

PERSPECTIVE

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Analyzing Public Opinion on Moving Indonesia's Capital: Demographic and Attitudinal Trends

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President Joko Widodo spent the night camping in the Penajam North Paser Regency, East Kalimantan Province on 14 March 2022, where Indonesia's new capital will be located. Picture: Facebook, Source: <https://www.facebook.com/setkabgoid/posts/341484078009038>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Public support for relocating the Indonesian capital to East Kalimantan is divided. In a national survey conducted in February 2022, 48.5% of respondents support the plan while 44% disagree with it.
- Although a slight majority of respondents support the new capital city (IKN) initiative, the level of support in 2022 reflects a decrease of nearly 5 percentage points compared to a similar survey carried out two years ago. This decline in support may be due to the perception that managing the Covid-19 pandemic should be a higher priority.
- Support for the IKN plan varies by demographics and region, but political affiliation seems to be the most salient factor in shaping public attitudes towards the plan. Jokowi's base in the 2019 presidential election continues to support the IKN plan while Prabowo supporters in that election tend not to.
- Support for the IKN plan is higher among those who understand the various technocratic reasons for moving the capital city, such as the water crisis and overcrowding in Jakarta and creating more balanced economic development between Java and the outer provinces. This suggests that the government must do a better job in explaining the rationale for a new capital.
- The majority of respondents in Jakarta oppose the relocation of the capital, even though they directly bear the brunt of overcrowding and infrastructural problems in the city. They probably prefer the government to focus on fixing the problems in Jakarta rather than relocating the capital.
- Failure to arrest the downward slide in public support for the IKN initiative may jeopardise the prospects for a successful move altogether.

INTRODUCTION

President Jokowi's aspiration to move the nation's capital is not a novel idea. This ambitious capital relocation plan has resurfaced in almost every Indonesian President's term in office.¹ But it was only during Jokowi's presidential term that this so-called national pipe dream has begun to be realised. President Jokowi himself only revealed the plan during a limited cabinet meeting on 29 April 2019, a few days after he was re-elected for his second term. Prior to that, he had never mentioned the idea at all, and certainly not during the election campaign. This probably reflects his awareness that the proposal was too controversial and could be strongly rejected by the public, especially by those who have benefited from having the capital city in Jakarta.

Since this idea was introduced, many analysts have assessed the issue from the technocratic, environmental, economic and legal perspectives, but little has been discussed about what public opinion towards the plan is like. How do Indonesians actually respond to the plan to relocate the nation's capital? What factors best explain support for relocating the capital? What are the demographics of supporters and opponents of the new capital city (*Ibu Kota Negara*, IKN) plan? How does each political affiliation base and mass organization respond to the plan? And what strategies can the government use to increase public support for IKN? These are the questions addressed in this article.

