

Beyond the State: Local Dynamics of Border Management in *Temajuk and Sebatik*

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Received: 29 August 2025 Accepted: 15 December 2025

Abstract

Subnational governments play a pivotal role in shaping Indonesia's border relations with Malaysia, particularly in the border regions of West Kalimantan. This article examines the influence and involvement of subnational actors in managing cross-border issues by focusing on the distinct contexts of Temajuk and Sebatik. Employing a qualitative comparative case study approach, the research integrates in-depth interviews with local stakeholders, field observations, and policy document analysis. The study reveals that while subnational actors are crucial in managing border relations, their effectiveness varies across cases. In Temajuk, local actors facilitated economic cooperation. Still, they contributed to tensions due to limited access to national policy information and weak coordination with central authorities during the 2011 Camar Bulan and Tanjung Datu disputes. In contrast, subnational actors in Sebatik played a stabilizing role through active engagement in national-level negotiations, helping resolve a 127-hectare land dispute via coordinated multilevel diplomacy. These divergent contributions stem from differences in institutional capacity, access to strategic information, and local dependence on cross-border economic ties. The study underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of subnational actors' roles in border governance, particularly in sensitive and contested regions.

Keywords: Subnational Actors; Temajuk and Sebatik; Border Management; Local Context and Dynamic

Introduction

Subnational actors are significant actors and practitioners of paradiplomacy. Duchacek puts the role of subnational actors at the border as part of paradiplomacy, calling it a regional transborder paradiplomacy.¹ This idea dismantles the role of subnational actors in political geography projects because it questions the dominance of the state that has long been a central actor in high-level political issues. The involvement of sub-national actors often challenges and reshapes existing geopolitical representations and power dynamics.² Several studies on the role of subnational actors in building relations between countries at the border show a positive impression. Cooperation between subnational actors has encouraged the development of better infrastructure in border areas,³ cooperation between subnational actors has succeeded in promoting an economic alliance,⁴ capacity building,⁵ and even collaboration between subnational actors on the border can create security cooperation by exchanging information and building networks.⁶

The role of subnational actors in managing relations between countries is a positive trend at the border. Their influence and network have become a force for economic, social, and security cooperation.⁷ Similarly, in building border diplomacy, subnational actors are crucial in implementing border diplomacy.⁸ Their informal relationship is a force to solve social problems that often occur at the border. Without their intervention, daily issues can become complicated between countries. In the Indonesian context, subnational actors have been essential in addressing complex border issues, particularly in regions like Temajuk and Sebatik. Their informal networks often serve as mechanisms for resolving social problems that, without intervention, could escalate into bilateral disputes. For instance, socio-economic concerns are deeply intertwined with border conflicts, evidenced by two notable cases: Temajuk and Sebatik.

In Temajuk, a 2011 dispute arose over allegations of Malaysia annexing the Camar Bulan enclave and the unilateral construction of a beacon tower in Tanjung Datu. These issues quickly escalated into national controversies. Conversely, in Sebatik, the recurring demarcation dispute, notably resurfacing in 2019, failed to garner similar national attention. These contrasting dynamics highlight subnational actors' varied roles and challenges in managing border relations.

This article explores and compares subnational actors' roles in addressing border issues in Temajuk and Sebatik. By examining these cases, the study seeks to uncover foundational insights into how subnational actors can effectively manage state borders, offering valuable lessons for Indonesia's border diplomacy.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach to explore the roles and influences of subnational actors in managing cross-border issues in Temajuk and Sebatik. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for understanding complex social phenomena, as it focuses on interpreting meanings and experiences from the perspectives of individuals and groups within their natural contexts.

Data collection involves analyzing various sources to understand border dynamics comprehensively. Primary data were obtained from policy documents, government reports, and agreements related to border management in the two regions. Secondary data include journal articles, books, and media reports relevant to the border disputes under study. Analyzing these documents helps uncover broader perspectives from policymakers, academics, and the media on territorial boundary conflicts and paradiplomatic practices.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including local government officials such as the Head of Paloh Subdistrict (*Camat Paloh*), the former Head of BPPD (*Badan Pengelola Perbatasan Daerah* or Regional Border Management Agency) Sambas, and the Village Head of Camar Bulan. Community leaders interviewed included the head of the border community association (*Ketua Komunitas Masyarakat Perbatasan*). At the same time, academic perspectives were gathered from researchers at Universitas Tanjungpura who have been actively involved in border studies. These interviews aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by subnational actors and the strategies they use to foster cooperation and resolve conflicts. The interviews aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by subnational actors and the strategies they use to foster collaboration and resolve disputes.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke,⁹ which involves systematically coding qualitative data to identify recurring themes and meaningful patterns. The study was conducted in six phases: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This structured process enabled the identification of both convergences and divergences

in the roles and effectiveness of subnational actors in the Temajuk and Sebatik regions. Particular attention was given to the interplay between local socio-political dynamics, the extent of vertical coordination with national policies, and the influence of historical territorial disputes, thereby situating the findings within broader geopolitical contexts. By comparing the two case studies, this research aims to generate analytical insights into how context-specific factors shape subnational diplomacy and contribute to developing more effective and nuanced border governance practices.

