

# **Revisiting Indonesian Youth Nationalism in the Indonesia-Malaysia Borderland**

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## **Abstract**

Young people are the next generation of the nation. The future of the nation's life is in the hands of the younger generation. Therefore, the spirit of nationalism is very important for the younger generation, especially young people in border areas. This study aims to review the nationalism of young people in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area. This study uses a mixed-method research method, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative descriptive in this study is a description of the variables of national, socio-economic, and political insight. The national insight variable consists of various indicators, namely Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, the proclamation of independence, the Indonesian president, the meaning of the red and white flag, the youth oath, religion in Indonesia, the basis of the state, and Pancasila. The socio-economic variables consist of several indicators, namely daily needs, food commodities, currency, social welfare, infrastructure, education, health, religious freedom, tolerance, nationality, and language. The political variables consist of various indicators, namely corruption, race, religion, ethnicity, terrorism, narcotics, militarism, smuggling, and regional leaders. While on the qualitative aspect, this research reflects the nationalism of young people in the border area of Sebatik Island, both from the reflection of national, socio-economic, and political insights.

## **Keywords**

Border Communities, Indonesian Identity, Sebatik Island, Youth Nationalism

## **1. Introduction**

Youth has an important role as one of the determinants of the subject for the achievement of national goals. The history of the struggle of the Indonesian nation has recorded the important role of youth starting from the Budi Utomo movement in 1908, the Youth Pledge in 1928, the Proclamation of Independence in 1945, the youth movement, students, students in 1966, up to the student movement in 1998 which has brought the Indonesian nation into a period of reform. Some of these moments indicate a strong relationship between nationalism and youth that often appear together, even now the media often connects nationalism with today's youth. Young people are starting to talk a lot and be talked about in the media, including social media. How nationalism is so related to youth can also be investigated through search engines in cyberspace. Many articles were detected that included two words, namely youth and nationalism (Wardhani 2013).

Why young people? Young people are seen as figures who are in the 'becoming' phase. Young people are in a moving phase until they arrive at the endpoint, namely maturity (Alvian 2015). Young people are still trying to find and find their identity. While adults already have a fixed self-identity (Giroux 2009; Wyn and White 1997). So it is these young people who are vulnerable to their identity, especially their national identity, nationalism.

On the other hand, the border area should be the foremost area because it is the front porch of the Republic of Indonesia, the border area should be treated specifically by the government because the front porch is seen as a sample of the state of the whole country, but in fact, the front porch is isolated and isolated given the limited infrastructure and facilities. especially access to the area, causing inequality and vulnerability to nationalism. The results of the study of Khoiri and Irwan (2020) that community mobility is one of the factors that causes the weakening of the sense of nationalism of residents living at the border. Continuous mobility can affect people's attitudes towards their sense of nationalism.

The Indonesia-Malaysia border area has experienced an Indonesian identity crisis caused by several factors such as welfare problems, economic inequality, infrastructure, and infrastructure which are considered worse for the

Indonesian people at the border when compared to Malaysia. In addition, the emergence of the jargon "Garuda in my chest, a tiger in my stomach" in the Indonesian-Malaysian border community. Indonesian people at the border are very dependent on the economy of the State of Malaysia. So it appears what is called the split of identity. Therefore, this study aims to strengthen the Indonesian identity of the Indonesian people at the Indonesia-Malaysia border. The border areas of Indonesia and Malaysia have multiple gaps in terms of the level of the economy, infrastructure, and public services. The socio-economic life of Indonesian citizens is dependent on their neighbors in Indonesia (Putri 2018). From a social perspective, many young people drop out of school because of the economy, access to schools is very poor, infrastructure for health is very inadequate for the community because they are limited to getting health and education. On the other hand, there are various problems faced in border areas, poverty, and even marriage at an early age so many young people drop out of school without getting an education.

Patton (2009) in his research on the border in East Kalimantan-Malaysia explained that the lack of attention to the development of the border region resulted in a negative impact on the country's sovereignty, national resilience, and ideology, waning national insight both from the political, economic, social, cultural, and social aspects. defense and security for the people in the border areas. Based on this research, it is known that in border areas that do not receive attention, there is a tendency for a nationalism crisis to occur. The results of these previous studies need to be followed up with more in-depth research in other areas, namely on the border of North Kalimantan, namely Sebatik Island. So what about border youth concerning today's nationalism?