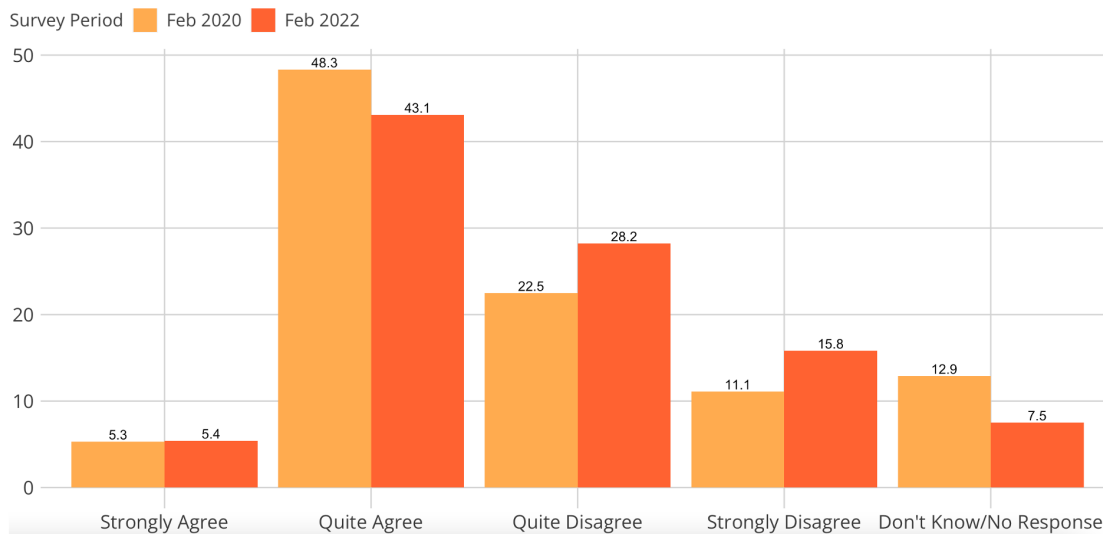
PUBLIC ATTITUDES DIVIDED

To answer the questions above, I analyze two representative face-to-face national surveys conducted by an independent survey agency, Indonesian Political Indicators (*Indikator*), in 2020 and 2022.² In terms of issue awareness, in 2022, 84.3% of respondents claim to know or have heard about the plan to relocate the nation's capital to East Kalimantan. The majority in almost all socio-demographic bases, except for respondents in the Maluku Papua region, are aware of the planned relocation of the capital.

However, at the public support level, there are indications of a decline in positive sentiment towards IKN. In 2020, 53% of citizens stated that they strongly or quite agreed with the plan to move the capital, but this support declined slightly to 48.5% in 2022. While in 2020 only 33.6% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed, in 2022 the level of public disapproval increased to 44%. Unlike in 2020, current public attitudes are more divided between those who are for and those who are against IKN.

Trends in Public Support for IKN

Percentage of Respondents, 2020 and 2022



Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

Note that the 2020 survey was conducted before the official government announcement was made on 2 March 2020 that Covid-19 cases had appeared in Indonesia. The pandemic has very likely reduced public support for IKN in the 2022 survey; the public health crisis having lowered its overall priority. This is evident even among citizens who agree with IKN; 51.1% of the supporting public stated that the idea was a non-exigent one to implement at the moment amidst more pressing issues facing the country. This means that many residents have a positive opinion about moving the capital city, but now find the timing inappropriate. Also, among those who disagree, almost 80% of them think that IKN is not urgent at all under present conditions.

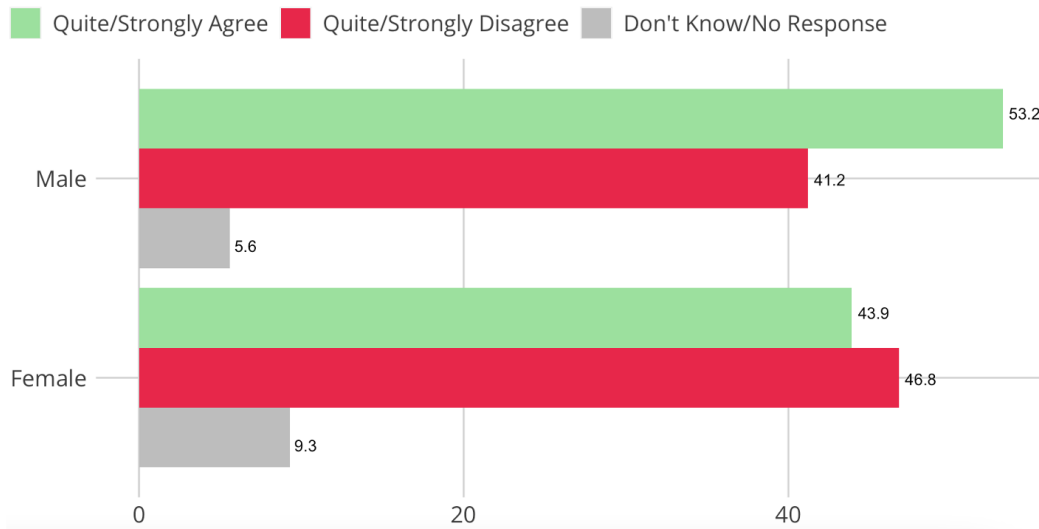
It is not surprising that the survey also found that among citizens who are satisfied with President Jokowi’s performance, the majority agree with moving the capital city (54.4%). On the other hand, among dissatisfied citizens, most disagree with the IKN plan. However, the proportion of Jokowi’s satisfied voters who disagree with IKN is quite high, at 38.6%. This shows that even among supporters, the capital relocation idea has not gained enough traction. Why the capital relocation proposal now faces heavier resistance is due to the idea being considered less urgent amidst the pandemic situation. The fear is that the project may heavily burden the state budget while the country is still reeling from the economic slump of the pandemic. Moreover, the public perceives that economic recovery should take precedence over the ambitious capital relocation plan.

WHO ARE THE SUPPORTERS OF IKN?