The Role of Subnational Actors on the Border

Subnational actors are part of paradiplomacy, which organizes various relations activities between countries that are not limited to states and provinces but include the smallest entities of the state structure. “Paradiplomacy” refers to international relations activities carried out by subnational or regional governments, such as states or provinces, and not by the central government of a country. This concept allows these subnational entities to engage in foreign relations to promote their economic, cultural, or political interests.¹⁰

However, some identify subnational actors more broadly, i.e., individuals, groups, or organizations that operate below the national level and can influence political, economic, and social dynamics within a country or across borders.¹¹ Han identifies them as local businessmen, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), involved in trade, investment, and service provision.¹² They often interact directly with local communities and governments. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focusing on development, environmental protection, and cultural exchange can influence local policies and practices. Individuals such as migrants, expats, and tourists are also considered subnational actors, as their movements and interactions significantly impact the local economy and culture. Fiona and McConnel argue that the nature of local governments, in this case, tends to be opportunistic, as local governments can carry out diplomatic initiatives that align with their unique needs and circumstances.¹³

Research shows that subnational governments engage in paradiplomacy activities for several reasons. Economic interests mainly drive the motivation behind paradiplomacy activities, as regions and cities seek to promote their financial goals on the international stage. The economic motivation includes technical assistance, setting up offices abroad, participating in trade shows, conducting market research, and providing financial assistance to regional companies.¹⁴ The BCIM-EC or Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor cooperation promotes economic development and integration in relatively backward regions of southwestern China, northeastern India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The corridor aims to facilitate trade, investment, and infrastructure development by creating subregional cooperation zones, ultimately leading to increased connectivity and economic growth in these regions. At the heart of the initiative is constructing a network of highways, railways, and other infrastructure projects that connect the four countries that share borders or are geographically close to China.¹⁵

One of the most pivotal initiatives within this corridor is the proposed 2,800 km highway connecting Kolkata (India) to Kunming (China) via Bangladesh and Myanmar. This highway will revolutionize land connectivity and trade routes among these nations. The economic benefits of the BCIM-EC are staggering, with the potential to create jobs, boost trade volumes, and enhance market access for local businesses. The corridor also promises to foster deeper economic integration with other global regions, mainly China, thereby improving the financial outlook of the participating areas.

Cultural motivation is a significant driver of paradiplomacy, where subnational actors strive to showcase their unique identity and heritage on the global platform. This endeavor bolsters local pride, fosters cultural exchange, and amplifies international visibility. The cultural solidarity and

identity among subnational actors in border areas signify the joint efforts of local communities to promote and safeguard their shared cultural or ethnic identity.¹⁶ This collaboration is crucial in regions with diverse populations, where various ethnicities, languages, and cultural practices coexist. Gu's research underscores the historical ties many countries in the Central and Eastern Region (CEE) share with China, which can be leveraged to strengthen contemporary relations.¹⁷

In addition to economic and cultural motivation, political motivation is also the motivation of subnational actors to organize paradiplomacy. Several subnational actors organize paradiplomacy activities to gain support for sovereignty or international recognition.¹⁸ However, the opposite political motivation is also found in paradiplomacy when subnational actors involve ethnic relatives or relatives. The practice is well established in Europe, such as Northern Ireland, Southern Tyrol, the Åland Islands, and Gagauzia, which have developed extensive cross-border relationships.¹⁹ *Kelompok Kerja Sosek Malindo* (KK Sosek Malindo) or Malaysia–Indonesia Socio-Economic Working Group organized the same practice.²⁰ Traditionally, security policies are not part of local competence; they are constitutional measures reserved for national and regional/state jurisdictions. Nonetheless, there is a worldwide trend towards the 'localization' of security policies in which cities play a more significant role nationally and internationally.²¹

