

## IKN BETWEEN SYMBOL AND STRUGGLE: GOVERNMENTAL FRAMING AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON IKN IN EAST KALIMANTAN

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### ABSTRACT

The relocation of Indonesia's capital city from Jakarta to East Kalimantan is seen as a significant but risky move. Therefore, numerous narratives are circulating regarding the development of the new capital city (IKN). One source of these narratives is the official Indonesian government website, which is <https://ikn.go.id/>. These narratives are heavily laden with the government's framing of the IKN development. Using Ecological Discourse Analysis, the researchers attempt to uncover how the government frames the IKN development and how society evaluates it. From the 17 analyzed articles, five frames were identified: the National Development Frame, Equality Frame, Sustainability Frame, Exploitation Frame, and Technocratic Frame. The National Development Frame depicts the IKN as a solution to enhance Indonesia's economy and development. In addition, the Equality Frame is also a form of justification by the Indonesian government for the IKN Development so that national development can be carried out evenly. The Sustainability Frame is the most frequently appearing frame, where the government presents the IKN as a forest city that supports low carbon emissions and promotes an environmentally friendly approach. However, within the same narrative, there is also an exploitation frame in which the government frames the ongoing exploitation process as a form of development. The last is the technocratic frame, which presents the IKN as a smart city with the latest technology, although its implementation still does not match reality.

**Keyword: IKN, Frame, Public Perception, Ecolinguistics, Ecological  
Discourse Analysis**

### ABSTRAK

*Perpindahan ibukota negara Indonesia dari Jakarta ke Kalimantan Timur  
dipandang sebagai sebuah Langkah yang besar tapi beresiko. Oleh karena itu ada*

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banyak sekali narasi-narasi yang berputar terkait pembangunan IKN. Salah satu sumber narasi tersebut adalah dari website resmi pemerintah Indonesia, yakni <https://ikn.go.id/>. Narasi-narasi ini sarat akan frame pemerintah terhadap pembangunan IKN. Dengan menggunakan Ecological Discourse Analysis, peneliti berusaha untuk mengungkap bagaimana pemerintah membingkai pembabngunan Ikn dan bagaimana masyarakat menilainya. Dari 17 article yang dianalisa terdapat lima frame yakni National Development Frame, Equality Frame, Sustainability Frame, Exploitation Frame dan Technocratic Frame. National Development Frame menggambarkan IKN sebagai Solusi untuk meningkatkan ekonomi dan Pembangunan Indonesia. Selain itu, Equality Frame juga merupakan bentuk justifikasi pemerintah Indonesia terhadap Pembangunan IKN agar Pembangunan nasional dapat dilaksanakan secara merata. Sustainability Frame merupakan frame yang paling sering muncul dimana pemerintah membingkai IKN sebagai forest city yang mendukung low carbon emission dan kota ramah lingkungan. Namun, dalam narasi yang sama hadir pula exploitation frame dimana pemerintah membingkai proses eksploitasi yang terjadi sebagai salah satu bentuk pembangunan. Yang terakhir adalah technocratic frame yang menjadikan IKN sebagai smart city dengan teknologi termutakhir namun pelaksanaan masih belum sesuai realita.

**Kata kunci:** IKN, Pembingkai, Persepsi Publik, Ekolinguistik, Analisis Wacana Ekologis

## A. INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the former President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, decided to relocate the capital city from Jakarta to Sepaku, Penajam Paser Utara Region, East Kalimantan. This decision is based on several reasons, including environmental damage in Jakarta, the need for a national symbol, and the proposed promotion of equality, especially in areas outside Java Island. The first reason is related to Jakarta, which has experienced several major floods, especially in 2020, when 66 people died, 187,000 people were displaced, and the recorded losses amounted to around 10 trillion rupiahs (BBC News Indonesia, 2020). As the most populous city in Indonesia, the condition of citizens in Jakarta faces many shortcomings, including a lack of water supply, high costs for renting and owning houses, resulting in slums, garbage issues, and traffic congestion (Syaban & Appiah-Opoku, 2023; Yahya, 2018). The second reason is that Indonesia never designed its own capital city because Jakarta itself is a heritage from Dutch colonization. Therefore, former President Jokowi emphasized the need to design and develop an Indonesian capital city that reflects the country's culture and environment. The last reason is to promote equal development across all areas in Indonesia, from West to East, as most of the country's development is currently concentrated on the island of Java. Thus, the

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people in the East do not perceive the same level of development as those in the West, especially those living on Java Island. Based on these reasons, the Indonesian government believes that relocating and developing a new capital city is a necessity for Indonesia's future advancement Hackbarth & Vries, 2021).

