patrol methods; limited inter-agency data sharing	No drone-based ISR integration; no fully-implemented early warning system in Nunukan

Although the TNI is deployed formally, there are major gaps in capabilities in all its military arms in Nunukan. In this light infantry model, heavy reliance on human drones increases risk and costs of operations on the border, while IDP camps are less heavily guarded with only light security measures, resulting in large areas of border territory that are poorly monitored. The narrow corridor also lacks major combatants; in conjunction, the Navy relies on fleet rotations instead of stasis forces; and maritime domain awareness systems are lacking in sensor connectivity. The Air Force has no combat air base in Nunukan, the nearest combat air base is located in Tarakan is about 153 kilometers away from Nunukan, which limit the speed in which the Air Force could respond to air attacks.



Figure 1. Location of Radar Unit and Air Force Base in Tarakan Relative to Nunukan Border

Geographic schematic illustrating the 153-kilometer distance between Radar Unit (Satrad) 225 in Tarakan and the Nunukan border zone. The map highlights surveillance coverage gaps that create monitoring blind spots along the Indonesian-Malaysian land and maritime boundary.

This reliance on conventional, practicable patrol systems, sub-optimal radar coverage, and lack of regular air patrol creates 'blind spots' where monitoring issues are perceived as absent, allowing opportunities for various non-productive activities such as the smuggling of narcotics through 'back channels' and the unauthorized use of land borders and air lanes. The narrowness of these limitations directly impacts Indonesia's capacity to track and strategically react to developments in the greater South China Sea region. The Ambalat waters and ALKI II are critical geostrategic areas, but the early warning system and the integration of multi-agency data in this area remain underdeveloped compared to the potential threats that may arise (Achmad and Setuningsih, 2023; Himawan, 2025; Laksmana, 2026; Panneerselvam and Supriyanto, 2025).

Soft Power: Social, Economic, and Development Dimension

Soft power spans the realm of political, social, and economic policy, while hard power focuses on the security aspect of border governance and seeks to increase state sovereignty by enhancing the situation of border communities. In the context of the border, soft power includes measures that improve the lives of citizens, increase the volume of public services, and promote their integration into the national space in terms of development (Akbarov, 2020; Gray, 2011; Makukh-Fedorkova & Konstantynyuk, 2024).

Even the social fabric in Nunukan border and transmigration people is multi-ethnic, having indigenous people in Nunukan namely Tidung and Dayak, while Bugis, Javanese, and other are immigrant ethnic people. This diversity engenders dynamic processes of cultural interaction and acculturation. However, social divisions in access to basic services such as education and healthcare negatively impact social cohesion and dependency on Malaysia as an alternative service provider. Educational facilities in remote transmigration settlements are still fewer in number and personnel, which may result in a low level of educational attainment. In particular, it seems that young people are more attracted to Malaysia due to the higher perceived levels of economic opportunities relative to opportunities at home.

Access to healthcare is also restricted. Primary health centers suffer from long distances, short staffing, and weak facilities, pushing farmers along the border to consider accessing Malaysian healthcare centers (HC) for assistance that are more convenient to reach and have more comprehensive service levels. This situation reflects a structural problem in the delivery of public services at the frontiers of Indonesia and is a significant loss of soft power.

The Human Development Index (HDI) in the Nunukan region experienced an improvement from the previous year, which was around 67.88 in 2022 to 69.27 in 2024, with the main improvement seen in the area of a decent living standard (Badan Pusat Statistik - BPS, Kabupaten Nunukan, 2024). Despite this, the HDI level of the regency is still rather low compared to the national average (cet. 75.0) and the provincial average for North Kalimantan (cet. 79.0), indicating that the community continues to be a community with an economic situation that is vulnerable.