The initiative to organize relations between countries independently arises from the functional nature of paradiplomacy, namely being able to overcome specific issues or challenges that require cross-border collaboration.²² They have autonomy in decision-making to manage local affairs according to the community's needs. Thus, subnational actors engage in diplomacy through international relations, treaty signing, and participation in international forums to promote local interests. They usually focus on regional issues such as economic development, the environment, education, and health. Although they operate locally, they can influence global policy by collaborating with other actors and participating in international networks.²³

Several things support independence in organizing relations at the subnational level. Lachapelle divides it into 3: institutional capacity, political capacity, and network and relationship building.²⁴ Institutional capacity refers to the legal basis that gives institutions the authority to engage in international relations, such as constitutional provisions or laws that allow them to negotiate treaties and build global partnerships. In addition, effective paradiplomacy requires a well-organized administrative structure, including specialized institutions that deal with foreign affairs, trade, and cultural exchange.²⁵ Institutional capacity also refers to funding capabilities. Adequate funding is needed to support paradiplomacy activities, including the establishment of international offices, participation in forums, and implementing collaborative projects.²⁶ For example, Quebec has a significant budget allocated for its international relations.²⁷

The political capability of subnational actors refers to a solid political will to establish international relations, where foreign policy is prioritized and opportunities for engagement are actively sought.²⁸ A clear example of this political support can be seen in subnational actors in Aceh, Indonesia, who played an essential role in gaining support for decentralizing power from the central government.²⁹ Political support is strengthened by mobilizing public support for specific policies, increasing their legitimacy and political power. Subnational actors often collaborate with advocacy groups and civil society to build consensus and support for their proposed policy initiatives.³⁰ This political capability is also seen in paradiplomacy activities, especially conflict resolution.³¹

Third, subnational actors have the ability to build a relatively good and vast network. Through these partnerships, often forged through agreements or joint projects, these regions can pool resources and strengthen their influence on international issues.³² Access to international networks, such as the United Nations or the European Union, also strengthens their ability to participate in global discussions and gain resources. This involvement empowers regions to fight for their interests and govern more

effectively, thus being more responsive to the needs of their communities.³³ It is also supported by effective communication and negotiation skills to help subnational governments articulate their goals and interests clearly, build strong relationships with international partners, and understand cultural differences. Good communication facilitates collaboration, allows for the negotiation of mutually beneficial agreements, and supports advocacy of regional interests on the global stage.³⁴ These skills are particularly crucial in crisis situations, enabling subnational actors to resolve conflicts quickly and maintain positive relationships. Effective communication allows them to share information, coordinate actions, and build trust among different stakeholders. High communication capacity allows these actors to articulate their needs, negotiate requirements, and encourage cross-border collaboration.³⁵

The capabilities possessed by these subnational actors significantly affect their relations at the border. Social, economic, and political proximity gives a different nuance to the subnational actors at the border. Their role also grows in establishing independent relationships with subnational actors in neighboring countries. Empirical evidence from various border governance arrangements demonstrates the growing political influence of subnational actors. These include the role of the KK Sosek Malindo,³⁶ the involvement of tribal chiefs in the governance of the Oecussi Enclave along the Indonesia–Timor-Leste border,³⁷ and the participation of subnational authorities within the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).³⁸ Together, these cases illustrate how subnational actors can shape policy coordination and institutional governance in border regions.

***Temajuk*: Subnational Actors as Catalysts of Tension and Growth**

Temajuk is one of the villages in Paloh District, Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan Province. Paloh District comprises eight villages: Kalimantan, Matang Danau, Tanah Hitam, Malek, Nibung, Sebusus, Temajuk, and Mentibar. With an area of 230 km², Temajuk is the second largest village in the Paloh district, after Sebusus, which has an area of 326 km². This village is located in the northernmost part of Kalimantan, at the tip of the Sambas Regency area. Temajuk Village is the farthest village from Paloh District, with a distance of about 55.2 km via the coast and 53.8 km by road. This Dec consists of 3 hamlets: Temajuk Kecil (Camar Bulan Hamlet), Temajuk Besar (Maludin Hamlet), and Takam Patah Hamlet.