### **1.1 Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to analyze nationalism in youth at the border. From the search results, there has been no previous research that specifically discusses nationalism in youth on the Indonesian border, especially on Sebatik Island, North Kalimantan. Existing studies are identity construction of nationalism in Batam (Dedees 2016), nationalism at the Malay-Karimun border (Pamungkas 2016), nationalism at the Kapuas Hulu border (Amin 2013), nationalism in West Kalimantan (Munandar 2016; Mansyah 2017; Elyta 2019), and other border nationalism studies. Meanwhile, studies of border nationalism in Sebatik have also been carried out by several researchers (Saleh 2011; Inayah 2017; Nurlala 2018; Setiawan 2021). However, from previous studies, there has been no study that analyzes nationalism among youth at the border, especially on Sebatik Island. Sebatik Island is a unique island because it is a small island directly adjacent to mainland Malaysia. This island has an area divided into two parts, some of which are part of the territory of the State of Malaysia and the other part is part of the territory of the State of Indonesia. Sebatik Island is the foremost and outermost island in Indonesia. Sebatik is an island located in North Kalimantan which is directly adjacent to Indonesia and Malaysia. The activities of the people of the Sebatik island are directly sided by side with the lives of Malaysians, such as economic, social, and political activities. This makes the writer interested in studying the nationalism of young people on the island of Sebatik.

## **2. Literature Review**

This study highlights the relationship between youth and nationalism in border areas. Talking about young people is important because it is associated with generations, they are the ones who will continue the goal of a struggle. According to Alvian's study (2015), the concept of young people as the younger generation when compared to the older generation: First, how young people will strengthen the country in the future, including if it is related to the border context. Second, young people are inheritors of the values of the older generation. In their relationship with young people, adults are internalizing the values they believe in the younger generation. Generation here can be understood as a group of people who were born at relatively the same time and have relatively similar interpretations of their life experiences. Therefore, the differences between the two generations—between youth and adults—not only include age differences, but also differences in values and perspectives (Alanen 2011). Identity is a pervasive problem experienced by both individuals and groups. If the individual in question is a member of a larger group, then apart from having an individual identity, he or she also has a group identity. Each individual must have a larger group, namely the nation. So within the individual concerned will reveal a national identity, and if that nation is Indonesia, it has an Indonesian identity. Because Indonesia is an imagined political construction, the levels of Indonesian identity possessed by individuals will vary.

Individuals who live in certain political communities, especially national political communities, will involve historical facts, experiences, and actualities within the individual so that one can find self-identity which is influenced by the style of the community within the nation. Individuals are born, grow, and raised in national identity, are formed, and absorb values that deeply shape their character towards that national identity. The political community that embodies

national identity also forms layers of strata and spatial structures that provide various colors and intensities to form an awareness of the same basic common bounds (Parekh 2000).

In its development, the political community moved forward into a modern state. Then there will be a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing relationship between the political community and its members. In this interrelationship, a national identity is formed which is maintained through the practice of trivial daily activities to more serious activities. Starting in the form of sports competitions in peacetime, for example, to competition and seizure of territory in times of war. States have symbols that are maintained based on mutual agreement and individuals maintain based on growing ties to their country (Parekh 2000).

National identity contains important aspects, namely as an element of differentiation (differentiation) something from others and as an element of "weighing" with others. It contains many intertwined elements, including territory/territory; language; history/experience that shape common understanding; tradition; belief-religious system; law, and political institutions.

Like individual identity, national identity is a complex layer of individuals who are united and driven by a common awareness of various values that are understood in different degrees. One individual's understanding of the collective general awareness of the various elements is not the same as that of another individual. So often these layers overlap and even collide with each other in the national identity system (Parekh 2000).

There are many definitions of the meaning of identity. Gelisli (2014) mentions that identity is a unique concept inherent in humans. The concept of identity contains two components, name recognition, and distinguishing components and the other component is belonging (belonging). Aspects of recognition so that it can be recognized and differentiated from other groups of individuals are language and cultural factors. While the belonging aspect can be obtained when the individual can be accepted by the group.