Table 3. Human Development Index (HDI) Trends in Nunukan Regency, 2021–2024

Year	Nunukan HDI	National HDI (Indonesia)	Key Driver of Change
2021	66.74	72.29	Baseline post-pandemic year
2022	67.88	72.91	Education dimension gains
2023	68.43	74.39	Improvement in life expectancy
2024	69.27	~75.00	Decent living and education dimensions improved

Analysis of the educational composition of Nunukan's population reveals profound structural challenges. As of the end of 2024, approximately 31.33% of the population had never completed or never attended primary education; only 15.19% had completed senior high school; and a mere 3.25% held a bachelor's degree, with graduate-level qualifications (master's or doctoral) being exceedingly rare (Fadhilurrahman, 2025). This profile reflects inadequate access to and quality of educational services across the regency, particularly in geographically isolated communities.

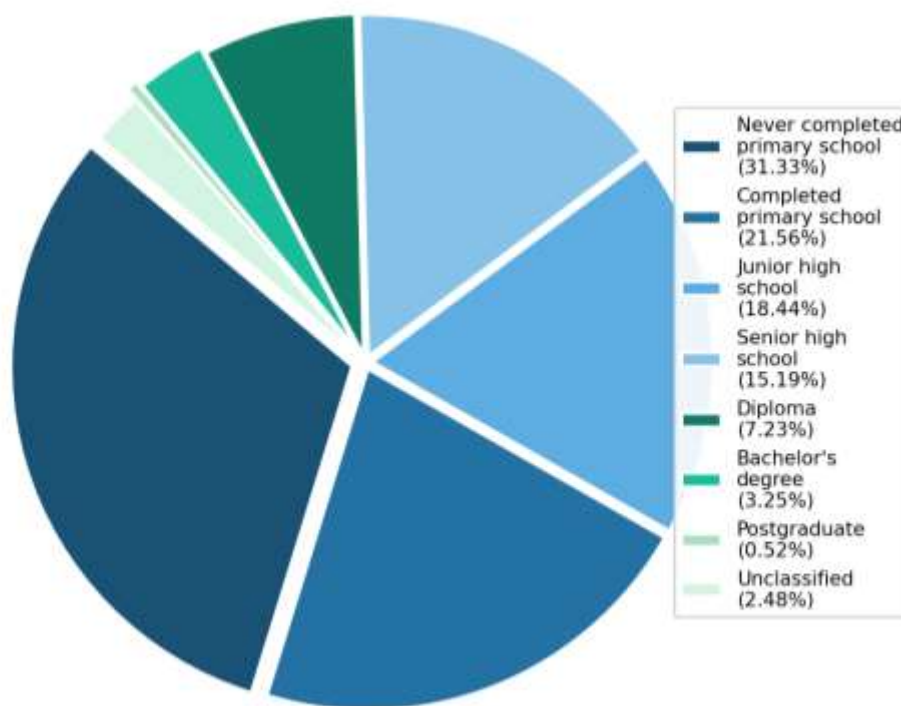


Figure 2. Educational Attainment Distribution of Nunukan Regency's Population (End of 2024)

The chart illustrates the predominance of low education levels, with 31.33% having never completed primary education, contrasted against minimal proportions holding tertiary qualifications.

From an economic point of view, the livelihoods of the residents in the border area and the transmigration area are mainly based on the primary sector, which includes the agricultural sector (palm oil and dryland rice growing), fisheries, and small businesses. The income range is low and fluctuating, limited by inadequate transportation of goods and people, weak road infrastructure, and limited access to markets. These circumstances result in high logistic expenses and make local products less competitive. Proximity to Malaysia also distorts the local labor market, leading to a large proportion of adults seeking work as migrant laborers in Malaysia, either documented or undocumented, due to significantly higher wages, perpetuating economic dependence on the neighboring country.