In the past, Temajuk was isolated and could only be accessed by sea. Until the 1990s, the journey to Temajuk had to be done along the coast because there were no roads, electricity, or cellular signals. Even though there is already a road, access is challenging because people only have to pass through a coastal path when the sea is low. People must go through the beach by motorbike when the sea water recedes between 07.00 and 14.00 WIB to reach the sub-district city. In 1999, the construction of a road from Ceremai to Temajuk began, a significant development that has facilitated access and increased population migration to Temajuk, paving the way for a brighter future.³⁹

Despite the considerable distance from the district capital and challenging geographical conditions, the residents of Temajuk have developed unique social and economic ties with Kampong Telok Melano in Malaysia, which is directly adjacent to Temajuk Village. The border between these two villages from different countries is only marked by a gate about 2 meters high, so people from both countries can cross the border easily. They only need to report to the (military) officers guarding the small post, fill out the guest book, and show their identity cards without requiring a particular official permit, such as a PLB or passport. The same applies to residents of Sambas Regency who want to travel to Telok Melano or Sematan in Malaysia.

The residents of Temajuk, most of whom are pepper, palm, rubber, and coconut farmers, often sell their produce to Malaysia because of the closer distance than to the district capital, Paloh. Similarly, with daily basic needs, the people of Temajuk still depend on the supply of rice and sugar

from Malaysia. Although some stalls sell rice and sugar from Indonesia, the availability is limited, and the price is higher than in Malaysia. Transportation to Temajuk, which has to pass through two rivers, causes the price of staples to soar when arriving in this village. As a result, Temajuk residents prefer to buy basic necessities from Malaysia, which are also considered to have better quality than products from Indonesia.⁴⁰

In addition to still being economically dependent, some of the residents of Temajuk, who are still related to the residents of Telok Melano, also work on plantations and trading businesses in Malaysia. In addition to wages that are considered sufficient, the proximity of distance is one of the reasons for working in Telok Melano.⁴¹ Dependence on internet access is still a significant problem in this region, considering that Temajuk is one of Sambas' main tourism destinations. With the inauguration of the operation of a 371 kW Solar Power Plant in Temajuk Village in August 2023, the community hopes that the limitations of the internet can soon be overcome and no longer depend on Malaysia. So far, to access the internet properly, the residents of the Camar Bulan have to go to Paloh or Sambas. The internet has only been available in Camar Bulan since 2012, but the conditions are unstable, and interruptions are often experienced. Therefore, residents prefer to use cards from Malaysia even though they are more expensive and require a passport for their purchase.⁴²

The Temajuk problem refers to the Camar Bulan and Tanjung Datu issue, which became a public spotlight in 2011. Camar Bulan is an enclave covering an area of 1,499 hectares, located about 700 meters from the coast of Camar Bulan Hamlet to the outermost border marker. This issue received public attention after the MoU related to the Camar Bulan enclave was decided to be reviewed. Member of the House of Representatives, TB Hasanudin, claimed that Malaysia had annexed Indonesia's territory, citing 1,400 hectares in Camar Bulan and 80,000 m² in Tanjung Datu.⁴³ Meanwhile, the Governor of West Kalimantan, Cornelis, revealed that 1,440 hectares of Indonesia's territory had been included in Malaysia's territory due to the neglect of the A88-A156 stake. He referred to information from Bakosurtanal that showed that Malaysia had included the Camar Bulan in its territorial map. Cornelis emphasized the importance of quick action to protect Indonesia's interests, especially in the administrative area of West Kalimantan. The Chairman of Commission I of the House of Representatives, Mahfudz Siddiq, also stressed that the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono should urge Malaysia to recognize the 1905 map of the Netherlands, which clearly states that the Camar Bulan and Tanjung Datu are part of Indonesia's territory.⁴⁴

Following a comprehensive review in 2011 involving a team from various ministries and agencies, the issue of territorial demarcation in Tanjung Datu was thoroughly examined. The team, which included representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Indonesian Armed Forces Headquarters, and the Geospatial Information Agency, presented their findings at a Ministerial coordination meeting chaired by the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs on October 20, 2011. The key conclusions of the meeting were as follows:

1. The territorial demarcation between Indonesia and Malaysia in Tanjung Datu was determined using the scientifically sound watershed method.
2. Following the 1891 Treaty Article 3, the boundary line follows the watershed, and joint surveys in 1976 and 1978 produced consistent findings.
3. Amending the MoU from the perspective of international law is considered to have no solid basis because (a) the 1978 MoU is the result of a survey that implements Article 3 of the 1891 Treaty, (b) the MoU is an agreement between the two countries that cannot be unilaterally canceled, and (c) by the 1969 VCLT, the agreed border agreement cannot be canceled.

This study is the basis for re-discussing the problem of the Camar Bulan enclave. The talks did not change the outcome of the previous agreement that declared the territory to belong to Malaysia. It also emphasizes that Malaysia's memorandum of objection asking several farmers to leave the area does not mean annexing Indonesia's territory, but asking for their rights as owners.

