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Ethnic-sensitive governance: Redefining good governance in an ethnically polarized region

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES: East Kalimantan has experienced ethnic conflicts and riots in the past. With Indonesia's capital relocating there, concerns about potential ethnic strife are rising. This research seeks to identify a model of good governance suited for ethnically polarized regions to prevent conflicts from escalating. The study focuses on the newly established Nusantara Capital City and its surrounding area. The objectives of this study are threefold: first, to examine whether areas with high ethnic polarization quantitatively show signs of ethnic antagonism or tensions qualitatively; second, to understand the existing mechanisms of ethnic solidarity and mobilization; and third, to identify the key elements that inhibit the transformation of potential conflict into actual conflict from both ethnic and governance perspectives. The significance of this study lies in its efforts to develop an effective model of good governance tailored for regions with high ethnic polarization.

METHODS: Qualitative and analytical-exploratory methods were utilized to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data, with descriptive statistics enhancing the latter's analysis. Nusantara Capital City comprises 54 villages, housing a total population of 201,259, including 1,777 individuals in village bureaucracies. For qualitative data collection, 29 villages were purposively selected based on ethnic polarization, and respondents were chosen through purposive sampling. Additionally, data on the ethnic backgrounds of the 1,777 individuals in the village bureaucracies were gathered from village offices and key informants, resulting in 189 respondents and key informants for this study.

FINDINGS: The results show that all village samples in Nusantara (100%) implement ethnic-sensitive practices in public service delivery. While various ethnic groups are present at management, staff levels, and in community organizations closely connected to village bureaucracies, the village bureaucracy predominantly comprises three major ethnic groups: Javanese, Banjarese, and Buginese, with average representations of 40.01%, 21.23%, and 21.03%, respectively. Among the local minority ethnic groups, Kutai, Paser, and Dayak have average proportions of 4.55%, 3.14%, and 1.84%, respectively. Despite the insufficient focus on the inclusion of vulnerable Indigenous Baliq people in governance, these practices have helped prevent ethnic polarization from escalating into conflict. Improving governance to be more ethnically sensitive could better address the needs of indigenous communities.

CONCLUSION: The findings provide enhanced strategies for policymakers to implement effective governance in ethnically polarized areas or multi-ethnic regions by taking ethnic-sensitive governance into account. This can be accomplished by adopting ethnically sensitive governance within government policy.

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INTRODUCTION

Many countries across the globe are characterized by their multi-ethnic populations, with each ethnic group holding distinct perspectives, values, and interests. This diversity can often lead to tension and conflict. Elites may exploit these differences to advance their agendas, contributing to societal divisions. Consequently, numerous multi-ethnic nations experience recurrent ethnic conflicts, resulting in significant casualties. Indonesia is a diverse nation, comprising 633 ethnic groups and 1,333 tribes and sub-tribes (Ananta et al., 2015). The country has a history marked by violent ethnic conflicts that have claimed thousands of lives. Even in specific regions, such as East Kalimantan Province, which is home to 435 tribes and sub-tribes (Gunawan et al., 2024), instances of ethnic conflict have been reported. The Indonesian government has passed laws (No. 3/2022 and No. 21/2023) to relocate the country's capital from Jakarta to East Kalimantan Province. The new capital city, *Ibu Kota Nusantara* (IKN) (Fig. 1), is being developed in stages, and its main buildings are now ready for use. As a result, the Independence Day celebration on August 17, 2024, was held in IKN, marking the first official celebration outside Jakarta. Concerns have been raised regarding the potential for ethnic conflict in the IKN region, given East Kalimantan's history of ethnic tensions. This issue warrants attention for two key reasons. First, many areas in the newly established capital city

are expected to develop into urban environments, necessitating specialized management for ethnically polarized urban areas. Second, there have been instances of ethnic riots in Penajam Paser District, one of the parent districts of IKN, highlighting the need for careful oversight. The risk of ethnic conflict is frequently associated with ethnic polarization. Quantitative research indicates that many villages (*desa/kelurahan*) in IKN display elevated levels of polarization, which suggests a potential for conflict (Gunawan et al., 2024). To gain a more comprehensive understanding of this issue, further qualitative research is necessary to explore regions exhibiting such ethnic polarization. For this reason, the current study employs a qualitative approach. It addresses three key research questions:

- 1) *Do areas characterized by high ethnic polarization quantitatively exhibit significant ethnic antagonism or tension qualitatively?*
- 2) *What is the state of ethnic solidarity and mobilization among the primary ethnic groups?*
- 3) *What forms of governance can effectively prevent the escalation of potential conflicts (high ethnic polarization) into actual conflicts?*

Through a qualitative lens, this study seeks to explore the first question by examining the nuances of ethnic polarization and tension in the selected areas. In the field of conflict studies, Nathan (2005, 2008) critiqued the use of proxy variables and the conclusion of the quantitative analyses conducted

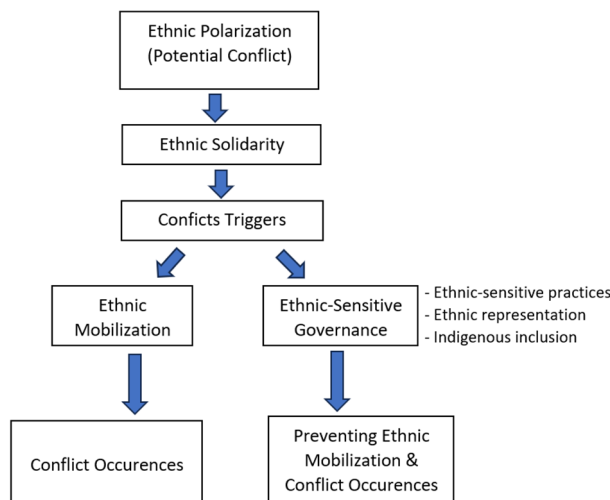


Fig. 1: Model of the theoretical framework

by Collier and Hoeffler, suggesting that they should engage in field observations to gain a more accurate understanding of the complex nature of conflict. This research aligns with Nathan's recommendation. Moreover, this study will explore ethnic solidarity and the mechanisms of ethnic mobilization among dominant ethnic groups and those with a history of conflict in East Kalimantan, to evaluate the potential for polarization to evolve into conflict. The transformation of ethnic conditions into conflict is influenced by the existing institutional framework. In this context, effective governance plays a crucial role in managing multi-ethnic communities to mitigate primordial conflicts. To address the third question, this study will identify the governance structures related to ethnic relations in the region and their impact on either exacerbating conflict or fostering harmony. In discussions of good governance, scholars from various disciplines seek to define relevant concepts within their areas of expertise. For instance, in the context of environmental challenges, there exists a significant discourse surrounding environmentally sensitive governance. This dialogue emphasizes the importance of incorporating environmental sustainability into the broader framework of governance (Triyanti *et al.*, 2023; Purniawati *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, gender-sensitive governance underscores the necessity of recognizing and incorporating women's voices and participation. It acknowledges their unique interests, needs, and concerns about those of men (Brody, 2009; Naz *et al.*, 2023; Manik and Ekayanta, 2024). In the urgent context of climate change, it is evident that there is a rising trend toward climate change-sensitive governance (Meadowcroft, 2009; Ndambwa and Moonga, 2024). This study highlights the importance of ethnically sensitive governance in multi-ethnic countries, where relationships among diverse ethnic groups can vary from harmonious to tense. To mitigate the risk of ethnic conflicts, it is crucial to identify strategies that reduce ethnic tensions and friction, thereby decreasing the likelihood of disputes. This study advocates for the implementation of ethically sensitive governance as an effective approach to addressing this issue. The manuscript will commence by evaluating high ethnic polarization quantitatively through qualitative observation. It will then focus on the conditions of ethnic solidarity and the mechanisms of ethnic mobilization to assess the possibility of transforming