Despite sharp seasonal changes in Nunukan's economy, the region recorded an annual growth rate of 3.55% in the first quarter of 2025. However, the economy contracted by -3.27% in the same quarter of 2025 due to low seasonal demand from commodity-dependent sectors (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Nunukan, 2025; Asrin & Mufid, 2025). Approximately 27.07% of the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) of North Kalimantan comes from the regency, with a GRDP value of Rp10.34 trillion at current prices. These statistics indicate potential economic growth but also highlight the country's vulnerability to internal and external shocks, such as climate variability and global commodity prices.

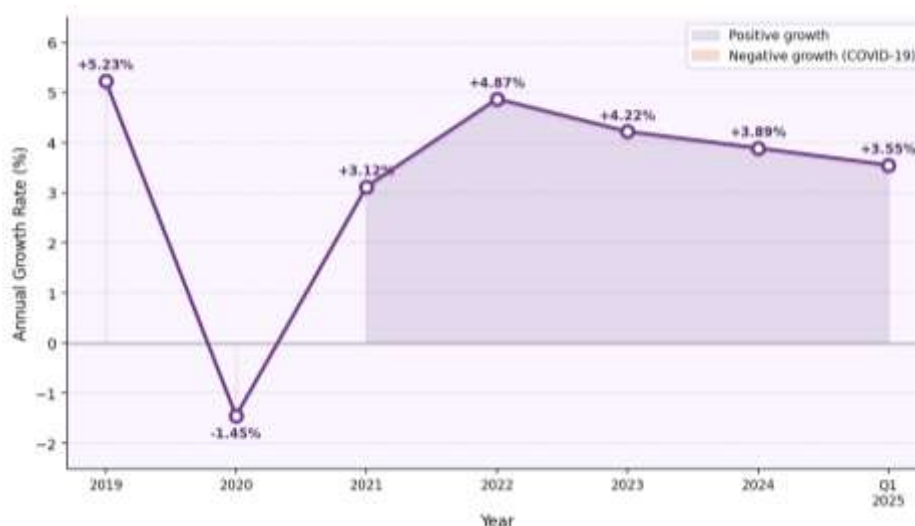


Figure 3. Annual Economic Growth Rate (%) of Nunukan Regency, 2019-Q12025

Line chart illustrates the annual economic growth rate of Nunukan Regency from 2019 to Q1 2025. The trajectory shows post-pandemic recovery, with a 3.55% annual growth rate in Q1 2025 alongside a seasonal quarterly contraction of -3.27%.

One of the most obvious forms of soft power contestation in Nunukan is in infrastructure development. Roads, electrification, clean water supply, and public service facilities are not just welfare goods but tools of state presence and territorial integration. Nunukan's geographic attributes (islands, forests, and mountainous terrain) make infrastructure development quite challenging and more expensive than in other non-border regions. The disparity is also pronounced in the case of transportation infrastructure; access to the land is still unstable, relying on seasonal conditions, while sea and air transportation is limited due to high costs and low frequency compared to the income levels of local communities.

Basic services are gradually reaching most places – electricity and clean water – but provision remains unreliable and incomplete, even in many transmigration settlements and border villages. Prolonged staffing personnel issues and geographic unavailability are compounding factors in education and healthcare institutions. The low quality of services and accessibility create a recurring phenomenon where Nunukan's border residents are persuaded, or even forced, to seek schools, hospitals, and commerce in Malaysia, believing that the services there are better (Mirwang, 2024; Ramadianto et al., 2022).

Additionally, institutional limitations exist in the development of infrastructure in Nunukan. Financial constraints, lack of efficiency, and coordination shortcomings between central and local government units have led to delays and poor performance in various development programs. The institutional failures are worsened by geographic remoteness, perpetuating a vicious circle of inadequate infrastructure and investment, leading to underdevelopment. In the case of the transmigration program, its effect has been more than just a territorial soft power measure; it has also helped repurpose the population to support the moderate economic growth common in Indonesia. The transmigration policy, which includes village structures, elementary infrastructure, and economic activities, has had a significant impact on strengthening state presence at the border and contributing to national integration in sparsely populated areas along the border (Ministry of Transmigration, 2025). The presence of transmigration areas like Seimenggaris is considered a tangible example of Indonesia's populated, administered, and developing status, which are strategic and developmental factors. This fact aligns with the general academic understanding that population policies complement traditional security policies in consolidating sovereignty (Kurniasih & Umar, 2022; Siswanto et al., 2024).