The Sarawak Government sent a memorandum of objection in 2017 requesting that Group 31 return the land they had illegally managed to the Malaysian government in the Camar Bulan enclave. This group is called Group 31 because it consists of 31 heads of families who manage the land into productive gardens. For the Malaysian government, this area is a protected forest. However, the locals do not consider the land to be used, so it does not matter if they manage it. The boundary markers around this area are also challenging to find because they are covered by grass and are only 30 cm high, making them difficult to see.

For the 31 groups, managing the land is a good decision because it has the support of officials. Interviews with residents showed that they dared to clear the land after getting permission from a military commander (Danton).

“ I used to live in Malaysia. The land in Malaysia is clear. I lived there for about two years. Danton Pak Saiful from Jogja came one day, so I coordinated with him. He said, ‘Oh, there is still about a kilometer and three hundred meters up there. If you build a house, it does not matter.’ So, I built a house. After nine months, when officers were changed, I was asked, ‘Why do you dare to build a house here? This is Malaysia's land. What if my boss asks?’ I replied, ‘If you want to dismantle the Malaysians, it doesn't matter; this is their land. But if it's our person, I do not feel guilty because there was permission from the old Danton before.’”⁴⁵

Rahmad's confession was also supported by several other members of Group 31, such as Ibrahim, Herlin, and the head of Camar Bulan Hamlet. They admitted they were encouraged to clear the land even though they already knew the area belonged to Malaysia. They are also willing to close the land after harvest because of a request from the Sarawak government. As compensation for the loss of rubber, oil palm, papaya, pepper, and other productive crops, the local government then provided compensation of 100 kg of rice per head of the family.⁴⁶

Manto Saidi, the former head of BPPD Sambas, also acknowledged the encouragement to manage the land. According to him, the idea was also welcomed by the sub-district head and regent.

“In 2012 or 2014, I provoked my community in the sub-district office hall to get productive land there. At that time, the regent responded to my provocation by giving me productive plant seeds. Finally, from 2012 to 2014, the local community planted there, but we told them that this land could be released from our hands at any time because it was still disputed. We gave them an understanding like that. Then, when we had to let it go, they felt sorry for their productive land. So we gave compensation, first from the district government. It would be better if the compensation were in the form of land. If the compensation was in rice, rice is a consumable item. At that time, some were almost harvested. But after the harvest, they destroyed it.”⁴⁷

An interview with Usman, a former Paloh official, also shows that managing the dispute area for basic needs is not a problem.

“Try to ask Mr. Madi; he is gardening there, and the house is not there, but that indicates that we control the area if Malaysia does not exist. He is far away because his people, except our people, don’t want to live in the forest. There are many of our people there. Why? Yes, because we must master it. This means we want to manage it, which is not allowed to burn or destroy. Our population is looking for food and human rights. It is not permitted if damaged, primarily when the business is being sold. You can stay there if you want to garden.”⁴⁸

The interview results show that aligning regional officials’ views with the central government’s in managing border areas is sporadic. This discrepancy can be attributed to various factors, including the central government’s insufficient information on border management. As highlighted in the interviews, the findings underscore the crucial need for a deeper understanding of the 2011 MoU results among regional officials.

Subnational actors on the Temajuk border can mediate conflicts on social and economic issues, but this does not happen when the issue intersects with the land issue. In this case, subnational actors should be able to mediate conflicts⁴⁹ are instead a source of conflict due to the need for more information and policy conformity with the central government. The situation worsened when several high-ranking officials also owned limited subnational actors at the regional and central levels, such as council members. Limited communication between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and regional officials is another problem that prevents all information related to border policies from being conveyed to regional officials. The Focus Group Discussion with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also showed that there was no communication or particular information provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs related to Indonesia’s border with neighboring countries, especially Malaysia, to local governments or local communities.⁵⁰

In Temajuk, subnational actors—particularly village leaders and local officials—have historically played a dual role. On one hand, they facilitated cooperation with neighboring Malaysian communities and supported economic initiatives such as the cross-border trade of staple goods. On the other hand, their limited coordination with the central government during the 2011 Camar Bulan and Tanjung Datu disputes resulted in conflicting claims and policy ambiguity. Interviews reveal that local officials encouraged community members to occupy and cultivate lands within the Camar Bulan enclave, believing it to be part of Indonesia’s territory. This misalignment with national diplomatic policy turned local actors into unintentional sources of tension.