The survey offers insight into the demographic characteristics of supporters and opponents of IKN. From the gender composition, men tend to show higher support for IKN than women. Based on age group, support among young voters under the age of 21 for IKN is slightly higher than that among those in the age generation above it.

Opinions on IKN by Gender

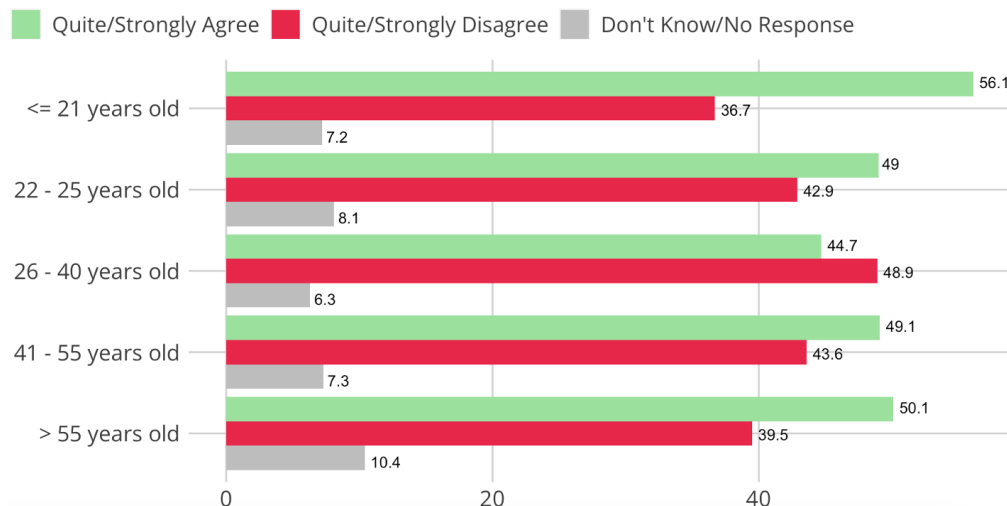
Percentage of Respondents



Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

Opinions on IKN by Age Group

Percentage of Respondents

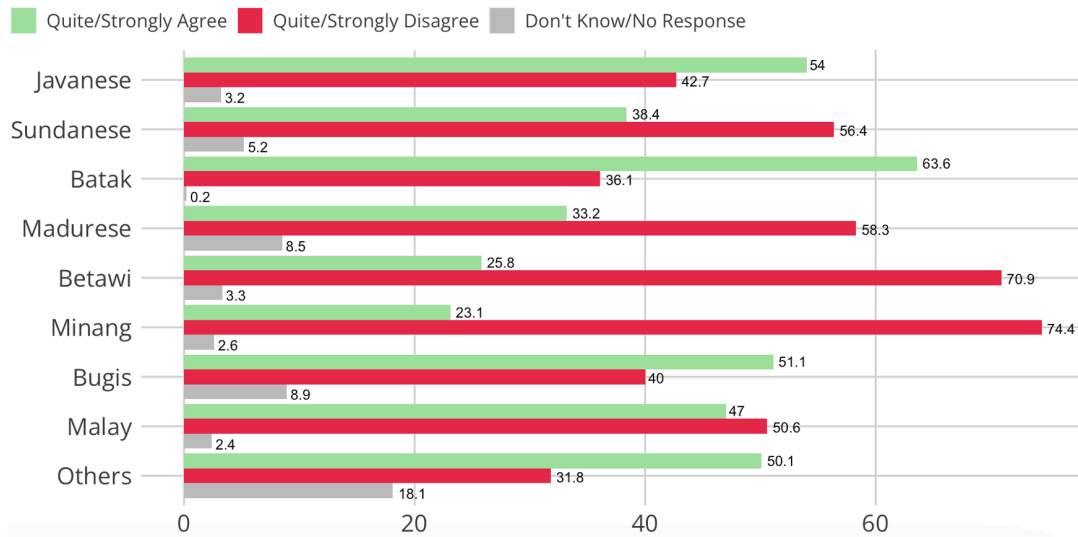


Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

Meanwhile, judging from ethnic composition, only Javanese and Batak ethnic groups tend to support the idea of moving the capital city, while Sundanese, Betawi, Minang, Malay, and Madurese ethnic groups tend to reject it. This is presumably related to partisan factors: ethnic Javanese and Batak make up Jokowi’s supporter base which delivered him his second presidential term, while Sundanese, Minang, Betawi, Madurese and Malays were Prabowo’s supporters in the 2019 election.³