ethnic polarization into actual conflict. Finally, the study will discuss the elements of ethnic-sensitive governance in the IKN region, which can either hinder the emergence of ethnic conflict or facilitate the transformation of polarization into conflict occurrences. The objectives of this study are, first, to test whether areas with high ethnic polarization from a quantitative research perspective exhibit ethnic tensions, hostile relationships, or disrespectful relationships among ethnic groups qualitatively. Second, to understand the existing mechanisms of ethnic solidarity and mobilization among ethnic groups, to assess the potential transformation of ethnic polarization into conflict occurrences. Third, to identify the key elements in ethnic-sensitive governance that inhibit the transformation of potential conflict into actual conflict from both ethnic and governance perspectives. To achieve these objectives, the research was conducted in 54 villages in the IKN region in 2024.

Literature review

In the domain of conflict and governance studies, a significant body of literature has emerged from both theoretical frameworks and case-based analyses. It is crucial to examine the progression of these publications to attain a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between conflict and governance issues.

Ethnic conflict and ethnic polarization

Conflicts based on primordial issues such as ethnicity and race are prevalent in various parts of the world, not only in newly established democracies but also in well-established ones, whether in so-called developing (e.g., India, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand) or developed nations (e.g., USA, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, UK). To understand these conflicts, experts strive to explain from different perspectives. Works of literature documented four basic perspectives regarding ethnic conflict, namely: primordialism, instrumentalism, constructivism, and institutionalism. Primordialism explains that identity differences stem from blood relations and clans within ethnic communities. These differences can cause competition, hostility, and feelings of superiority. Ethnic identity is viewed as natural or shaped by ancestors and passed down through generations. Ethnic conflicts arise from cultural and traditional

differences, often fueled by shared memories of past atrocities, which makes violence hard to avoid. Constructivism posits that ethnic identity is socially constructed by individuals and groups to differentiate between “us” and “them,” often influenced by those in power. Colonial governments have historically contributed to dividing society through subjective classifications, but groups have not always accepted these labels. Ethnic conflict often arises when political regimes collapse, leading to competition among newly defined groups for power, particularly during elections or modernization processes that favor one ethnic group over another. Instrumentalism posits that ethnic conflict arises from external factors rather than the ethnic groups themselves. It suggests that political leaders and conflict entrepreneurs manipulate ethnicity as a tool to mobilize groups against each other for specific goals. To achieve this, they spread injustice and hatred, dragging groups into conflict despite their initially non-political cultures. Institutionalism theory suggests that ethnic conflict arises from factors like political systems and ethnic exclusion. Proponents argue that institutions can both create and resolve ethnic conflict, depending on their effectiveness in managing diversity (Williams, 2015; Yeghiazaryan, 2018; Tepfenhart, 2013; Lieberman and Singh, 2012). The explanations discussed above possess both strengths and weaknesses. While they offer valuable insights into the nature of ethnic conflict, a significant limitation is that these perspectives often rely on broad generalizations. In their attempt to encompass all existing and emerging perspectives, they may overlook the distinctive characteristics of specific conflicts. Despite extensive research on ethnic conflict, scholars continue to debate the effectiveness of existing explanations in providing resolutions to these issues (Kataria, 2018; Coakley, 2017; Weir, 2012). Some researchers have sought to integrate multiple frameworks to capture the complexity of ethnic conflict (Kataria, 2018; Weir, 2012), while others have moved away from traditional models to identify key factors that contribute to such disputes (Gurr, 1973; Choi, 2017; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Notably, Gurr (1973) introduced the concept of “relative deprivation,” which explains that ethnic conflicts often emerge from the gap between expected and actual outcomes, resulting in feelings of alienation and frustration. Choi (2017) argued that ethnic exclusion is responsible

for the emergence of ethnic conflict. Collier and Hoeffler’s Greed and Grievance theory is among the most widely discussed conflict perspectives. Through their research, which involved a quantitative analysis of 161 countries, they sought to uncover the motivations behind conflict. Their findings indicate that “greed outperforms grievance” as a driving force in conflict dynamics (Collier and Hoeffler, 1999, 2000, 2004). The terms “greed” and “grievance” have significantly influenced conversations about conflict, with some scholars extending Collier and Hoeffler’s explanation to other contexts (Dunne and Tian, 2019; Atanasiu, 2023), while others concentrate exclusively on either greed or grievance (Shaykhutdinov and Bragg, 2011; Denny and Walter, 2014; Chidima, 2017). Nonetheless, Collier and Hoeffler’s work has faced criticism for neglecting additional factors, such as ethnic survival. Nathan questioned the reliability of the proxy variables utilized in the study, arguing that they led to unreliable conclusions. He suggested conducting field observations to gain a more accurate understanding of the complexities surrounding conflicts (Nathan, 2005, 2008). Recent research trends in conflict analysis have increasingly focused on examining the ethnic structure of societies to determine the risk of conflict. Ethnic diversity is a key factor in this analysis, which is further divided into three subcategories: heterogeneity, fractionalization, and polarization. As far as ethnic heterogeneity is concerned, some believe that conflict occurs because society consists of various tribes with differences in culture, traditions, and views of life. However, many pluralistic regions and countries can coexist peacefully. Therefore, research has turned to ethnic fractionalization, which is triggered by Easterly and Levine’s work on economic inequality related to ethnic division (Easterly and Levine, 1997; Esteban and Ray, 2008). Studies have shown that ethnic fractionalization has a positive impact on economic growth, diversity of livelihood sources, increased income, and tolerance (Ananta *et al.*, 2023; Campos *et al.*, 2009; Gatykaev and Voronetsky, 2018; Papyrakis and Mo, 2014; Sanjaya, 2022). However, the relationship between ethnic fractionalization and conflict is still uncertain and inconclusive, and it has even failed to be established. Esteban said that “it is fair to say that most of the literature fails to find any significant evidence of ethnic fractionalization as a determinant of conflict” (Esteban and Ray, 2008).

Recent studies suggest that ethnic polarization is more closely related to conflict than fractionalization. To measure ethnic polarization, scholars developed a quantitative index that can be used to calculate the degree of ethnic polarization, along with ethnic fractionalization, within a society (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2002, 2005; Alesina *et al.*, 2003; Esteban and Ray, 2008). It is plausible, therefore, that this study highlights ethnic polarization and tests whether ethnic polarization or communities in an ethnically polarized region show signs of conflict.