These findings underscore the absence of vertical policy synchronization: only 3 out of 9 interviewed regional officials indicated they had ever received direct communication or policy briefings from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding border agreements. The case of Temajuk reveals that subnational actors, when underinformed, may act in ways that complicate bilateral relations, despite their intent to serve community interests.

Sebatik: Subnational Actors as Mediators and Stabilizers

A different approach is found in the Indonesia-Malaysia border on Sebatik Island. Sebatik Island is located north of Kalimantan Island. Sebatik Island has an area of 433.84 km², with the northern part controlled by Malaysia, covering an area of 187.23 km², while the southern part, covering an area of 246.61 km², is the territory of Indonesia. In 1973, Indonesia and Malaysia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to resolve the territorial boundary issue. In this MoU, the two countries agreed to comply with the rules of law that have been approved before, including the convention and border agreement made by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. However, differences in interpreting

these documents created uncertainty in determining clear boundaries, mainly when the Sipadan and Ligitan problems arose in 1967.

Negotiations on the continental shelf boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia have raised a debate about the ownership of Sipadan and Ligitan. The dispute relates to an agreement between the Netherlands East Indies and the United Kingdom regarding territorial boundaries, which was then taken to the International Court of Justice. The International Court of Justice's decision that Sipadan and Ligitan Islands became Malaysia's property in 2002 also affected the border on Sebatik Island.⁵¹ Following the decision, Malaysia felt that ownership of the Sipadan and Ligitan Islands gave additional legitimacy to its claims to Sebatik Island. Malaysia argues that better control and management of the islands indicates it has more substantial rights over the surrounding areas, including Sebatik Island. Malaysia tends to maintain the position of the existing boundary. At the same time, the government of Indonesia wants the boundary to be set according to the agreement that has been set, which is at the coordinates of 4°10'N. The coordinates of 4°10'N on Sebatik Island were established through an agreement between the governments of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in 1891. This agreement includes establishing a boundary line that passes through the 16 boundary pillars on the island. Indonesia argues that the decision regarding Sipadan and Ligitan should not affect the claim to Sebatik Island, as each region has a different context and history. Indonesia adheres to existing historical documents and treaties to support its claim to Sebatik Island.

Border problems have hardened again with the development of the border in 2019. Febrianti et.al. suspected that potential issues were also triggered by regional expansion without adequate facilities, infrastructure, and apparatus, lack of integration in the management of natural resources, especially protected and conservation forests, between Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as violations in the management and exploitation of natural resources across borders, both on land and sea.⁵² A forum between Indonesia and Malaysia was formed to solve some border issues, namely the Joint Indonesia-Malaysia Boundary Committee (JIMBC). This forum, a cornerstone of the resolution process, is an official platform established to facilitate negotiations and discussions on territorial boundary issues between Indonesia and Malaysia, including those related to Sebatik Island. The main goal is to address and resolve outstanding territorial boundary issues, focusing on international territorial boundary demarcation and management to ensure mutual agreement on territorial boundaries. The committee holds meetings, technical discussions, and practical activities such as surveys and territorial boundary determination.

After negotiations through the JIMBC forum involving several other state institutions, in 2024, the dispute was successfully resolved. As a result, part of the previously disputed area of Sebatik Island has now been agreed to become part of Indonesia. According to the results of the 2020-2024 State Border Management Coordination meeting in Jakarta on June 6, 2024, around 127 hectares of oil palm plantation land on Sebatik Island will be handed over to Indonesia as part of the agreement. Villagers forced to be relocated will receive compensation of around Rp50 billion.⁵³

The border on an island does not cause significant turmoil like the border issue in Camar Bulan, Temajuk, because of better management of the problem by subnational actors. Saleh's research shows that the issue does not cause disputes over territorial rights, like what happened in Temajuk, because of the active involvement of local communities. This involvement, whether through advocacy or sharing information and perspectives with local governments, is crucial and tends to be positive. For example, the Directorate General of Regional Administration Development organized the socialization regarding resolving Outstanding Boundary Problems (OBP) on Sebatik Island, North Kalimantan, on March 24, 2021. The event was attended by various government officials, the military, and local communities whose land was affected by the results of the Indonesia-Malaysia Joint Survey.⁵⁴ Basundoro also claimed that the involvement of local communities is crucial because

they understand the situation on the ground much better than policymakers in Jakarta.⁵⁵