Opinions on IKN by Ethnicity

Percentage of Respondents

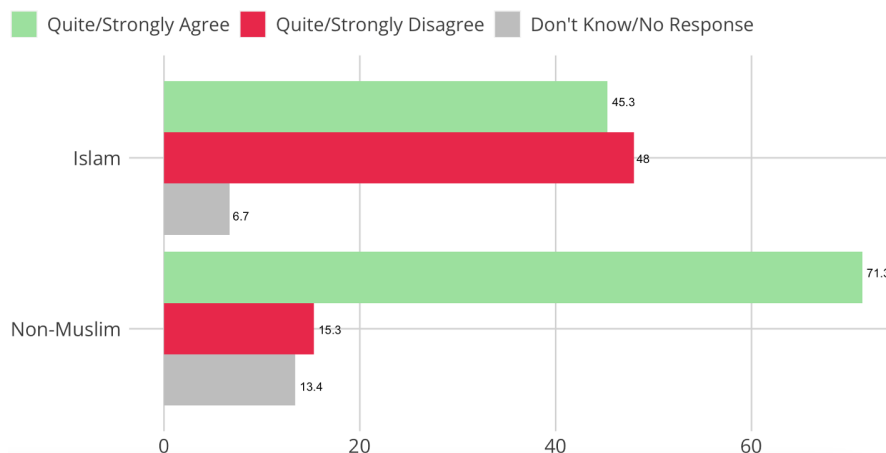


Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia

The partisan factor is also evidently present in the breakdown based on religion. Non-Muslim voters who have been Jokowi’s main support base⁴ solidly support his plan. On the other hand, Muslim voters are relatively divided; in absolute terms, there are slightly more Muslim voters who reject it than who support it.