In line with Geseli, Castells (2010) argues that identity is a social construction that goes through a long process. Identity construction uses building materials from history, geography, biology, productive and reproductive institutions, collective memory and from personal fantasies, the state or ruling apparatus, and God's revelation. However, after all, individuals, social groups, and communities even process in all these material forms and rearrange individual meanings based on social conditions, cultural projects rooted in social structures, space, and time frames of society. Furthermore, Calhoun (1994) states that identity is a reference source of individual meaning to the world around him. It says: We know of no people without names, no languages or cultures in which some manner of distinctions between self and other, we and they, are not made . . . Self-knowledge – always a construction no matter how much it feels like a discovery – is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others (Calhoun 1994). According to Gelisli, identity is a dynamic process of social formation. It involves so many agents who play a role in building identity construction through the socialization process. These agents include families, schools, playgroups, mass media, etc.

### **3. Methods**

This study used a mixed-method research method, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative descriptive in this study is a description of the variables of national, socio-economic, and political insight. While on the qualitative aspect, this research reflects the nationalism of young people in the border area of Sebatik Island, both from the reflection of national, socio-economic, and political insights. This study takes data from young people in Sebatik Island. Data collection in this study was using interviews, questionnaires, and Focus Group Discussion techniques. This research has used descriptive analysis to explain the level of youth nationalism on the border of Sebatik Island. This research has identified, described, and interpreted general patterns, trends, and themes from the data obtained. The data is then analyzed through decomposition and conceptualization following the existing theoretical framework, then concludes the research.

### **4. Data Collection**

Data was collected on 110 young people in Sebatik with the proportion, 45,5% young women and 54,5% young men. The age range of respondents is 32.8% aged 16 years old, 30% aged 17 years old, 29.1% aged 18 years old, and 7.1% more than 18 years old. From the data that has been analyzed, most of the respondents stated that they had visited Malaysia intending to meet with family, seek treatment, travel, or trade (Table 1).

Table 1. Respondent's Characteristics

No.	Variables		Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	54,5%
		Female	45,5%
2.	Age	16 years old	32,8%
		17 years old	30%
		18 years old	29,1%
		More than 18 years old	7,1%
3.	Domicile	West Sebatik	4,5%
		Main Sebatik	25,5%
		Central Sebatik	9,0%
		East Sebatik	37,3%
		North Sebatik	22,7%
Number of respondents		110	100,00%

We collected quantitative data regarding youth on Sebatik Island, North Kalimantan based on the distribution of areas per sub-district. Based on the table data above, the respondents in this study were domiciled from Sebatik Muda from West Sebatik 4.5%, Main Sebatik 25.5%, Central Sebatik 9%, East Sebatik 37.3%, and North Sebatik 22.7% consisting of 54.5% young man and 45.5% young woman. The data shows that 67.3% of respondents have visited abroad. This means that most of Sebatik's youth have visited abroad. Meanwhile, 36.1% of overseas destinations are visiting family places. Other reasons are trade, medical treatment, travel, and school. It confirms that many youths in Sebatik have relatives and family abroad or outside Indonesia (Figure 1).