Governance and ethically sensitive governance

In the realm of conflict prevention, current literature examines the significance of governance. The term “governance” was first introduced by the World Bank in 1989, defined as the “exercise of political power to manage a nation’s affairs” (World Bank, 1989). Following the World Bank’s lead, many international organizations have begun to mainstream the issue of governance. The UNDP further elaborates on governance, defining it as “the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels,” and proposes 19 characteristics of good governance, such as participation, sustainability, transparency, promoting equity and equality, promoting gender balance, tolerating and accepting diverse perspectives, etc. (UNDP, 1997). United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) later defines governance as “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented),” and shortens the characteristics of governance into 8 elements, namely: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability, and “can be used in several contexts” (UNESCAP, n.d.). Based on this, in discussions surrounding good governance, scholars across various specialized fields strive to define the concepts relevant to their areas of expertise. For example, in the realm of environmental issues, there exists a discourse on environmentally sensitive governance that underscores the necessity of integrating environmental sustainability into the pursuit of good governance. It is vital to ensure that principles such as participation, efficiency, and democracy do not adversely impact the environment (Triyanti *et al.*,

2023; Purniawati *et al.*, 2020). In the pressing context of climate change, one can observe the emergence of climate change-sensitive governance or climate change governance (Meadowcroft, 2009; Ndambwa and Moonga, 2024). The World Bank emphasizes the importance of a government’s transparency and accountability in dealing with climate issues and people’s participation in policymaking, budgeting, and monitoring for climate action (World Bank, 2022). Additionally, gender-sensitive governance or gender-responsive governance emphasizes the importance of recognizing and including women’s voices and participation, acknowledging their distinct interests, needs, and concerns (Brody, 2009; Naz *et al.*, 2023). The topic of gender in governance is of significant importance, particularly when considering the unique challenges faced by women in interactions with governmental and political systems. Women often find themselves in more precarious positions than their male counterparts. This vulnerability is compounded by systemic barriers and cultural dynamics that can further marginalize their voices and diminish their access to resources and opportunities (Manik and Ekayanta, 2024). This is also connected to feminist critiques of the state, which characterize it as “a repressive agent for women.” Feminist activists seek to dismantle the patriarchal structure of society by working to eliminate male supremacy within socio-economic and political contexts (Sapkota and Dahal, 2021). For these reasons, integrating gender perspectives into governance is a plausible approach to promoting gender equality and fostering inclusive societies (Singha and Singha, 2024). In addressing the topic of ethnicity, scholars have explored connections between ethnic issues and governance, covering a range of areas including multicultural societies (Koenig, 1998), public goods (Kimenyi, 2006), human rights (Orji, 2001), and ethnic conflicts (Aseka, 1999; Adams, 2009; Chelanga *et al.*, 2009). However, there is currently no established terminology that explicitly links ethnicity and governance, making it difficult to focus on ethnic issues in the context of governance. To address this gap, this study proposes the term “ethnic-sensitive governance,” which is specifically intended for conflict prevention purposes. Akinola expresses concerns about threats to governance in multi-ethnic societies, particularly in the form of discrimination based on language, ethnicity, race,

and religion. To address this issue, he recommends fostering a culture of tolerance, encouraging more dialogue, and adhering to the principles of the Constitution (Akinola, 2022). Such discrimination impacts not only politics but all aspects of public life, including public services. Marwan highlights the importance of governance practices aimed at delivering justice for ethnic minorities. He proposed the implementation of equitable justice for ethnic minorities that advocates for the equal treatment of all ethnic groups, irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or cultural backgrounds (Marwan, 2019). In the work of Schlesinger and Devore, the aforementioned refers to ethnically sensitive practices or elements thereof. Schlesinger and Devore highlight the significance of ethnically sensitive practices, particularly regarding the role of government agencies and social workers in ensuring equitable treatment of minority ethnic groups (Schlesinger and Devore, 1995). Haynes and Singh also underscore the necessity for public service professionals, including social workers, to integrate ethnic sensitivity into their practices (Haynes and Singh, 1992). It is essential, therefore, for government entities at all levels to adopt an ethnically sensitive approach in delivering public services, ensuring that all individuals receive equal treatment regardless of their ethnic background. From the perspective of minority groups, this practice can foster greater trust in government institutions and encourage increased participation. This study examines ethnic-sensitive practices through the lens of observable public service delivery to various ethnic groups. In the meantime, Noe et al. noted a significant lack of public understanding and awareness concerning multicultural democracy, which has contributed to ongoing polarization along ethnic, racial, and religious lines within governance. They proposed that governance be managed collaboratively by diverse ethnic and religious communities (Noe et al., 2023). This perspective highlights the importance of ethnic representation in governance within multicultural societies. The broader significance of ethnic representation is further emphasized by Protsyk (2010), Tan and Preece (2021), and Bird (2014), who argue that providing ethnic representation in governments, parliaments, and political parties is essential for allowing various groups to express their voices and interests. In this study, the focus will be on assessing ethnic representation in village

governments. Furthermore, Sibbel emphasizes the plight of indigenous peoples by highlighting their prevalent poverty and the marginalization of their voices. He argues that political considerations relating to the principle of self-determination often lead governments to systematically deny their indigenous rights and identity and exclude them from national decision-making processes (Sibbel, 2005). A government's economic considerations also play a crucial role, particularly regarding the claim to customary land by indigenous communities (such as those in East Kalimantan), where the land in question can span thousands of hectares, further contributing to their marginalization and limiting their access to natural resources (Gunawan, 2015). To enhance the conditions and status of indigenous peoples, Morris underscores the importance of their representation and participation in governmental systems. He emphasizes the necessity for these communities to express their interests and needs in daily life (Morris, 2021). This perspective is supported by international agencies, which assert that involving indigenous peoples in decision-making processes and committing to a human rights-based approach to governance are crucial for their survival and for alleviating poverty within these communities (Sibbel, 2005). Therefore, acknowledging indigenous rights, facilitating access to natural resources, and promoting their participation in policy-making are key components of indigenous inclusion in governance, reflecting the principles of ethnically sensitive governance. Based on the above discussion, ethnic-sensitive governance addresses three key issues: the adoption of ethnic-sensitive practices, the assurance of ethnic representativeness, and the promotion of indigenous inclusion in governance.