Opinions on IKN by Religion

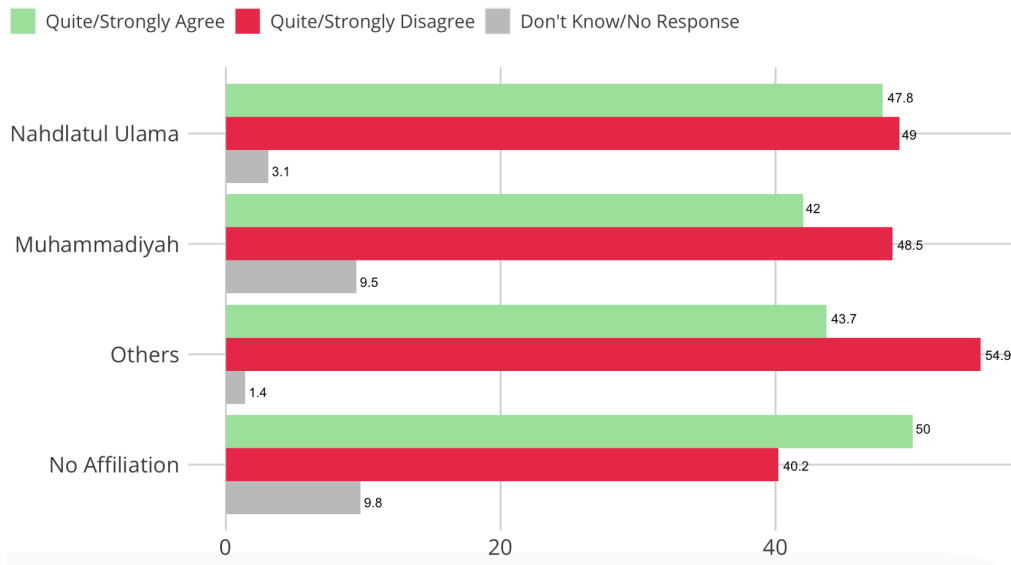
Percentage of Respondents



Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia

Opinions on IKN by Islamic Mass Organisation Affiliation

Percentage of Respondents

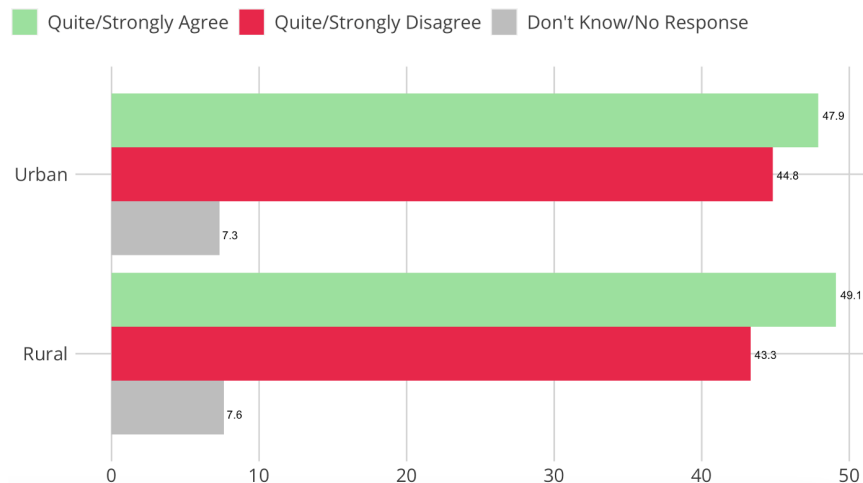


Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

The partisan element is also evident when dissected based on domicile, namely rural-urban and regional demographic background. The support from rural residents for IKN is slightly higher than that from urban residents; this fact mirrors exit poll data showing that Jokowi’s support in the presidential election was consistently higher in rural villages than in urban cities.⁵ So, even though they were Jokowi’s opponent in 2019, Prabowo Subianto and his running mate, Sandiaga Uno, are now ministers in Jokowi’s cabinet, the attitude of their voter base has remained relatively unchanged.

Opinions on IKN by Rural/Urban Classification

Percentage of Respondents

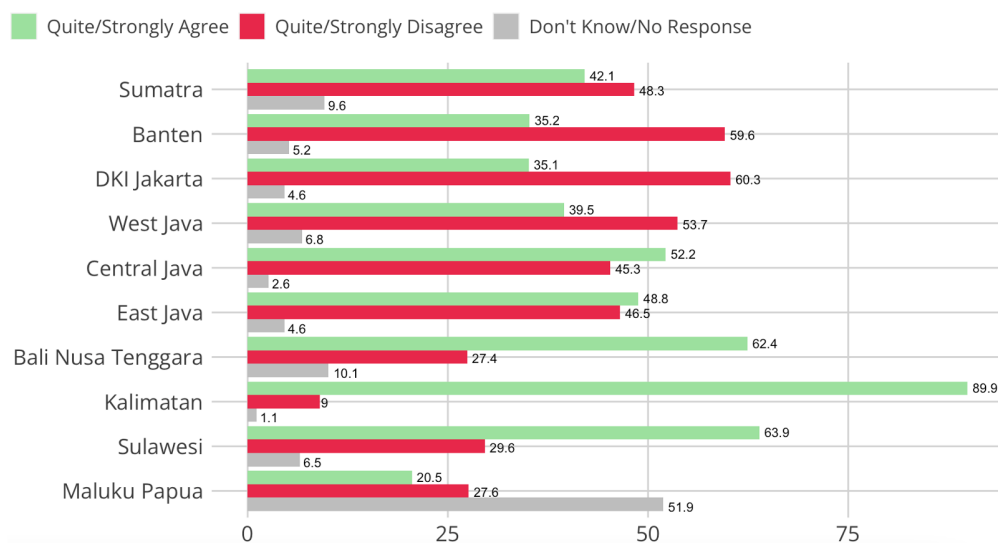


Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

The same pattern is also evident where regional background is concerned. In regions where Jokowi had a landslide victory in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, a majority supports his plan to move the capital. The exceptions are in Maluku and Papua where the majority of the people do not have an attitude or opinion about the plan since they generally do not know about it. The biggest support comes from Kalimantan where an overwhelming majority is behind the government and DPR’s decision to move the capital to their island. In Jakarta, Jokowi had a slight advantage over Prabowo in the 2019 presidential election, but the absolute majority of Jakarta residents tend to reject IKN. This is expected because they have enjoyed the privilege of being residents of the nation’s capital for years. Be that as it may, in Prabowo’s strongholds such as West Java, Sumatra, and Banten, the majority also rejects IKN.

Opinions on IKN by Region

Percentage of Respondents



Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia

Meanwhile, when analyzed by education level, the higher the education level of a respondent, the higher is the level of support shown for IKN. 57.7% of those with university education and above support creating the new capital. At the same time, support among those with lower secondary education tends to be divided. The same pattern is also evident where income level is concerned. The higher the income level, the higher the support for IKN, and vice versa.