As the first capital city that the Indonesian people designed, IKN is proposed to be "a smart forest city". By developing the capital city independently, the Indonesian government aims to ensure that the city will have forest areas, comprising 50% green spaces, and be equipped with the latest technology. The proposed IKN, as a forest city and smart city, is informed by the official website <https://ikn.go.id/>. These discourses reflect how the Indonesian government frames IKN.

As previously mentioned, the Indonesian government frames IKN as a forest and smart city, but the people living near IKN perceive it differently. Through the NGO's report, indigenous people report an increase in flood frequency since the IKN was developed. Also, they report that the traditional forest is included in the IKN area. Indigenous people raised their concerns about what will happen to their next generation if the forest is gone gradually, since the forests are their home where they share the knowledge with future generations, finding materials for rituals, and collecting herbs for their traditional medicine (Rahayu, et al, 2025). According to this report, a discrepancy exists between what the Indonesian government claims and what people surrounding IKN perceive. This discrepancy highlights the need to investigate how the government frames IKN and what environmental ideology it adheres to, and to compare it with public perception to determine whether the discourse genuinely takes the environment into consideration or is merely a form of greenwashing aimed at gaining public approval. This topic is suitable to be studied using the ecolinguistic framework proposed by Stibbe (2015).

Ecolinguistics is a multidisciplinary study that examines how language can shape people's perception and attitude toward nature (Stibbe, 2015). It uncovers which linguistic manifestation in a discourse could lead people to destroy or protect nature. Using ecolinguistics, the discourses could be distinguished into three: destructive, ambivalent, and beneficial discourses. One of the ways to reveal what kind of discourse it is through revealing the framing of the topic in the discourse. Framing is a process of making some aspects of a reality more salient in a text to promote a particular message, interpretation, or evaluation (Entman, 1993). This concept offers such a way to describe the power of communicating text that illuminates the way that text influences human consciousness (Entman, 1993, p. 51). At the same time, Stibbe defines framing in an ecolinguistic perspective as the use of a story from one area of life (a frame) to structure how another area of life is conceptualised. In the IKN case, the government's framing of IKN needs to be further evaluated to determine whether it genuinely promotes environmental conservation or is merely a greenwashing tactic to gain public acceptance.

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Therefore, the researchers aim to answer the research questions on how the Indonesian government frames IKN and how the public perceives the development of IKN. To provide the data of public perceptions, the researchers conducted interviews with indigenous people and head of village surrounding IKN.

Recent studies have already conducted research using an ecolinguistics approach on different types of discourses, such as investigating anthropomorphic metaphors of war (Materynska, 2021), news reports on a trade war (Cheng & He, 2022), media framing (2024), poems (Zamruddin, Rahayu, Juliastuti, & Muhajir, 2025) and in pedagogic activities (Rutledge & Manegre, 2024). Some of the recent research even particularly discusses how the Indonesian government frames IKN (Rahayu, et al., 2025a) and erasure patterns in their narratives (Rahayu, et al., 2025b). However, none of them ever compares the frame of IKN with public perspectives to see the discrepancy between those discourses. Therefore, the present study aimed to fill the gap by investigating how the Indonesian government presents IKN in its narratives and how people perceive the development of IKN.

## B. LITERATURE REVIEWS

### 1. Ecolinguistics

Ecolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field that combines aspects of ecology and linguistics. As explained by Stibbe (2015), the term ecolinguistics is not new, as it has been in use since the 1990s. However, there are distinctions in the way people interpret the prefix *eco*, which refers to the ecological aspect of ecolinguistics. These distinctions are determined by the type of relationship between language and the environment being examined.