Theoretical framework

Ethnic polarization refers to the concept of ethnic distance and antagonism between ethnic groups, distinct from ethnic heterogeneity and fractionalization. In the theory of ethnic polarization, there is a more direct link between ethnic polarization conflict (compared to ethnic fractionalization and conflict) as ethnic polarization refers to the potential for conflict (Esteban and Ray, 2008; Esteban and Schneider, 2008; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2002, 2005). Experts have developed a method to calculate the level of ethnic polarization in a region

using statistical formulas based on ethnic population data. This calculation results in the Ethnic Polarization Index (EPI) (Ananta *et al.*, 2016; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2002). A higher EPI indicates a greater potential for conflict. However, polarization is only a potential and may or may not transform into conflict. Here, ethnic mobilization by conflict entrepreneurs is crucial, particularly if ethnic solidarity is high. Nevertheless, solidarity mobilization only affects ethnic expression if there are conflict triggers. Many societies try to prevent conflict triggers leading to ethnic mobilization by maintaining respectful and tolerant relations with other ethnic groups. Thus, despite high ethnic polarization, some societies appear harmonious, with inter-ethnic relations seemingly unaffected. This is often due to efforts to prevent conflict triggers from igniting emotions within certain ethnic groups. The government plays a crucial role in preventing the transformation of ethnic polarization into ethnic riots or open conflict. Experts emphasize the importance of designing governance that addresses ethnic issues, especially in multi-ethnic communities (Marwan, 2019; Noe *et al.*, 2023). In other words, the transformation of the ethnic *status quo* into ethnic friction is contingent upon the existing institutional framework. In this context, the role of governance in managing multi-ethnic communities to mitigate earlier or simmering conflicts is paramount. As discussed, governance can be used in several contexts, such as environmental issues, gender issues, and issues of climate change. This study highlights an often-overlooked discourse amidst widespread and high-level primordial conflicts: ethnic-sensitive governance. This concept is particularly vital in multi-ethnic countries. In regions with diverse ethnic groups, relationships may vary from harmonious to consistently tense or adversarial. To prevent ethnic conflicts, it is essential to identify strategies for reducing ethnic tensions and friction, thereby minimizing the potential for conflict. This study advocates for the adoption of ethnic-sensitive governance as a means to tackle this issue effectively. As aforementioned, the concept of ethnic-sensitive governance deals with three key issues: the adoption of ethnic-sensitive practices, ensuring ethnic representativeness, and promoting Indigenous inclusion in governance (Schlesinger and Devore, 1995; Protsyk, 2010; Tan and Preece, 2021; Morris, 2021). Ethnic-sensitive practices involve

providing public services without discrimination based on ethnic background (Schlesinger and Devore, 1995). It is common to observe that public services are provided equally to people of different ethnic or racial backgrounds. However, it is common as well that some ethnic groups feel more comfortable and receive more attention when dealing with officials from the same ethnicity. Therefore, it is important to consider ethnic representation in government officials, ensuring that officials come from various ethnic backgrounds rather than just one tribe. In many countries or regions, one will find indigenous people or First Nations. They are mostly backward, undereducated, marginalized, and poor. Therefore, it's crucial to have governance that is sensitive to the needs of indigenous people. This type of governance should be responsive to the rights, access to natural resources, and representation or participation in policy making of indigenous communities (Sibbel, 2005; Saglie, 2020; Feiring, 2013; Barie, 2020; Luturmas *et al.*, 2024). The above explanation is used as a foundation or guidance for this research, which can be simplified into a theoretical framework model as illustrated in Fig. 1.

In the new capital city of Indonesia (IKN), there are 102 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups, which can be grouped into 73 main ethnic groups. Quantitative research reveals that the majority of villages (*Desa/Kelurahan*) in IKN display elevated levels of ethnic polarization, which suggests a potential for conflict (Gunawan *et al.*, 2024). These villages are composed of a population from diverse ethnic groups, from which many work in the government bureaucracy. In addition, in the Sepaku area (Rings 1 and 2 of the IKN areas), there are indigenous people known as the Baliq tribe. The population of this tribe is small, neglected, and therefore might predictably become extinct. As they are situated in the center of the IKN development area, they are the most affected by IKN development. Implementing indigenous inclusion in governance in the development of IKN will make the development more humane and has the potential to contribute significantly to maintaining the image of IKN as a capital built with the principles of ethnically sensitive good governance. A model in Fig. 1 will be used to describe and analyze the situation in the researched areas. This research will provide a clear understanding of governance that is sensitive to ethnic diversity. The results are expected to redefine

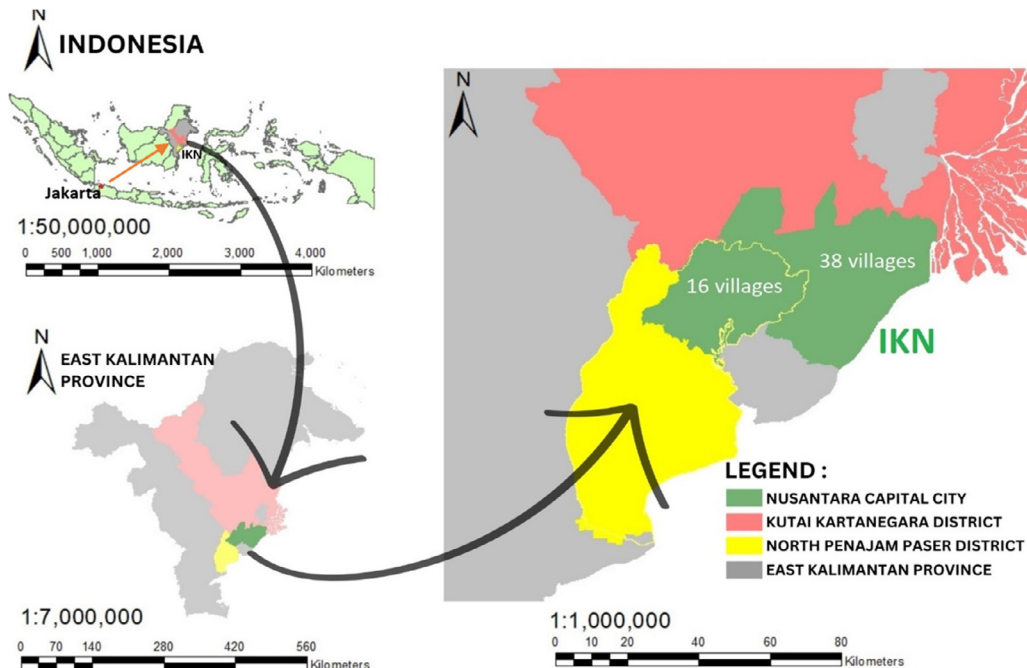


Fig. 2: Research sites

governance by addressing multi-ethnic issues. The inclusion of ethnic issues in managing human capital in the targeted region—urban or suburban areas—is crucial for sustaining economic development as well as for political development, especially in nation-building and social order.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research underscores the necessity of ethnically sensitive governance in a polarized region to avert the progression of potential conflict into an actual one. The study was conducted in IKN (Fig. 2), which incorporates areas from the Kutai Kartanegara and North Penajam Paser Districts. IKN, with a total area of 320,429 Ha (252,660 Ha land area and 69,769 Ha coastal area), comprises 54 villages, with Kutai Kartanegara District contributing 38 villages and North Penajam Paser District comprising 16 villages. The research employs qualitative and analytical exploratory methods (Mahdinezhad et al., 2024), utilizing library research or document analysis, along with observation, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

For the observation, interviews, and FGDs, sample villages were selected using a purposive

sampling method based on the known level of ethnic polarization. A total of 22 villages out of 39, representing 56.41%, were selected as sample villages characterized by varying degrees of ethnic polarization, ranging from slightly high to very high levels. In comparison, this research also collected data in areas exhibiting low to moderate levels of ethnic polarization, comprising 7 villages out of 15, or 46.66%. Overall, the research encompasses 29 villages out of a total of 54, yielding a combined representation of 53.79% of the selected sample villages. In these villages, key informants and participants for interviews/FGDs were also chosen through this method (purposive sampling), taking into account their position, expertise, ethnic background, and related experience. Additionally, numerical data on the ethnic representation of 1777 individuals across all 54 villages (management, staff, and community association related to village bureaucracies) were collected from village offices and key informants to enhance the analysis. The total number of respondents and key informants is 189. The main measurement items used in this research are as follows (Table 1).