PUBLIC SUPPORT BASED ON POLITICAL AFFILIATION

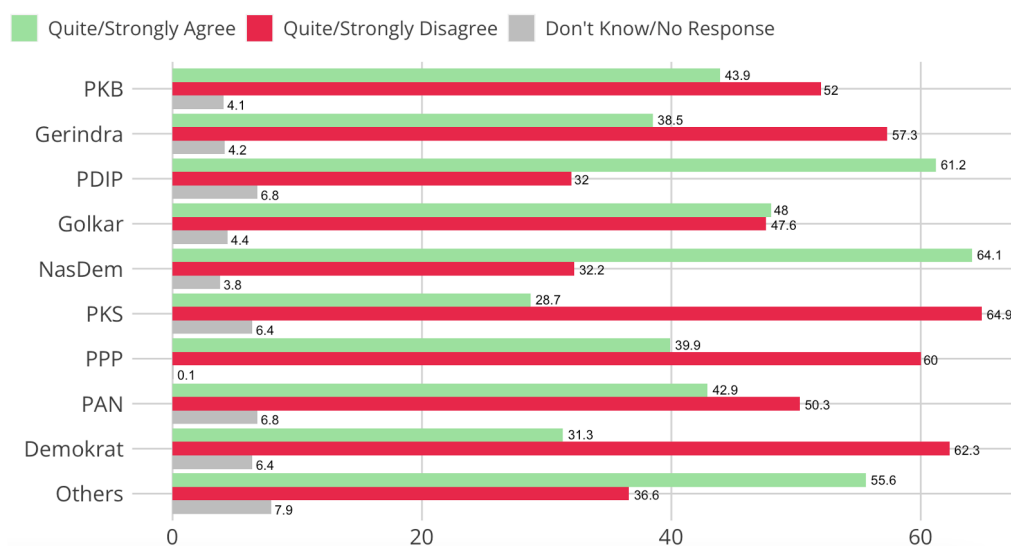
The partisan factor for supporting IKN is highly evident when we break it down based on the presidential choice made in 2019 election. Among 55.5% of respondents who claim to be Jokowi-Ma’ruf Amin voters, the majority support building the new capital. On the other hand, 61% of Prabowo-Sandiaga voters reject IKN outright. Also, although the majority of

Jokowi’s supporters support the plan, a significant minority among these display disagreement with IKN.

When analyzed further based on the respondents’ party vote in the 2019 legislative elections, we get further insight into why more than a third of Jokowi’s supporters have negative sentiments about IKN. The mass base of Jokowi’s coalition parties does not solidly support Jokowi’s ambition to develop a new capital city. Only the PDI-P and NasDem voter bases solidly support the plan. On the other hand, the majority of PKS and Demokrat mass bases – the two remaining opposition parties in parliament – reject IKN. Meanwhile, Golkar’s mass base is equally divided on that issue.