In general, ecolinguistics can be divided into two approaches. The first focuses on the ongoing interaction between language and its environment, while the second examines the role of language in addressing environmental issues (Gunawan, 2023). These approaches represent distinct directions in the field's development.

The first approach appeared in the early development of ecolinguistics. Fill (1993), as cited in Penz and Fill (2022), described it as a study of "the (inter)relations between languages in their social and natural environment and the role of language in their relations between groups". The second approach can be traced back to Halliday's plenary talk in 1990, where he argued that "dealing with environmental issues should have a central place in applied linguistics" (as cited in Penz & Fill, 2022). This talk is described to have initiated Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA).

### 2. Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA)

Ecological Discourse Analysis (henceforth referred to as *EDA*) is an approach within ecolinguistics that examines how language contributes to ecological problems or solutions. It focuses on uncovering the underlying discourses that

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shape human relationships with the natural world, particularly those that support or undermine ecological sustainability. EDA can be understood as a form of discourse analysis that employs an ecolinguistic framework. In relation to EDA, Alexander and Stibbe (2014) describe ecolinguistics as an "ecological analysis of discourse" rather than simply an analysis of texts about the environment. This argument is supported by Wu (2018), who also argues that the framework can be applied to any text on the assumption that even everyday practices, though seemingly unrelated, may still affect the environment.

Still under the scope of *EDA*, Stibbe (2015) introduced the framework of *stories we live by*. Through this framework, ecolinguistics is defined as a study that reveals the stories influencing people and their societies by examining "ideologies, metaphors, frames, and a variety of other cognitive and linguistic phenomena" (Stibbe, 2015, p. 5). This perspective argues that language can shape people's attitudes toward their natural environment. In particular, Stibbe (2015, pp. 46-62) emphasizes framing as a key linguistic tool that can highlight certain aspects of reality while hiding others, which makes it central to understanding how language influences ecological thinking.

### 3. Frame and Framing

The concept of frame and framing is not limited to linguistics, as it has also been widely discussed in fields such as sociology, psychology, and communication studies (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993). In these fields, framing is understood as the process of selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality while downplaying others. Within linguistics, however, the concept has developed into a strong analytical tool, particularly in critical approaches such as EDA. This is because framing provides insights into how language represents the world and, at the same time, influences how people perceive and act toward it. Stibbe (2015, p. 47) offered the definitions of *frame*, *framing*, and *reframing* in a concise manner. A frame is defined as "a story about an area of life that is brought to mind by particular trigger words", while framing is described as "the use of a story from one area of life (a frame) to structure how another area of life is conceptualised" (2015, p. 47). In certain circumstances, the process of framing can be repeated with a different frame. This practice is known as *reframing*.

Framing in language can be identified through various linguistic strategies. Word choices, for instance, play a significant role in directing attention and shaping interpretation. Metaphors also function as framing devices by structuring one concept in terms of another, which can carry powerful implications for how an issue is understood (Müller, 2008). Another important strategy is salience (as opposed to erasure), where certain aspects of a text are made more prominent than others, guiding the reader or listener toward a preferred interpretation. As van Leeuwen (2008) points out, framing is achieved through these semiotic resources that foreground some meanings while backgrounding others, thereby influencing the

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social and ecological realities constructed through discourse. Overall, these linguistic strategies demonstrate that framing provides a critical lens for understanding how language shapes ecological awareness and practice.

### C. Methods

This study employs qualitative discourse analysis particularly Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA). EDA is an approach within ecolinguistics that examines how language contributes to ecological problems or solutions. The researchers sourced the data from the official website of IKN (<https://ikn.go.id/>) and conducted interviews with 6 indigenous people and the head of the village who live in the surrounding area of IKN. One hundred four articles were selected from the website, and the researchers performed some keyword searches (forest city, smart city) using the AntConc application to choose the articles that discuss the environment in their narratives. From this search, 17 articles that use those words are identified, as follows:

**Table 1 Data Source**

Name	Published Date	Code
<b>2019 IKN-10 Juli 2019</b>	10 Juli 2019	IKN1
<b>2019 IKN-20 Agustus 2019</b>	20 Agustus 2019	IKN2
<b>2019 IKN-20 Agustus 2019b</b>	20 Agustus 2019	IKN3
<b>2019 IKN-17 September 2019</b>	17 September 2019	IKN4
<b>2019 IKN-1 Oktober 2019</b>	1 Oktober 2019	IKN5
<b>2019 IKN-17 Oktober 2019</b>	17 Oktober 2019	IKN6
<b>2020 IKN-11 Februari 2020</b>	11 Februari 2020	IKN7
<b>2021 IKN-5 April 2021</b>	5 April 2021	IKN8
<b>2021 IKN-22 April 2021</b>	22 April 2021	IKN9
<b>2021 IKN-24 April 2021</b>	24 April 2021	IKN10
<b>2023 IKN-16 April 2023</b>	16 April 2023	IKN11
<b>2023 IKN-17 April 2023b</b>	17 April 2023b	IKN12
<b>2024 IKN-19 Januari 2024d</b>	19 Januari 2024d	IKN13
<b>2024 IKN-21 Februari 2024</b>	21 Februari 2024	IKN14
<b>2024 IKN-26 Maret 2024</b>	26 Maret 2024	IKN15
<b>2024 IKN-22 April 2024</b>	22 April 2024	IKN16
<b>2024 IKN-25 April 2024</b>	25 April 2024	IKN17

These 17 articles are then analyzed using five types of frames from Stibbe's framework (2015) and Entman's framework (1993) such as the national development frame, the sustainability frame, the exploitation frame, the equality frame, and the technocratic frame. Using the framework developed by Stibbe (2015) and Entman (1993) the researchers employ it to code the data into a

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classification, comparing government discourses with public perception. Using NVivo, the researchers will display the data and map it into several themes.

## D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Findings

The researchers examine 17 articles that frame IKN as the forest city. From these articles, the researchers examine how the government frames IKN into five types of frames as follows:

**Table 2 Frames of IKN**

Frames	Files	References	Percentage (%)
National Development Frames	9	13	22,81
Equality Frames	2	3	5,26
Exploitation Frames	4	4	7,02
Sustainability Frames	15	35	61,40
Technocratic Frames	8	11	19,30

Based on the table above, the government frequently frames IKN using sustainability frames, which are related to its tagline that IKN is a forest city. However, these frames need to be re-evaluated to determine whether the sustainability frames truly represent the IKN by comparing the frames with the context in the same discourse and public perception to see how the people surrounding the IKN perceive the development of the IKN. Besides analyzing how the government frames the IKN in its discourse, the researchers also conduct a word query to reveal the most discussed topics in their discourse. Surprisingly, although the sustainability frames are the most discussed topic, the top ten most frequent words in the discourses do not belong to environmental or sustainable-related keywords, as follows:

**Table 3. Word Frequency in IKN-related discourses**

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Nusantara	9	171	1,98
Capital	7	170	1,96
Development	11	145	1,68
City	4	136	1,57
Indonesia	9	105	1,21
Kalimantan	10	84	0,97
IKN	3	81	0,94
Minister	8	71	0,82
NCA	3	69	0,80
National	8	64	0,74

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Instead of showing most frequent words about environment or sustainability, the discourses talk more about development in their discourses, which means that the sustainability frames are complementary to the development of IKN. The more comprehensive explanation are presented in the following themes:

**a. National Development Frames: IKN is the problem solution**

National Development Frames refer to the salience part of IKN, which are represented as the key factor of advancing Indonesia's economy and development. This frame conceptualizes that the relocation and development of IKN is part of the Indonesian government's efforts to improve its economic progress. This message is usually represented through the use of economic-related terms and the positioning of IKN as the only or the prime solution of Indonesian's economic problem as represented in the following quotation:

*Therefore, the total impacts of the IKN relocation will also contribute to improving GDP growth and welfare levels (IKN4)*