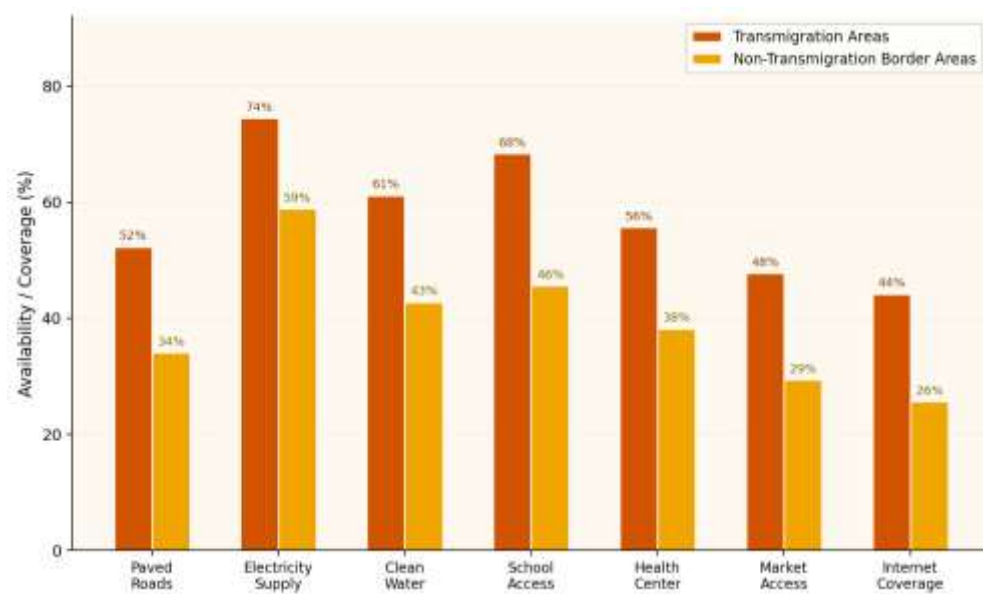


Figure 4. Infrastructure Availability in Transmigration vs. Non-Transmigration Border Areas, Nunukan Regency (2025)

Grouped bar chart comparing infrastructure availability (roads, electricity, clean water, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions) between transmigration areas and non-transmigration border areas in Nunukan Regency as of 2025. The chart highlights persistent disparities in service provision between settlement types.

Hard/soft power dynamics in Nunukan highlight a structural conflict at the core of border governance in Indonesia. The constraints on security operations stem from the very limitations sought to be overcome by soft power policies: poor roads make it difficult to move security forces; limited economic opportunities push residents to Malaysia and transborder activities; and gaps in current surveillance technology leave security authorities less aware of their surroundings. On the other hand, it is impossible for development programs to achieve the desired results without stability enhanced by effective security governance. This interdependence underscores the importance of a more integrated, rather than sequential, approach to border governance that relies on defense modernization, investments in infrastructure, and investments in human development as mutually reinforcing measures, rather than potentially conflicting strategies.