Opinions on IKN by 2019 Party Choice

Percentage of Respondents

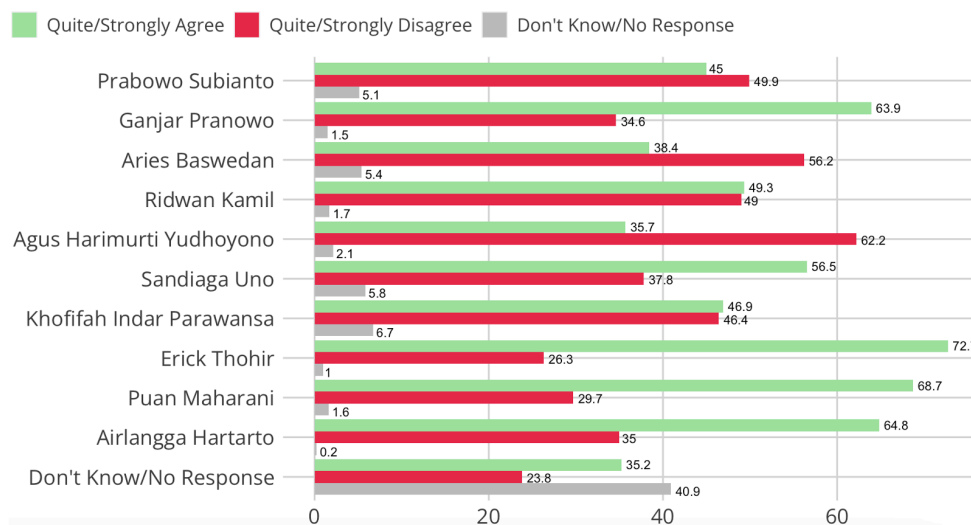


Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

The variation in support for IKN is more visible when based on the supporter base of each of the presidential candidates projected to run in 2024. The polling firm *Indikator* asks about the electability of ten presidential candidates if the election were held during the 2022 survey. While the electability of the ten varies, the support bases of Ganjar Pranowo (Governor of Central Java), Erick Thohir (Minister of SOEs), Puan Maharani (Chairman of the DPR and PDIP elite) and Airlangga Hartarto (Coordinating Minister for the Economy and Golkar Chairman) tend to solidly support Jokowi’s agenda.

Opinions on IKN by 2024 Presidential Candidate Choice

Percentage of Respondents



Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

This is quite logical because apart from these four candidates viewed as individuals in close proximity to Jokowi, their support base at the same time also coincides with Jokowi's base. What sticks out is the majority of Sandiaga's supporters; these support IKN even though Sandiaga was Jokowi's adversary in the 2019 election. Sandiaga's position as Jokowi's minister as well as his public appearance with Jokowi on many occasions seem to have changed the attitude of his supporters towards being more positive towards IKN.

On the other hand, the majority of supporters of Anies Baswedan (Governor of Jakarta) and Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (Chairman of Democrats) reject the new capital. These two figures have been presenting themselves as Jokowi's oppositional figures, thereby attracting voters who are disillusioned or opposed to the Jokowi government. Prabowo supporters are quite divided, although slightly more among them support IKN than are against it. Supporters of the Governor of West Java Ridwan Kamil and of the Governor of East Java Khofifah Indar Parawansa are also sharply divided regarding the plan to move the capital.

HOW TO BOOST PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR IKN?

Given the downward trend of public support for the new capital, the government urgently needs to find ways to turn the situation around. Moreover, the IKN plan should no longer be seen as just a reflection of Jokowi's personal ambition, but a long-term Indonesian project that was popularly passed into law on 18 January 2022. Of the nine factions in the DPR, only PKS firmly rejected IKN, while the Democrat party together with the remaining seven other governing coalition parties jointly voted to pass the IKN Bill.⁶

Our analysis suggests that one potential way for the government to boost public support is to disseminate the objective and practical rationales for why the capital needs to be

relocated. *Indikator*'s survey posed to respondents a series of questions to ascertain the level of knowledge and support for various technocratic policy rationales that have been used to justify why a new capital is needed. The level of awareness among respondents from 34 provinces throughout Indonesia about the reasons behind moving the capital turns out to be underwhelming.

Awareness of the Rationales for IKN

Percentage of Respondents

| RATIONALE | AWARE | UNAWARE |
|---|-------|---------|
| Jakarta is Overburdened | 50% | 50% |
| Java is Overpopulated | 63% | 37% |
| Economic Distribution Outside Java | 48% | 52% |
| Water Supply Crisis in Java (Especially Jakarta) | 37% | 63% |
| Threat of Sunda Strait Megathrust Earthquake in Jakarta | 34% | 66% |

Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

Only a third of the respondents are aware of the two main rationales that are used to justify relocating the capital, namely “Jakarta is threatened by the Sunda Strait Megathrust earthquake” (33.6% of the respondents were aware) and “the crisis of water supply in Java, especially Jakarta” (37% were aware).

For respondents who claim to be aware of the rationales for a new capital, *Indikator* then asked follow-up questions about how much they believed in or supported those rationales. I have correlated the public’s knowledge of the rationales with the level of trust/support for such rationales. The findings show that the absolute majority of respondents who are aware of the rationales express strong belief / support for these reasons. In contrast, where respondents display lack of awareness of the rationales, their levels of skepticism and resistance to the capital move tend to increase. This finding clearly shows that if the government wants to boost positive perceptions of IKN, then the public needs to be made more aware of the reasons for the move.