From this quotation, the government stated that IKN relocation is expected to contribute to improving GDP growth and welfare levels. The message that IKN will bring welfare and economic growth is frequently mentioned in government discourse to ensure the investment is not going to waste. The statement of IKN brings welfare and opportunities, which are also presented in a discourse related to indigenous people to answer the indigenous people's call for equality and protection of their lands and homes, as seen in the quotation as follows:

*It is hoped that the IKN will help bring improved welfare, education and opportunities for native Dayaks to hold strategic positions in government (IKN6)*

In this narrative, IKN is presented as a key solution to enhance welfare, education, and opportunities for indigenous people to participate in government. However, this statement seems to be contrary to what the public perceives. The counter voices are first coming from AMAN (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara), which disagrees with the relocation and development of IKN because the development of IKN will threaten the people's land and home, as stated in the following quotation:

*Organizationally, AMAN does not agree. So AMAN is one of the organizations that rejects IKN. The reason is that there is no clarity or certainty regarding the rights of indigenous peoples in the development of IKN. Indigenous peoples are actually threatened and marginalized. With the development of IKN, for example, one of the communities there is almost being evicted. They are forced to leave, as their village is within IKN. Then IKN wants to build offices and buildings. This community's village is small. They actually do not want to be relocated from their ancestral land that has been theirs for generations. That is one of the reasons why AMAN is an organization that opposes the*

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*presence of IKN since it is not supported by IKN's own policies regarding support for the rights of indigenous peoples. (Participant 1)*

According to participant 1's testimony, AMAN is concerned about the rights of indigenous people, which may be violated due to the influx of people from outside Kalimantan Island, who could intensify competition for opportunities in IKN. Also, the development of IKN is in the area where indigenous people live from generation to generation. Many indigenous people are losing their ancestral land and should leave their homes where they have lived for years because of the development. It is strengthened by the interview quotation as follows:

*However, there is a slight problem on our part, because this development was initially planned to be built only in the PT IHM area, but many plots of land belonging to residents were actually cleared for the construction of IKN. At first, many accepted it, but ultimately felt disappointed. A significant number of residents' houses, stalls, and mosques had to be demolished to make way for this development. However, thank God, the mosque was rebuilt elsewhere. The affected houses were compensated for their losses, but there should have been a solution found for those impacted, not just paid off and then left alone. Most of the affected individuals are residents. There should have been a search for suitable land and plots first and through discussions beforehand, not just compensated and then given a short time to vacate their homes. The relocation and development of IKN might be one of the best solutions to mobilize the economy from the central part of Indonesia, ensuring that national development can be achieved evenly. However, the indigenous people and environment should not be at risk for those advancements (Participant 2).*

From the excerpt of the interview above, it is evident that the land clearing process, in its implementation, faces various unexpected problems. During the process, the indigenous people who have lived in the area for generations feel displaced from their own hometown. This is precisely what the indigenous community alliance feared: that the development of the IKN would result in indigenous people being pushed aside and marginalized. Participant 2 is the tribal chief of the local indigenous people, who lamented that a community that has lived there since childhood, even from their ancestors, has to move. With the compensation provided, they are unable to purchase new homes and have to rent, which forces them to move frequently from one place to another. Participant 2 hopes that the government can address this issue more wisely, for example, by relocating the affected residents to other homes rather than just providing compensation. From this excerpt, it is evident that addressing issues related to indigenous peoples still requires attention so that the same situation does not drag on.

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**b. Equality Frames: IKN enables the even development**

Equality frames deal with the purposes of the Indonesian government in building IKN as a means to spread welfare from the west to the east. It is rooted in the fact that Indonesia’s development is centered on Java Island, that arise led to a discrepancy among regions in Indonesia. Equality frames are realized through lexical choices such as the use of words that describe equality or reducing the tension of domination of a particular region. The relocation of the capital city is seen as the first step to make sure all regions are monitored and close to the government, so the problems from the regions in Indonesia can be addressed immediately. The equality frame can be seen from the following quotation:

*The construction of this new governmental center is an investment to help reduce the excessive economic domination of certain islands.*  
(IKN4)