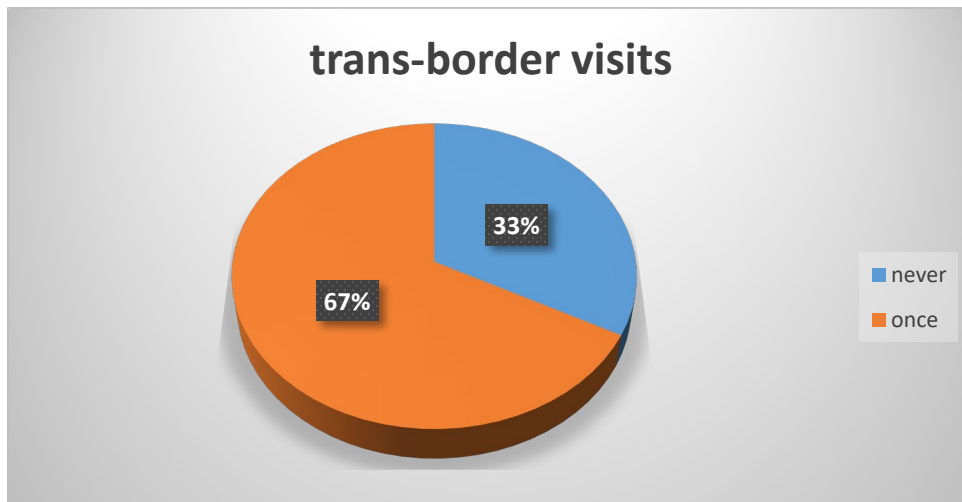


Figure 1. Trans-border Visits

For data related to the variable of national insight, which consists of various indicators, namely Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, the Proclamation of Independence, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, the Meaning of the Red and White Flag, the Youth Pledge, Religion in Indonesia, the Constitution, and Pancasila. The data shows that on average around 72% have a fairly good national insight. However, the other 28% lack good insight.

Furthermore, measuring socio-economic variables consists of several indicators, namely daily needs, food commodities, currency, social welfare, infrastructure, education, health, religious freedom, tolerance, nationality, and language. For data from socio-economic variables on indicators of daily basic needs, 73.7% answered that they were not supplied from Indonesia. This means that most of the respondents who get their basic daily needs come from Malaysia. Likewise, indicators of other socioeconomic variables are also low when compared to Malaysia. For example, the Indonesian government's efforts to improve welfare for border communities are also considered low. The next measured variable is the political variable which consists of various indicators, namely corruption, race,

religion, ethnicity, terrorism, narcotics, militarism, smuggling, and regional leaders. Furthermore, this study was compared with qualitative research using data collection in the form of in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Qualitative data is used to explore the results of quantitative research related to youth's nationalism at the border (Figure 2).

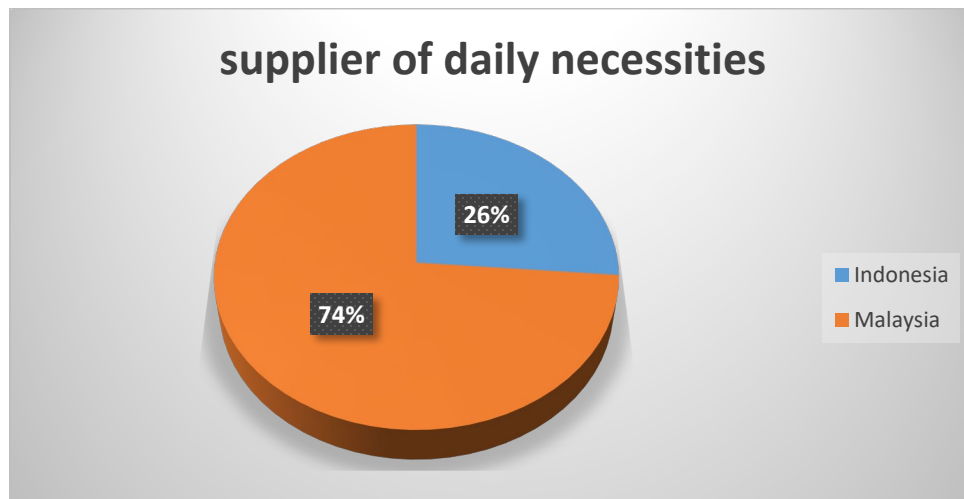


Figure 2. Supplier of Daily Necessities

## 5. Results and Discussion

This study examines the construction of the nationalist identity of border youth communities in one of the outer islands in Indonesia, Sebatik Island, North Kalimantan. The discourse of nationalism is often an issue that is vulnerable to be negotiated and discussed in border areas. This is because people in border areas have different and distinctive characteristics when compared to people who do not come from and live in border areas. Border youth communities tend to have a higher level of mobility to interact and come into direct contact with other communities of different backgrounds and nationalities. They interact socio-culturally, economically to political issues. This fairly intense interaction gave birth to different tendencies from non-border communities. For example, starting from the use of foreign languages (bilingual or multilingual), the use of one's own country's currency as well as from other countries, consumption of foreign products, going in and out of living and working in neighboring countries, and so on. These various activities have become daily activities for border communities that have been carried out for a long time and have been handed down from generation to generation by local communities. Some of the characteristics of border communities on Sebatik Island are heterogeneous people from various ethnic groups and religions who live in small islands around Sebatik Island. This heterogeneity has implications for contestation in constructing identities in border communities. Various forms of border areas can be constructed or constructed by the state. At the same time, social groups or communities can also have their border areas, which are different from other groups. The border areas of social groups have their logic and identity. They also have their dimension of identity which is different from the definition of the state.