Limitations and scope for future research



Figure 5. The Nunukan Frontier: Strategic Gaps and Border Realities

This study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of border politics in transmigration and outermost regions in Indonesia, but several limitations are observed. First, the analysis is based on qualitative

data obtained from the qualitative study conducted in one border regency, Nunukan; that is, the data obtained are not likely to reflect the diversity of the dynamics of administration in Indonesia's extensive and geographically diverse border regions. The local political-economic and ethnic mix and capabilities in Nunukan, and its strategic role with regards to Malaysia, may differ from other border contexts, which entails the findings being regionally bound in nature and thus restricting their generalizability. Second, although this study is an important contribution to the analysis of local institutions and stakeholders, it fails to explore other important dimensions relevant to the research questions. Transnational economic networks were not dealt critically, such as the linkages between informal cross-border traders and wider regional markets. Likewise, the agency and corresponding views of documented and undocumented migrant workers were understated. We could benefit from some of the 'grassroots' experiences of border politics from an integration of these views into future research. Third, this study adopted a qualitative methodology exclusively. Although this method applies well to the interpretive/customary needs of the research, the near lack of any quantitative measures (numerics) such as time-series data and information on migration flows, infrastructure investment expenditures, security incident frequencies, or other factors would allow a more precise analysis of temporal trends and help in cross-regional comparisons. Fifth, although this study reviews the geopolitical aspects and background of the South China Sea and ALKI II, much of the analysis of regional security dynamics and their associated local aspects of border governance is descriptive.

Future work would benefit from a more systematic analysis of the transformation of macro-level geopolitical changes to local-level policy changes. Future research should follow several directions to overcome these limitations. Multi-regional studies in the various Indonesian border areas (with Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines) would help to deduce generalizable patterns as well as border-specific variables. A combination of quantitative data related to development indicators, migration flows, and security outcomes would facilitate the use of mixed methods analysis to test the causal mechanisms. The current study complements institutional perspectives on migration through research that focuses on the voices and experiences of migrants and neighboring residents. Moreover, longitudinal studies tracking the impact of policy interventions, such as the current revitalization project in the transmigration program and defense modernization program, would provide tangible information to policymakers. Finally, future research could explore the influence of regional geopolitical space through ASEAN aspects and bilateral agreements between border regions, such as Nunukan and Malaysia, on regional governance.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this study is to analyze the model of border politics in the transmigration and outermost border regions of Indonesia, especially Nunukan Regency. The results illustrate the presence of a dual governance of the border in this area, with hard power tactics linked to the securitization of the border and soft power measures focused on development. The state's military force, consisting of Army territorial troops, naval bases, and border security posts, is an indicator of the state's commitment to maintaining territorial integrity while controlling cross-border mobility. Development projects such as the transmigration programs, provision of infrastructure, and business development projects illustrate the state's aim to strengthen its socio-economic base at the border.

However, over the years, these policy initiatives have been little effective in achieving an integrated, effective border management system with the state. Digital shortcomings in surveillance and defensive capability, as well as unequal development of infrastructure and geographic isolation, continue to add to the limitations of "hard-power" activities. Such a structure is but part of the socioeconomic difference between Nunukan and the Malaysian border areas, which engender cross-border labor migration, the normalization of informal trade, and dependence on facilities for education and healthcare abroad. The consequences of these dynamics are that the border regions are at the same time areas of security and space for economic and social relationships, which need border governance that is sensitive towards these two aspects.

This study has an important conceptual contribution to make, which is to show how the transmigration policy can be regarded as a territorial governance instrument. Transmigration in Nunukan is not just about demographic redistribution; it can even be a system of establishing permanent settlement and stimulating economic growth in the regions and asserting state presence that would otherwise be left ungoverned. This discovery extends a conventional discourse on border politics, as population policies can be used as a supplemental axis to the consolidation of the sovereignty of a state independent from military and security policy.

Theoretically, it contributes to the integration of demographic, security, and development dimensions in one analytical approach, providing a more comprehensive framework for the analysis of border politics in the Global

South. From an operational perspective, the report highlights the need to strengthen an integrated policy framework to harmonize the integration of both human and physical resources in border areas for defense modernization and infrastructure development. A sector-by-sector response is not enough, as it entails an integrated whole-of-government strategy for Nunukan between security capability and development. The findings are relevant not only for Indonesia's border governance agenda but also to comparative border studies as a whole.

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