Good coordination between the community and the local government is also found in the Nunukan Regent Circular letter, Number P/673/BPPD-II/700, regarding coordinating the supervision of affected land in the OBP area of the Sebatik Segment. The Regent's Circular Letter is a follow-up to Letter Number 314/2660/BPPD/Gub dated August 16, 2022, regarding the Supervision of Affected Land in the Sebatik Segment OBP Area. This policy considered the community's aspirations regarding replacing land affected by the withdrawal of the State boundary line in the OBP Sebatik segment. The prohibition of carrying out any activities in the disputed area and socialization is carried out so that the community does not take actions that can interfere with the smooth running of the negotiations with the Malaysian side to reach an agreement, and the legality of the area as a result of the joint measurement.⁵⁶

On the other hand, Ghafur sees the situation as more influenced by people's awareness of their economic dependence on Malaysia.⁵⁷ The Sebatik people are generally aware of their economic reliance on Malaysia. Many necessities and consumer goods are supplied from Malaysia, creating awareness of the importance of cross-border relations. This dependence is often a topic of discussion among the public, primarily related to the impact of the closure of PLB (Bonded Logistics Center) and trade policies. The strong social ties between the Sebatik and Tawau (Malaysia) communities provide a more profound knowledge of the border issue. Many Sebatik residents have family or relatives in Malaysia, so they better understand the social, economic, and policy conditions that apply on both sides of the border. Meanwhile, access to information through the media, both print and digital, also contributes to public knowledge about border issues. News on government policies, demarcation conflicts, and socioeconomic issues is often of public concern, although the level of access and understanding can vary.

Subnational Actors in *Temajuk* and *Sebatik*

The role of subnational actors in managing border issues in border areas, including Temajuk and Sebatik, is gaining attention due to the complexity of the relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia. Subnational actors include a variety of local entities such as local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups, and individuals directly involved in border dynamics, giving color to border management and conflict management efforts at the border. Although these two regions are both on the Indonesia-Malaysia border, the role and influence of subnational actors in managing border issues in Temajuk and Sebatik show differences.

Temajuk, a village in Paloh District, Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan, is located at the northern tip of Kalimantan Island and directly borders Malaysia. As a relatively isolated border area due to its considerable distance from the sub-district capital, the role of subnational actors in Temajuk is more focused on local economic development and improving basic infrastructure. Local governments play an essential role in facilitating the construction of roads, bridges, and other public facilities to improve accessibility and community welfare. It is not uncommon for them to use political issues to force the national government or district governments to pay attention to the development conditions in the region, which tend to be left behind. Manto Saidi, former Head of BPPD Sambas, revealed the situation.⁵⁸

The pressure from subnational actors on the central government intensified when Temajuk began to walk its path as a tourist village. Temajuk Village has been known as a tourist village since 2011. In that year, this village began to attract the attention of tourists, especially after the viral border conflict involving Indonesia and Malaysia, which made the beauty of the beach and other tourism potentials in Temajuk increasingly known. Since then, the development of the tourism sector

in Temajuk has begun to be taken into account, and various efforts have been made to increase the attractiveness and tourist facilities in the village.⁵⁹ Until 2015, tourism development in Temajuk was still pursued independently by the local community and village officials. Unfortunately, development by the community tends to be uncontrolled and conceptualized, causing various problems, be it financial, economic, or environmental pollution.⁶⁰ The lack of facilities and support from the central government has made the subnational actors move to pressure the central government on border issues.

Subnational actors, who are usually bridges for the social and economic problems of the people at the border, have turned into actors who are the drivers of issues at the border. Similarly, one of the officials in the Paloh sub-district at that time explained that managing an unused area was not a violation of the law because the Malaysian government owned the land.⁶¹ Limited facilities, lack of development, and lack of information make subnational actors avoid siding with the management of state borders.

In contrast, the case of Sebatik presents a more structured and coordinated engagement. Subnational actors, particularly local governments in Nunukan Regency and village-level leaders, played a key role in mediating the demarcation process between Indonesia and Malaysia, especially during the Joint Indonesia-Malaysia Boundary Committee (JIMBC) negotiations. Field data confirmed that 127 hectares of previously disputed land were agreed to be handed over to Indonesia in 2024, following active participation of local governments and coordinated communication with national institutions. This outcome marks a significant instance of successful multilevel diplomacy. When the border agreement was not realized, several residents' houses were affected; some were in Indonesia, and others were in Malaysia.⁶² The research of Ghafur⁶³ and Kurnia⁶⁴ shows that the Sebatik people are highly dependent on the supply of necessities from Malaysia due to the limited access and availability of these goods. Everyday items such as food, fuel, and other consumer goods are often imported from Malaysia, creating a high dependence on supplies from the country.