For quantitative data, descriptive statistics

Table 1: Measurement items

No.	Themes and sub-themes	Questions
1	Evaluating high ethnic polarization quantitatively through qualitative observation	Do areas characterized by high ethnic polarization, from a quantitative research standpoint, demonstrate ethnic tensions, hostile relationships, or disrespectful interactions among ethnic groups on a qualitative level? - Have the respective ethnic groups encountered ethnic conflict, friction, or tension with one another? What are the reasons? - What is the nature of ethnic relations among the various groups in the research area? (e.g. respect, tolerance, etc.)
2	Ethnic solidarity and mobilization	What are the conditions that foster ethnic solidarity and mobilization among various ethnic groups? - Does ethnic solidarity exist among migrant ethnic groups within the research area? If so, to what extent and in what forms is it expressed? - Is ethnic solidarity maintained among local ethnic groups? If so, how significant is it, and in what ways does it manifest? - How does traditional ethnic mobilization occur among these groups? - What does modern ethnic mobilization look like among ethnic populations? - Is the presence of conflict a necessary catalyst for ethnic mobilization?
3	Key elements preventing the transformation of potential conflict into actual conflict	How is the condition of good governance in an ethnically polarized area? What are the key elements that impede the transformation of potential conflict into actual conflict from both an ethnic and governance perspective?
	a. Ethnic-sensitive practices	What is the quality of public service delivery to different ethnic groups? Are there indications of discrimination?
	b. Ethnic representation	What is the ethnic composition of individuals occupying top and middle management positions, as well as the staff and members of community associations associated with village bureaucracies?
	c. Indigenous inclusion in governance	How does the government address the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly in terms of community rights? How do indigenous peoples access natural resources? Are indigenous peoples involved in the policymaking process?

are applied to analyze the collected data. These approaches aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the observed phenomenon through the analysis of qualitative data, bolstered by solid quantitative evidence (Busetto *et al.*, 2020; King *et al.*, 1995).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Area condition in an ethnically polarized region

The IKN region has a population of 201,259 individuals, encompassing 102 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups, which can be categorized into 73 primary ethnic groups. The ethnic composition of these main ethnic groups is illustrated in Fig. 3.

The predominant ethnic group in the region is the Javanese, comprising 61,616 individuals, which accounts for 30.62% of the total population. The second and third largest ethnic groups are the Buginese and Banjarese, respectively. It is noteworthy that these three groups are migrant communities. In contrast, the local ethnic groups include the Kutai, Dayak, and Paser. An analysis of ethnic polarization

across the 54 villages reveals the distribution of these groups, as highlighted in Table 2 under the “Total village” column. The data shows that 39 out of 54 villages in IKN (72%) exhibit elevated levels, ranging from slightly high to very high. The average EPI for these 39 villages is 0.71 (somewhat high) (Gunawan *et al.*, 2024). Nevertheless, among a sample of 29 villages, ethnic tensions have been observed in only 5 villages.

Ethnic tension has been observed in four villages classified with a “somewhat high” level of ethnic polarization, involving native ethnic groups (the Paser and indigenous Baliq) vis-à-vis migrant groups (the Buginese and Javanese) within the core area of IKN development (Rings 1 and 2). The tension with the Buginese is primarily linked to issues of political and economic dominance, whereas the tension with the Javanese stems from land ownership issues associated with the transmigration program and political influence. The ethnic tension with the Buginese is notably stronger than that with the Javanese, attributable to the higher profile of the Buginese compared to the lower profile of the

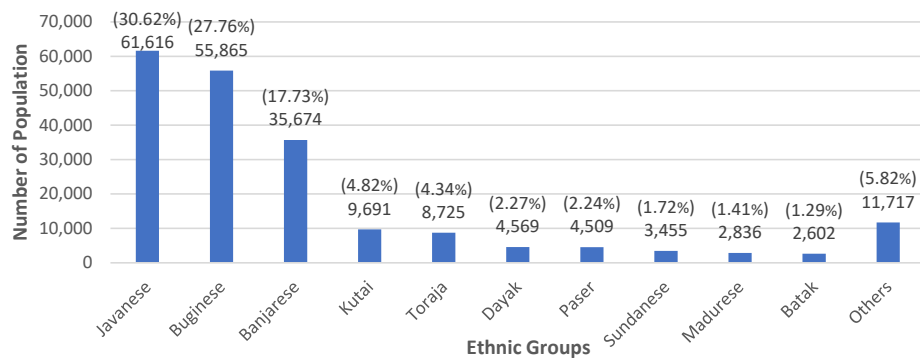


Fig. 3: IKN population by ethnicity (Source: Gunawan et al., 2024)

Table 2: Ethnic Polarization and Ethnic Tension (Sources: Quantitative Field Survey 2023 (Gunawan et al., 2024) & Qualitative Fieldwork 2024 (Interviews, FGDs).)

No	Ethnic Polarization Index (EPI)	Category	Total village	Village samples		
				Total	Total village with normal relations	A total village with ethnic tension
1	0.00 - 0.05	Extremely low	0	0	0	0
2	0.06 - 0.15	Very low	0	0	0	0
3	0.16 - 0.25	Low	2	1	1	0
4	0.26 - 0.35	Somewhat low	0	0	0	0
5	0.36 - 0.45	Slightly low	6	3	3	0
6	0.46 - 0.54	Moderate	7	3	3	0
7	0.55 - 0.64	Slightly high	8	4	3	1
8	0.65 - 0.74	Somewhat high	19	10	6	4
9	0.75 - 0.84	High	9	7	7	0
10	0.85 - 0.94	Very high	3	1	1	0
11	0.95 - 1.00	Extremely high	0	0	0	0
Total			54	29	24	5

Javanese. In Ring 3 of IKN, one village characterized by “slightly high” ethnic polarization between the Banjarese and Toraja groups has also experienced tension, which relates to the establishment of a place of worship. Overall, the ethnic tensions in all five villages are deemed “manageable,” as there have been no confrontations or hostile behaviors. Instead, the expressions of discontent manifest as ethnic grievances, while on the surface, there is an apparent coexistence marked by mutual respect. Thus, based on Table 2 and the explanation above, the majority of ethnic groups maintain positive relationships, characterized by mutual respect and appreciation. Although some areas experience ethnic tensions, the overall coexistence is peaceful and largely free from conflict. This situation prompts curiosity about why highly polarized regions do not exhibit signs of ethnic antagonism, instead showcasing mutual respect.

Ethnic solidarity and mobilization

Based on the abovementioned phenomenon, one might argue that the potential for conflict in these highly polarized areas remains inconclusive. Therefore, it is essential to explore the mechanisms of ethnic solidarity and mobilization within these communities. Among the 73 primary ethnic groups in IKN, there are eight major tribes with a history of ethnic conflict or ethnic tension in East Kalimantan. Understanding the dynamics of ethnic solidarity and mobilization within these groups is crucial. Table 3 outlines the key points related to these important issues.