The quotation above does not explicitly use the words “balance”, “equal”, or “even” to describe the equality proposed. Instead, through the phrase “to help reduce... domination of certain island”, this statement suggests that there was a domination of certain areas when discussing national development, specifically in the case of Java Island, where Jakarta, as the capital city, is located. Therefore, the relocation of the capital city and the development of IKN is to ensure that this domination is reduced and the welfare can be spread evenly. The same statement is provided in the following quotation:

*The new capital city must accommodate the needs of all regions of Indonesia. It must be in the center of the country, hence Kalimantan, to encourage equitable development and spur economic growth.*  
(IKN2)

Through this interview excerpt, the government signals that the new capital city (IKN) will become the nation's center, supporting equitable national development for all regions of Indonesia. The use of the word 'equitable' conveys the message of justice and equality that the Indonesian government wants to communicate through the development of IKN. Although the narratives shaped by the Indonesian government expect the IKN to be able to make Indonesia's development more evenly distributed, many people feel disadvantaged in the development process. As stated by the village head:

*But at that time there were only two options. Those who agreed would sign, those who didn't agree didn't need to sign. Later, compensation could be claimed in court. That's all. Yes, there is a sort of doctrine, like a doctrine if I, you know, that. (Participant 3)*

The quote above is part of an interview with Participant 3, who works as the village head in the IKN area. According to him, almost all of the land compensation process has been completed; however, in its implementation, there really was no choice. The community can agree by signing and accepting the compensation determined by the government, or if they refuse, they do not need to sign and will

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not receive compensation; in this case, the matter will be taken to court. And the final result, of course, is that the community will lose if they oppose the government in court. This aligns with what Participant 2 stated, that the community, whether willing or not, must sell their land and ultimately lose ancestral land that has been inhabited for generations. Not only do they lose the centuries-old land they have lived on, but they also lose the forest that has been an integral part of their lives.

### c. Exploitation Frames: Deforestation and Mining

The exploitation frame is a representation of exploitation carried out by the Indonesian government, as stated in the narratives about IKN. Mining and plantations, especially palm oil, are the mainstay enterprises on the island of Kalimantan. Until now, the Indonesian government has relied on income from mining and plantations that have harmful effects on the environment. However, in several government narratives, they never mention or connect mining and plantations to the environmental degradation occurring in Kalimantan. The process of covering up or not discussing the adverse effects of an activity, while only focusing on the positive impacts, is a behavior known as greenwashing, characterized by selective disclosure. As in the following quote, where the government mentions mining and plantations as a form of state revenue, but does not mention the environmental damage caused by these activities:

*In addition to moving the nation's capital city to Kalimantan, Minister Bambang also explained several ways that the government is building new growth centers, increasing equitable development, and reducing inequality. The first is industrializing outside of Java in the form of mining and plantation products both in Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. (IKN1)*

In addition to mining and plantations, the government also shows the frame of exploitation through the following quote:

*Furthermore, if the government provides more land, we will increase investment and invite private partners to join," said Christopher Sumasto. (IKN13)*

The above quote suggests that if investors require more land for their developments, the government will allocate additional land for occupation. This statement inadvertently indicates that the Indonesian government is highly dependent on the interests of investors, thus fulfilling their demands. Preparing land will certainly impact many environments because the more land that is prepared, the broader the land clearing that is done. At the same time, the IKN area is surrounded by indigenous forests. With the loss of forests, it will become increasingly complex for indigenous peoples to pass on their knowledge about traditional medicines, rituals, and handicrafts that utilize natural materials typically sourced from the forest.

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**d. Sustainability Frames: IKN as the forest city**

The sustainability frame is where the Indonesian government describes IKN as a forest city that will prioritize urban planning in line with sustainable environmental principles. According to Table 2, the sustainability framework is the most widely used framework by the Indonesian government. This aligns with the Indonesian government's goal to make IKN the country's first forest city. This is evident in the following quote:

*We are committed to not disturb the area's forests, which are categorized as protected forests and we will make sure that 50% of the new city's land will be dedicated to green spaces," Minister Bambang said. (IKN5)*

In the excerpt above, the government stated its commitment to ensure that 50% of the area is designated as green space. However, what exactly is meant by green space is not clearly explained by the government. In addition, as shown in Table 3, the word count analysis (using a word search query) reveals that the top 10 frequently appearing words do not include any terms related to green space or the intended ecological principles. This suggests a potential tendency for the green space or forest city mentioned by the government to be merely a rhetorical device.