The results show that the level of confidence of border youth in power and politics is quite low. They consider that the handling of conflicts and problems in Indonesia is less effective than neighboring countries. While The results of qualitative research reflect that the nationalism of young people in the border area of Sebatik Island has been threatened, both from the reflection of national, socio-economic, and political insights. The youth claimed to be persuaded to become Malaysian citizens. Their reason is because of the ease of access to education, employment, and better health services than Indonesia. Nevertheless, they continue to be Indonesian citizens by hoping for better welfare.

The crisis of nationalism can be influenced by the crisis of confidence in the government. The people of Sebatik Sub-district are bored with being visited by central government officials (director general, ministers, and members of the Indonesian House of Representatives) who, according to them, are just lip service without realizing it; because so far

the government has never been able to provide electricity alone, many roads in Sebatik District have also been damaged. According to them, the visits by the central government officials were fruitless, because in every visit the central government officials said that the state border area was the front porch, but the roads were still damaged. The influence of poverty on the nationalism crisis in the Sebatik District can be seen in the migration of people from villages in Indonesia to Malaysia and the occurrence of several crimes in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area in the form of human trafficking, smuggling, and illegal immigrants.

There are various push and pull factors for inter-country mobility in border communities to Malaysia. In addition to traveling activities, close relationships, kinship, and relatives are the main socio-cultural factors for people in border areas who move to Malaysia. Meanwhile, the opportunity to have a more prosperous life in Malaysia is indeed an attractive offer for many workers to migrate or migrate to the country. Malaysia is still often seen as a country or region whose position is higher than Sebatik Island and even Indonesia, both economically, the level of education of its citizens, as well as the quality of service to its citizens.

The unequal prosperity has made hundreds of young people migrate to Malaysia. There are people from the Sebatik Sub-district who want to move to become Malaysian citizens because so far the Indonesian government's development program has not reached the hamlet. They admit that they feel more comfortable being Malaysian citizens so that since 1990 there have been hundreds of residents in the sub-district who have moved to become Malaysian citizens. They turn to Malaysian citizens because of their ethnicity, pursue education, improve the economy, and seek ease of access. Border communities on Sebatik Island rely on products from abroad such as Malaysia to meet their daily needs ranging from primary, secondary, and tertiary needs. For border communities, it is commonplace to conduct economic transactions, buying and selling with people from outside the islands.

The results of the research analysis also show that There are 2 types of Indonesian identity for youth at the border: (1) Change of identity type: Youth who change citizenship; (2) Split of identity type: "Garuda di dadaku macan di perutku" (eagle (representing Indonesia) in my chest, tiger (representing Malaysia) in my stomach). It means, their soul belongs to Indonesia, but their economic needs depend on Malaysia. The split of identity is divided into two types: (a) Youth who have one nationality but still depend on Tawau, Malaysia; (b) Youth who have dual citizenship.

## **6. Conclusion**

The conclusion in this study is that the Indonesian identity of young people in Sebatik Indonesia has been reduced. Nationalism is only limited to ceremonies, not yet rooted in their souls. Many of them chose to become Malaysian citizens. Factors causing the reduced sense of youth nationalism at the border are for example socio-economic conditions, such as the occurrence of economic inequality and other factors. This study also concludes that youth nationalism at the border has 2 types of identity, namely identity change and identity split. This social reflection reviewing the nationalism of young people in the Sebatik border area is the trigger for further studies related to nationalism at the border.

This study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this research contributes to the field of study of youth nationalism at the border. This study has analyzed how the spirit of youth nationalism. Furthermore, the results can be used as a reference for studies related to nationalism in the future. Practically, the results of this study provide several recommendations for the government. The government needs to pay more attention to the future of youth at the border as the nation's next generation at the forefront of the NKRI. Another important insight conveyed by the current research is the need for a strategy to increase youth nationalism at the border through strengthening Indonesian identity. This research is limited to youth nationalism with the study area on Sebatik Island, North Kalimantan. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct furthermore comprehensive research, including national studies.

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