Referring to Table 3, it is evident that ethnic dominance and groups with a history of conflict typically demonstrate high levels of ethnic solidarity. This strong sense of solidarity plays a vital role in facilitating ethnic mobilization. However, not all forms

Table 3: Ethnic solidarity and ethnic mobilization

No.	Ethnic groups	Ethnic solidarity	Ethnic mobilization	
			Traditional	Modern
1	Paser	High, upholding tradition, guardian of the motherland	Ritual and <i>adat</i> mechanisms of ethnic mobilization	Digital communication (mobile phones, WA, social media)
2	Kutai	High, common solidarity, guardian of the motherland	No longer using <i>adat</i> and ritual-based mobilization, door-to-door (person-to-person)	Digital communication (mobile phones, WA, social media)
3	Dayak	High, upholding tradition, guardian of the motherland	Ritual and <i>adat</i> mechanisms of ethnic mobilization	Digital communication (mobile phones, WA, social media)
4	Banjarese	High, common solidarity	No ritual and <i>adat</i> mechanisms (person to person)	Digital communication (mobile phones, WA, social media)
5	Javanese	High, common solidarity	No ritual and <i>adat</i> mechanisms (person to person)	Digital communication (mobile phones, WA, social media)
6	Buginese	High, common solidarity, self-esteem	No ritual and <i>adat</i> mechanisms (person to person)	Digital communication (mobile phones, WA, social media)
7	Toraja	High, common solidarity	No ritual and <i>adat</i> mechanisms (person to person)	Digital communication (mobile phones, WA, social media)
8	Madurese	High, common solidarity, self-esteem	No ritual and <i>adat</i> mechanisms (person to person)	Digital communication (mobile phones, WA, social media)

of ethnic solidarity result in conflict. Ethnic groups that view themselves as guardians of their homeland and possess traditional mobilization mechanisms are more likely to engage in conflict to defend their land and honor. In contrast, ethnic groups with high solidarity and a robust sense of dignity may also be prone to becoming adversaries in conflict situations. Therefore, while ethnic groups in polarized regions may coexist peacefully, the dynamics of ethnic solidarity and mobilization can create an environment where the potential for conflict exists, particularly if triggering factors emerge and conflict entrepreneurs are present. This raises the question: What underlying factors contribute to the preservation of peaceful relations between ethnic groups in highly polarized regions? The exploration leads to the concept of ethnic-sensitive governance, which effectively manages human capital in these areas.

Ethnic-sensitive governance

Ethnic-sensitive practices

This issue pertains to the provision of public services to the community without discrimination, irrespective of the ethnic backgrounds of its members. Based on interviews conducted in the sampled villages, the findings revealed that in all village samples (100%), there are no disparities in the treatment provided by the village government to residents of different ethnicities. Community

members from various backgrounds confirmed this, stating that they receive fair and equal treatment when interacting with the village administration, regardless of their tribal affiliation. These practices are supported by Law 6/2014 on Village (Government), which prohibits village apparatus from “carrying out discriminatory actions against citizens and/or certain community groups” (Article 51) in providing public services. In addition, the law stipulates that any village must “protect and maintain the unity, oneness, and harmony of the Village community in the context of national harmony and the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia” (Article 67). To support the implementation of this law, the central and district governments allocate substantial budgets to village administrations for their functions. In return, these governments are expected to deliver high-quality public services to all residents, acknowledging their diverse ethnic backgrounds. The village governments are committed to addressing any complaints promptly at the village government office. If a complaint remains unresolved, it will be escalated to higher levels of government, including sub-district, district, and provincial authorities. Citizens who are dissatisfied with public services also have the option to report their concerns to the Ombudsman, either online or offline, as well as through the national complaint-handling website at lapor.go.id. Additionally, the newly elected Vice President has

initiated *Lapor Mas Wapres* (Report to the Vice President) available at <https://lapormaswapres.id>. While some complaints are resolved quickly, others may take longer to address. Ethnic issues tend to receive swift attention due to their potentially harmful repercussions, whereas complaints related to religious matters, such as the construction of places of worship, can be met with mixed responses in certain areas.

Ethnic representation in village governments

Ethnic representation in village governance is essential within multi-ethnic communities, as it fosters an inclusive atmosphere for individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds who depend on public services. Furthermore, it plays a significant role in mitigating ethnic tensions. The following data provides insight into the ethnic representation within the village government.

Ethnic representation in the top management

The top management structure in this

organization is composed of Village Heads and their Secretaries across 54 villages. This leadership group of 101 individuals represents a diverse array of ethnic backgrounds, encompassing 15 distinct ethnic groups. These groups include Javanese, Banjarese, Buginese, Kutai, Paser, Dayak, Madurese, Toraja, Bajau, Mandar, Minangkabau, Makassar, Balinese, Malay, and Sundanese (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 shows that the top management posts are filled with human capital from many ethnic backgrounds. Among ethnic groups, the top three are Javanese (41.58%), Banjarese (20.79%), and Buginese (18.81%).

Ethnic representation in the middle management

At the middle level, the officials in 54 villages with a total of 271 individuals come from 15 ethnic groups, namely Javanese, Buginese, Toraja, Batak, Paser, Kutai, Madurese, Banjarese, Dayak, Sundanese, Mandar, Butonese, Minahasa, Minangkabau, and Mamasa (Fig. 5).

In the realm of Middle Management within village

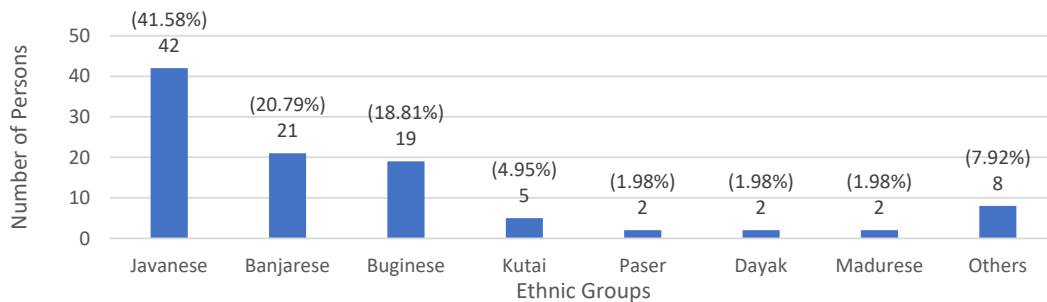


Fig. 4: Ethnic representation across the village bureaucracies in IKN (top management)

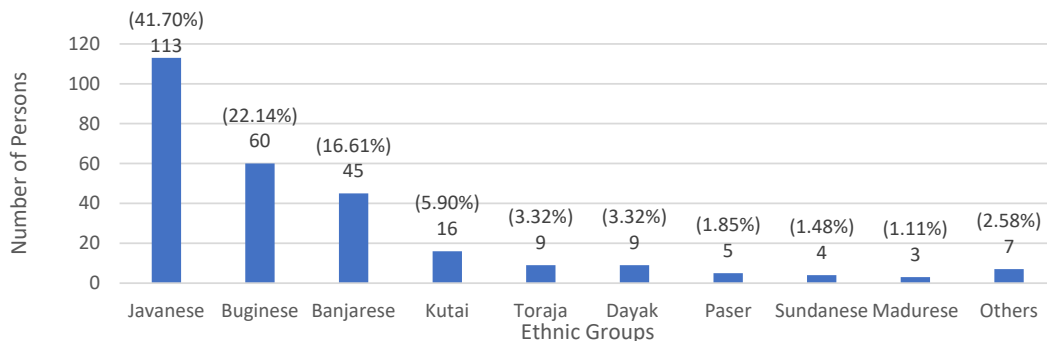


Fig. 5: Ethnic representation across the village bureaucracies in IKN (middle management)