*"At the IKN, we will live in and around the forest as it is an Indonesian heritage that we must protect for our future generations. For example, when the IKN is completed, we will plant and reforest the Soeharto Hill. If one of the weaknesses of environmental conservation is that Kalimantan is too big and too far away, then the presence of the IKN will bring policymakers closer, especially the President, to the beautiful forests of Kalimantan. By relocating our State Capital, the world's lungs will be even more secure because it is located right on the terrace of our home," Minister Suharso said. (IKN10)*

According to the excerpt above, the Indonesian government has stated that it will protect forests and carry out reforestation in Bukit Soeharto, a designated conservation area. This also serves as a justification for why the national capital must be relocated so that policymakers are closer and can better protect the forests in Kalimantan. However, behind these environmentally friendly narratives from the Indonesian government, there is also public concern and anxiety that the presence of the new capital will actually worsen environmental degradation, as expressed by participant 4 below:

*So far, there has been no impact on Rangan. However, economically, this will affect Rangan, especially since Rangan's rulers will become greedier in controlling Rangan's territory, because they are also participating in the development of the IKN. The increasing clearing of mangrove forests to be turned into docks is also related to the IKN. They*

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*are preparing for when the port can no longer accommodate coal, it will be used to load containers, CPO, etc. (Participant 4))*

From the quote above, Participant 4 expressed her concern about the construction of IKN, which will impact other areas. Participant 4 is an AMAN activist who lives in the Paser region. She stated that, in any case, the development of IKN can affect the surrounding environment, as mangrove forests are converted into docks and forests are gradually being depleted. Concerns about this issue are the main fears of AMAN regarding the construction of IKN in Kalimantan. The environment is increasingly being damaged, and the indigenous people of Kalimantan are becoming more marginalized. From Participant 4's perspective, there needs to be concrete action from the government to preserve the forests and prevent indigenous people from marginalization.

#### e. **Technocratic Frames: IKN as the smart city**

In addition to framing the IKN as a forest city, the Indonesian government also frames the IKN as a smart city. The Indonesian government's framing of the IKN as a smart city falls under the Technocratic frame, where the IKN is depicted as a futuristic city utilizing the latest and advanced technology. Lexical choices related to technology serve as trigger words indicating the presence of a technocratic frame in the Indonesian government's narrative about the IKN. On many occasions, the Indonesian government has stated that the IKN will be the first forest city equipped with advanced technology. As can be seen in the following excerpt:

*Nusantara Capital City will be a sustainable smart forest city that represents the use of the latest technologies and innovations that enable new models of social, economic and environmentally sustainable growth to create cities that are liveable fairly. (IKN11)*

In the excerpt above, the use of the term "the latest technologies and innovations" serves as a trigger word that consciously represents IKN as a sophisticated city. However, the extent of the technology used and its examples have not been clearly conveyed in government articles on the official IKN website. One corpus that can be referenced is the IKN Blueprint. Starting from the front page of the IKN Blueprint titled Smart City Blueprint, which depicts a cityscape with flying cars and electric trams with the state palace shaped like a Garuda in the background, as can be seen in the following image:

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Figure 1. Cover of Blueprint Smart City

The depiction of IKN as a Smart City in this Blueprint appears very optimistic, suggesting that IKN will have technology so advanced that it will even have flying cars, even though such cars are not yet mass-produced. However, at first glance, the cover of this blueprint depicts the IKN city situation as very barren, with concrete floors everywhere and trees that appear to exist only for aesthetic purposes. Furthermore, this is also supported by a keyword search from the IKN blueprint as follows:

Table 4 Word Query Search in Blueprint IKN

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Kota (City)	4	491	2,53
Cerdas (Smart)	6	397	2,05
IKN	3	290	1,50
Nusantara	9	288	1,49
Teknologi (Technology)	9	271	1,40
Smart	5	243	1,25
Sistem (System)	6	199	1,03
Layanan (Service)	7	183	0,94
Data	4	156	0,80
Biru (Blue)	4	127	0,66

From the table above, we can see that among the top 10 words that appear, none of them are related to the environment. Furthermore, the frequently appearing words are philosophical rather than practical or operational. Then, when compared to the government's vision of a forest city as a form of environmentally friendly development, this depiction is far from the government's frame and claims. With the claim that 50% of the area will be green space, where the forest will become an integral part of the city, the depiction of IKN certainly does not match that claim.

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Since the narrative produced by the Indonesian government itself appears inconsistent, it can be concluded that the claims of a forest city and an environmentally friendly green city are merely government rhetoric aimed at gaining public approval.

## 2. Discussion

The findings reveal a significant discursive gap between how the Indonesian government frames IKN and how local communities perceive its development. Using an ecolinguistic lens, particularly framing analysis from Stibbe (2015) and Entman (1993), the study identifies five dominant frames in government discourse: sustainability, national development, technocratic progress, equality, and exploitation. Among these, the sustainability frame is most frequently invoked, positioning IKN as a “forest city” committed to green development. However, this frame is contradicted by both lexical patterns and visual representations in the blueprint, which prioritize infrastructure, technology, and national symbolism over ecological integrity.

The word frequency analysis reinforces this contradiction: environmental keywords are notably absent from the top ten most frequent terms, suggesting that sustainability is discursively present but lexically marginal. This aligns with the concept of greenwashing through framing, where environmental language is used to legitimize development without substantive ecological commitment (Baker, 2013; Collard & Dempsey, 2022; Florea, 2025).

Public perception, as captured through interviews with indigenous leaders and villagers, reveals deep concerns about land loss, displacement, and ecological degradation. While the government frames IKN as a solution to inequality and a symbol of national progress, local communities experience it as a threat to ancestral land, cultural continuity, and environmental stability (Aktürk & Lerski, 2021; Pearson, Jackson, & McNamara, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2025c). The equality frame, for instance, is undermined by testimonies describing coercive compensation processes and a lack of meaningful consultation.

The technocratic frame, which presents IKN as a smart city, further distances the discourse from ecological realities. The blueprint’s imagery and keyword density emphasize futuristic technology while rendering nature as aesthetic background. This framing not only masks the ecological risks of urban expansion but also marginalizes indigenous knowledge systems and lived environmental relationships (Brondizio, et al., 2021; Copes-Gerbitz, Hagerman, & Daniels, 2021; Turner, Cuerrier, & Joseph, 2022).

In sum, the government’s framing of IKN operates as a symbolic narrative that performs sustainability and inclusivity while structurally privileging development, control, and investment (Prabhakar, 2025; Ritter & Thaler, 2023; Telleria & Garcia-Arias, 2025). The contrast with community discourse exposes the ideological function of framing in managing public perception and legitimizing state-led transformation (Lan, Zhang, Cheng, & Kioussis, 2025; Olsen & Larsen, 2023; Wang, Wu, Zhang, & Yang, 2024).

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## E. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Indonesian government's discourse on IKN is shaped by strategic framing that emphasizes sustainability, progress, and equality, yet fails to substantively engage with ecological and social realities. Through an ecolinguistic analysis of official texts and community interviews, the research uncovers how language is used to construct a symbolic narrative of IKN as a smart forest city, while masking the material consequences of displacement, deforestation, and cultural loss.

The discrepancy between governmental framing and public perception highlights the need for more inclusive and ecologically grounded planning discourse. Indigenous voices reveal that the development of IKN is experienced not as empowerment, but as marginalization—raising urgent questions about environmental justice, participatory governance, and the ethical use of language in state narratives.

Future research should expand this analysis by incorporating indigenous epistemologies, longitudinal monitoring of ecological impact, and comparative studies with other national development projects. As IKN transitions from blueprint to reality, critical discourse monitoring will be essential to ensure that sustainability is not only spoken—but meaningfully enacted.

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