Opinion on IKN by Awareness of Rationales

Percentage of Respondents

| RATIONALE | AWARENESS | AGREE/STRONGLY AGREE | DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE | DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE |
|---|-----------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Jakarta is Overburdened | Aware | 60% | 37% | 3% |
| | Unaware | 37% | 51% | 12% |
| Java is Overpopulated | Aware | 58% | 40% | 3% |
| | Unaware | 32% | 52% | 16% |
| Economic Distribution Outside Java | Aware | 63% | 36% | 1% |
| | Unaware | 36% | 51% | 13% |
| Water Supply Crisis in Java (Especially Jakarta) | Aware | 60% | 39% | 1% |
| | Unaware | 42% | 47% | 11% |
| Threat of Sunda Strait Megathrust Earthquake in Jakarta | Aware | 61% | 37% | 2% |
| | Unaware | 42% | 48% | 10% |

Source: *Indikator Politik Indonesia*

CONCLUSION

The idea of moving the Indonesian capital from Jakarta, which is widely considered to be overstretched in its ability to remain the seat of the central government and the locus of economic activities in the country, has persistently cropped up since the era of Indonesia's founding father President Sukarno and been revisited in every presidential era ever since. However, this ambitious idea has failed to materialize, until now. It was only during the time of President Jokowi that proper plans for the construction of the new capital began to take shape. Parliament passed the IKN Bill into Law earlier this year. But instead of increasing public support after the legal instrument was passed, public resistance has increased instead. Opposition to IKN has increased from 33% in 2020 to 44% in February 2022.

If this deteriorating trend in public support for IKN continues, the government will find it difficult to carry out the stages of relocating the capital effectively. Public objection may also disrupt the process of relocating civil servants and public officials from the 82 state institutions or ministries to IKN, and it is highly plausible that in the future, dissent will increase among civil servants or public officials who refuse to relocate to the new capital. If public resistance grows, it is not impossible that the stance of government coalition parties that originally supported it could shift. Furthermore, if the Jokowi government fails to arrest the slide in public levels of support for the capital move, the next administration may be reluctant to follow through with it and instead place blame on the Jokowi's administration for the costs and confusion involved.

For this reason, the Jokowi government urgently needs to increase public support for IKN. First, the partisan effect that affects support or rejection of IKN must be addressed. All parties supporting the government, including those who were previously in the opposition, must be involved in order to make the IKN agenda a success. Prabowo and Sandiaga, both currently serving as Jokowi's ministers, including two former opposition parties, Gerindra and PAN, which are now part of the government coalition, need to be drawn in more intensely to shore up support for the IKN agenda. To further boost positive perceptions of IKN, the government also needs to intensify socialization on why the country needs a new capital.

The absolute majority of residents who know or display high level of awareness of these rationales tend to be strongly supportive of the IKN project, compared to citizens who are unaware of the rationales being presented. Of course, in communicating these rationales, the government risks being perceived to be ignoring the infrastructural issues facing Jakarta and to be instead taking the easy way out, by moving the capital. The government needs to convince the public that it remains committed to solving the classic problems that have long plagued Jakarta, such as the water crisis, the threat of earthquakes and Jakarta sinking, and others. If the government is successful in socializing the rationale why Indonesia needs to build a new capital, then public support for IKN should increase and Jokowi can leave a good legacy behind for the next government to build upon.

ENDNOTES

¹ Rohmatin Bonasir, “Rencana pemindahan ibu kota dari Jakarta: Berapa lama waktu yang diperlukan dan apa saja syarat-syarat ibu kota?” *BBC News Indonesia*, 29 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-48093451>

² The first survey was carried out simultaneously in all regions on 5-10 February 2020, while the second survey was conducted on 11-21 February 2022. The population for this survey were Indonesian citizens with the right to vote, who were thus 17 years old and above, or already married when the survey was conducted. Using a questionnaire, the interviews were conducted face-to-face by our interviewers on 1,220 voting-age adults in the first survey and 4,220 respondents in the second survey who were selected with multistage random sampling. These were proportionally distributed over the 34 provinces.

³ Indikator Politik Indonesia, “2019 General Election exit poll,” 17 April 2019, p. 42 <https://indikator.co.id/rilis-exit-poll-pemilu-2019-2/>

⁴ Ibid, p. 41. For comparison, see the results of the 2014 presidential election exit poll, Indikator Politik Indonesia, “Hasil exit poll Pemilu Presiden,” 9 July 2014, p. 21, <https://indikator.co.id/laporan-exit-poll-pemilu-presiden-2014/>

⁵ Ibid, p. 43.

⁶ Nicholas Ryan Aditya, “PKS Tolak RUU IKN Disahkan di Rapat Paripurna, Ini Alasannya”, *Kompas.com*, 18 January 2021, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2022/01/18/09200151/pks-tolak-ruu-ikn-disahkan-di-rapat-paripurna-ini-alasannya?page=all>.

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