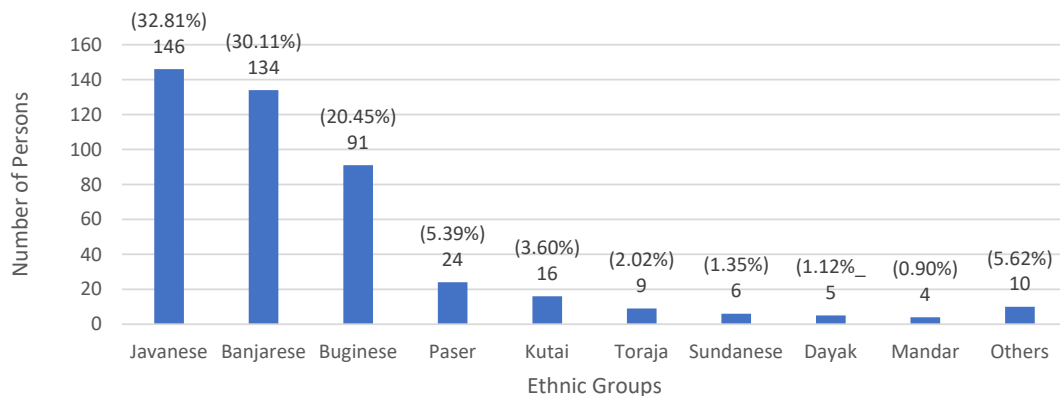


Fig. 6: Ethnic representation across the village bureaucracies in IKN (staff)

bureaucracies, the Javanese community continues to hold a prominent position, showcasing their longstanding influence and leadership. Following them, the Buginese have emerged as the second most represented group, indicating a growing presence in administrative roles. Meanwhile, the Banjarese occupy the third position, reflecting their participation and contributions within the village governance structure.

Ethnic representation at the staff level

At the staff level, 445 employees come from 14 ethnic groups: Javanese, Buginese, Toraja, Batak, Paser, Banjarese, Mandar, Sundanese, Butonese, Minangkabau, Kutai, Sasak, Dayak, and Makassar (Fig. 6).

The Javanese, Banjarese, and Buginese ethnic groups continue to represent the top three demographics at the staff level. In contrast, the local ethnic groups, specifically the Paser, Kutai, and Dayak, occupy the fourth, fifth, and eighth positions, respectively.

Ethnic representation in the community association

A village is composed of numerous Neighborhood Associations, each led by individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Within any village, the Village Consultation Body is also headed by a member of the community. In 54 villages throughout IKN, the total of individuals in both the Neighborhood Associations and the Village Consultation Body is 960 persons, representing 23 different ethnic groups, namely Javanese, Buginese, Toraja, Paser, Banjarese, Bima, Mandar, Butonese, Dayak, Timor, Batak, Sundanese,

Sangir, Kutai, Minahasa, Madura, Kaili, Minangkabau, Sasak, Nias, Aceh, Bima, and Bima (Fig. 7).

According to Fig. 7, the Javanese still hold the majority in leadership positions within the Neighborhood Association and the Village Consultative Body, while the Buginese and Banjarese occupy the second and third positions, respectively. Based on the above data, it shows that the village bureaucracy has accommodated ethnic representation. Even if at the Management level the positions only come from one ethnic group, other ethnic groups are accommodated at the staff level or community organizations that are closely related to the village bureaucracy. Although several tribes are accommodated at the management and staff levels, as well as in community organizations closely connected to village bureaucracies, there are three dominant tribes in the village bureaucracies in the IKN, namely the Javanese, Buginese, and Banjarese.

Indigenous inclusion in governance

Indigenous inclusion in governance pertains to a governance approach that is responsive to the needs and concerns of Indigenous peoples, actively addressing the issues they face in their respective regions. This concept is closely linked to three key dimensions: rights (community rights), resources (access to natural resources), and representation (involvement in policy making). In the Sepaku area (Rings 1 and 2 of IKN), the Baliq tribe is an indigenous community with a small population that faces the risk of extinction without proper support and attention. Being situated at the heart of the IKN development,

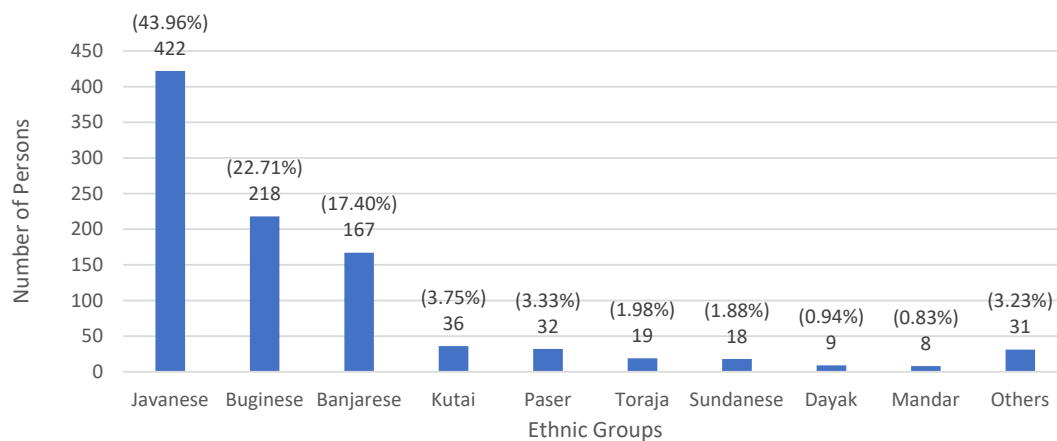


Fig. 7: Ethnic representation in neighborhood association heads and village consultative body

they are significantly impacted by these changes. The implementation of Indigenous inclusion in governance within the context of IKN development can enhance humaneness in the project and contribute positively to the perception of IKN as a capital that embodies the principles of good governance. Concerning the three dimensions mentioned, the rights to their customary territories remain unrecognized, and their access to resources is severely hindered, as all land is increasingly controlled by transmigrants, plantation and forestry concessions, as well as IKN developments.