Most of the Sebatik population works as farmers, fishermen, and traders. However, they need help competing with traders and fishermen from Tawau, Malaysia, who have better access to markets and infrastructure. Because of the higher prices and demand, many Sebatik fishermen prefer to sell their catch in Tawau rather than Nunukan, Indonesia. Compared to Tawau, the infrastructure in Sebatik, including roads, ports, and public facilities, still needs to be developed. This limitation makes it difficult for the people of Sebatik to access essential services and adequate facilities, so they prefer to go to Malaysia for better services. These challenges reflect the dependence of the Sebatik people on Malaysia in various aspects of daily life.

Subnational actors in Sebatik, including local governments and local communities, are often directly involved in issues related to territorial claims, illegal cross-border trade, and security issues. The role of the local government in Sebatik emphasizes supervision and law enforcement to overcome these problems. Mubarak et.al⁶⁵ research found that the community is involved in village deliberations and discussion forums held by the local government as a form of participation in decision-making. Village deliberations involve residents, community leaders, and village governments to discuss development issues, where the community can express opinions and provide input. These open discussions allow residents to share their views on the issues they face, such as educational facilities, health, or infrastructure. Through this forum, the community conveys their aspirations directly to the government, helping to ensure that the policies taken are more relevant and as needed. This participation also builds a sense of ownership of the decisions, encouraging support and active involvement in policy implementation.

The comparative insight drawn from the Sebatik and Temajuk cases suggests that three critical factors mediate subnational actors' effectiveness in border governance. First, policy coherence: in Sebatik, alignment between local and national policy agendas contributed to a peaceful and negotiated resolution, whereas in Temajuk, fragmentation and miscommunication escalated tensions. Second, access to strategic information: Sebatik's actors benefited from more regular interactions with national forums such as JIMBC, while Temajuk's actors operated primarily in an information vacuum. Third, local legitimacy and responsiveness: the ability of local actors in Sebatik to incorporate community voices into formal negotiation platforms helped sustain local peace and government credibility.

While both regions demonstrate the centrality of subnational actors in Indonesia's border governance, Temajuk underscores the risks of decentralization without integration. In contrast, Sebatik exemplifies the potential of well-synchronized paradiplomatic practice. These findings affirm the necessity of establishing institutional channels bridging the gap between grassroots realities and national foreign policy frameworks to promote stability and inclusive border diplomacy.

While local forums and consultations exist, their effectiveness in shaping development outcomes has been questioned. Tangkeallo's⁶⁶ research sees that this condition has yet to be maximized. Community involvement in Sebatik policy-making is still limited in practice.⁶⁴ Although mechanisms such as *Musrenbang* (development planning deliberation) allow residents to submit proposals from the neighborhood to the district level, many of these proposals—such as constructing inter-village connecting roads—remain unaddressed. In contrast, some developments not proposed by the community were prioritized instead. This reveals a gap between procedural inclusion and substantive responsiveness, where decisions often benefit select groups rather than the broader population. The disparity between the findings of Mubarak,⁶⁷ which emphasize community engagement, and Tangkeallo's,⁶⁸ which critiques its implementation, demonstrates that while participation exists in form, its impact is not yet fully realized.

Nonetheless, the presence of such forums and the emergence of community awareness about political, economic, and territorial issues indicate an evolving participatory culture in Sebatik. These early forms of engagement still represent meaningful progress compared to other border regions, and they serve as a foundation for more inclusive and effective paradiplomacy moving forward.

Conclusion

In Temajuk, subnational actors, including local governments and communities, primarily focus on economic development and infrastructure improvements. They pressured the central government to improve development conditions and address the lack of facilities, demonstrating their role in highlighting border issues. Despite local initiatives to develop the tourism sector, unstructured management and a lack of support from the central government add to the complexity of border management in Temajuk. Limited facilities and lack of information sometimes cause subnational actors in Temajuk to not support the management of the country's borders.

On the other hand, Sebatik faces more complex border management challenges due to its high economic dependence on Malaysia and lack of infrastructure. In Sebatik, local governments, communities, and subnational actors are involved in territorial claims, illegal cross-border trade, and security issues. Despite efforts to involve the community in village deliberations and discussion forums, community participation in development planning and implementation is still not optimal. Many community proposals have not been realized, showing a discrepancy between the needs of the community and the policies taken. Although subnational actors faced by subnational actors in these two regions are significant and need to be addressed.

Overall, subnational actors in Temajuk and Sebatik have a crucial role in managing border issues. Still, their challenges and involvement show the differences in local contexts and dynamics that affect the effectiveness of border management in both regions.

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