Discussion

This paper examines the present condition of ethnic polarization, ethnic solidarity, and mobilization, as well as ethnic-sensitive governance in the New Capital City of Indonesia, Nusantara. In terms of ethnic polarization, 39 out of 54 villages in IKN (72%) exhibit elevated levels, ranging from slightly high to very high. The average EPI for these 39 villages is 0.71 (somewhat high). According to conflict theory, increased ethnic polarization suggests a heightened potential for conflict. However, upon qualitative examination, there appears to be a lack of significant tension among ethnic groups. Ethnic relations are generally stable and characterized by mutual respect. Notably, no major friction has been reported between or among ethnic groups, except in the Sepaku sub-district, where tensions exist between the indigenous populations (Paser and Baliq) and transmigrant and migrant tribes (especially Javanese and Buginese). These tensions

primarily stem from differences in land ownership and business opportunities. Overall, ethnic relations are predominantly positive, marked by a spirit of mutual respect. In areas characterized by significant ethnic polarization but lacking substantial ethnic friction, it becomes essential to identify mechanisms or institutions for conflict prevention. This necessitates an evaluation of governance issues through an ethnically sensitive lens. Ethnic-sensitive governance encompasses three key aspects: ethnic-sensitive practices, ethnic representation, and the inclusion of indigenous groups in governance. Regarding ethnic-sensitive practices, it is noteworthy that all villages have adopted policies that do not differentiate between ethnic groups when delivering public services. Every individual is served and treated equally. The villages in IKN have made concerted efforts to promote ethnic diversity within their bureaucracies and organizations. This involves ensuring representation from various ethnic groups in management roles and staff, as well as in community-based organizations connected to the village bureaucracy. Such diversity aims to create an environment where residents of different ethnic backgrounds feel comfortable and adequately represented in local governance. Nevertheless, challenges persist concerning the inclusion of the indigenous Baliq ethnic group in governance, particularly related to issues surrounding indigenous land rights, access to forest resources, and participation in decision-making processes. While the current atmosphere seems peaceful and respectful, there exists a latent potential for conflict due to the

quantitative polarization of the ethnic population and the strong traditional solidarity among local tribes, such as the Paser and Dayak. Traditional mobilization mechanisms, grounded in *adat* and ancestral rituals, could be activated in response to conflict triggers. Although no significant conflicts have arisen to date, past incidents in Tarakan (when it was part of East Kalimantan), West Kutai, and Penajam Paser Utara serve as reminders that underlying tensions can escalate when confronted with conflict triggers. The current framework of ethnic-sensitive governance has not yet been fully realized and lacks formal recognition as a definitive policy. Therefore, it is essential to pursue its formal adoption through government policy. This process entails redefining the principles of effective governance and formulating a strategic roadmap to enhance, strengthen, and reinforce this model of governance.

Practical implication

Areas characterized by high ethnic polarization are not necessarily predisposed to conflict. This suggests that residents need not be concerned about the status of their regions, provided they practice tolerance and show respect toward individuals from other ethnic groups. It is imperative to maintain and strengthen the currently favorable ethnic relations in IKN through the establishment of ethnic communication forums, development programs involving diverse ethnic groups, and the organization of cultural festivals. Best practices for delivering equitable public services to diverse ethnic groups should be continued and enhanced. Additionally, the representation of ethnic minorities within the bureaucracy must be improved. Indigenous peoples should be actively involved in the decision-making process, and their rights should be duly acknowledged. Given that the government has not conducted an ethnic-based census after the 2010 census, Nusantara Capital City should endeavor to establish a systematic approach to population management that includes regular updates of ethnic data to support/facilitate ethnic-sensitive governance practices.

Policy implication

The current framework for ethnic-sensitive governance has yet to be fully implemented and does not hold formal recognition as an established policy. It is essential to advocate for its official adoption within government policy. This endeavor involves redefining

the principles of effective governance in ethnically polarized regions and developing a strategic roadmap to enhance and bolster this governance model.

Contribution of the study

This study is expected to contribute to redefining the existing governance practice in an ethnically polarized region and adopting and promoting ethnic-sensitive governance within the broader discourses and practices of ethnicity and governance.

Limitations and recommendations of the study

This study has limitations in that it primarily focuses on ethnicity regarding the responsibilities of a caring government, while acknowledging that many other factors can also play a role. Additionally, this study does not connect the ethnic background of officials with their abilities, talents, or performance within a meritocracy framework. In the modern world, staff selection is predominantly based on a meritocracy system rather than the inherent backgrounds of individuals. However, given that ethnic representation could significantly impact conflict prevention, it is advisable to explore the combination of meritocracy and ethnic background to discover a balanced solution. This is particularly relevant as many countries implement quotas for ethnic representation, including the representation of indigenous peoples (Bird, 2014; Tan and Preece, 2021), similar to the quotas assigned for women's representation in governments, parliaments, or political parties.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that most villages in the IKN region are characterized by significant ethnic polarization in quantitative terms. Qualitatively, however, the current conditions are relatively stable; there are no conflicts or signs of imminent conflict, and residents demonstrate respect and appreciation for one another. A key factor in preventing the potential for conflict from escalating into ethnic mobilization and actual conflict is the practice of ethnic-sensitive governance. Although this approach is not yet fully realized, it has generally contributed to promoting equal treatment, facilitating mutual respect among different ethnic groups, and ensuring equitable recognition for all communities, thereby preventing conflicts. Historically, evidence shows that such apparent stability can be disrupted if governance remains aloof from

sociocultural sensitivities; in other words, simply having apposite rules, regulations, and policies is inadequate without complementary service provision to the public. Therefore, redefining governance in multi-ethnic states or regions is essential as ethnic-sensitive governance. Ethnicity is one of the many community considerations a caring government must heed, alongside housing, utilities, roads, education, health, security, economic development, etc. As such, minority governance issues, while often needing prioritization, also require sufficient human and financial resources to enable the desired (re)orientation and implementation process to overcome critical issues, one that can be complemented by monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with commitments. In discussing what the government could do to enhance intercultural harmony, one cannot simultaneously discount the influence of culture itself on the governance process and its related enactment. Therefore, the recognition of issues and the strategies to improve must involve not only the elected officials and staff at a problematic time, but especially if minority groups do not have any or sufficient presence in governance, the identification, selection, and utilization of collaborating representatives from the citizenry at large. These people, with adequate orientation, should contribute to understanding, help reach difficult-to-access community members, and proffer pragmatic, utilitarian advice. Only by incorporating minority group values and perspectives could the local authorities claim that any new regulation or process has common support for a viable outcome. An ideally enhanced governance system proactively seeks and supports improved community involvement through formalized agreements, which facilitates fundamentals such as committing not only to inform minority groups but also to progressively consult with them to seek their perspectives and to iteratively involve, collaborate with, and ultimately empower such citizens with full decision-making responsibility.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I.K. Gunawan was responsible for the research design, data collection, analysis, and the preparation and finalization of the manuscript. M. Taufik assisted with data collection and analysis. N. Imang conducted interviews with indigenous people and performed descriptive statistical analysis. I.G. Somlai offered valuable insights by reviewing, enhancing, and proofreading the manuscript.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in publishing this article. The authors also declare that ethical issues like plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication or falsification, double publication/submission, and redundancy have been avoided in the publication process.

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ABBREVIATIONS/GLOSSARY

Adat	Customary law or tradition
Desa	Rural Village (on the same administrative level as <i>Kelurahan</i>)
EPI	Ethnic Polarization Index
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
IKN	<i>Ibu Kota Nusantara</i> (Nusantara Capital City)
Kelurahan	Urban Community (on a similar administrative level as <i>Desa</i>)
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
WA	WhatsApp

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