

Reflection on National Defense Day: Nationalism from the Perspective of Equitable Transportation in Southeast Sulawesi Province

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ABSTRACT

National Defense Day is a momentum to reflect on the nationalism in the context of inclusive and equitable national development. Nationalism is not only interpreted as a spirit of defending the country militarily, but also manifested through real contributions in the provision of public services that guarantee social justice, one of which is through the transportation sector. Southeast Sulawesi Province, as an archipelagic region with complex geographical characteristics, faces significant challenges in realizing equitable and equitable transportation. This article aims to analyze nationalism from the perspective of equitable transportation as a form of non-military national defense in Southeast Sulawesi. The research method uses a qualitative approach through literature studies and transportation policy analysis. The results of the study indicate that equitable transportation development in Southeast Sulawesi plays a crucial role in strengthening regional integration, reducing disparities between mainland and island regions, and affirming the state's presence in the outermost regions. Equitable transportation is a manifestation of contextual nationalism that supports national resilience and national unity.

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1. Introduction

National Defense Day, commemorated every December 19th, takes on even greater contextual relevance when placed within the dynamics of development in archipelagic regions like Southeast Sulawesi. The historical value of national defense, once oriented toward physical and military defense, has now expanded in meaning to become a collective commitment to ensuring the state's presence in a just and equitable manner (Haripin et al., 2020; Nidatya, 2023). In this issues, transportation development is not merely a technical issue of infrastructure, but a concrete manifestation of the state's responsibility to maintain unity, social justice, and the sustainability of nationalism (Szabó & Jelinek, 2023).

Modern nationalism demands policy support for groups and regions that have been marginalized due to limited access (Bieber, 2022). In Southeast Sulawesi, the isolation of small islands, limited frequency of sea transportation, and the community's dependence on economically unaffordable modes of transportation reflect the real challenges of non-military national defense (Rahmawati & Supriyadi, 2025). When transportation access is limited, communities not only lose economic opportunities but also experience a social and symbolic disconnection from the state (Archer, 2020). This situation has the potential to weaken nationalism and trust in the state as a protector of the public interest.



Figure 1. Greetings of National Defense Day

Source: Southeast Sulawesi Transportation Department (2025)

Equitable transportation is a strategic instrument in addressing these issues (Johnson et al., 2025; Pereira & Karner, 2021). The principles of equitable in transportation encompass equitable service distribution, affordability, safety, and sustainability across regions (Antipova et al., 2020; Martens et al., 2019). The implementation of policies such as subsidizing pioneering transportation, developing ferry ports, and

integrating land and sea transportation in the archipelago are concrete forms of national defense through development (Fadhiil & Afriansyah, 2022; Rochwulaningsih et al., 2019). These efforts demonstrate that nationalism is not limited to commemorative symbols, but is present in policies that address the basic needs of the community.

Reflections on National Defense Day become even more relevant when faced with the reality of suboptimal transportation services in Southeast Sulawesi Province. As an archipelagic region with a high dependence on sea and ferry transportation, the quality and affordability of transportation services are important indicators of the nation's presence (Kelwulan et al., 2019). However, to date, various structural issues continue to limit the effectiveness of the transportation system, such as limited fleet capacity, uncertain schedules, inadequate port infrastructure, and weak integration between land and sea transportation modes.

These suboptimal transportation services directly impact public mobility and logistics distribution, particularly for residents on small islands and remote areas (Dewanti et al., 2025; Garau et al., 2022; Soomauroo et al., 2020). Transportation delays, relatively high transportation costs, and the safety risks still faced by service users create unequal access to education, health, and economic services (Cochran et al., 2022). From a national defense perspective, this situation reflects a serious non-military challenge, as limited accessibility has the potential to create a sense of injustice and alienation from the centers of government and development.

Nationalism in this context cannot simply be interpreted as symbolic loyalty; it must be realized through concrete improvements in public services, including the transportation sector (Armawi, 2020). The state is required to be present not only in economically advantageous areas but also in geographically difficult-to-reach areas. When transportation services are suboptimal, their function as a social glue and unifying force is weakened, thus eroding the national spirit that should be fostered through development.

Therefore, the momentum of National Defense Day should be interpreted as a moral and political impetus for equitable improvements to the transportation system in Southeast Sulawesi (Nababan et al., 2025). Strengthening pioneering transportation services, improving infrastructure quality and safety, and collaboration across sectors and stakeholders are all part of the national defense strategy at the regional level (Okromtchedlishvili, 2024). By providing reliable and equitable transportation services, the state not only strengthens regional connectivity but also affirms nationalism in development practices that benefit all citizens.

2. Method

This research employed a qualitative approach using literature review and policy analysis. Data were obtained from transportation planning

documents, national and regional regulations, and scientific publications relevant to the themes of nationalism, national defense, and equitable transportation. The analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically to link theoretical concepts to the empirical context of Southeast Sulawesi Province.

3. Result and Discussion

Equitable Transportation as a form of national defense in Southeast Sulawesi Provincial

In the perspective of Southeast Sulawesi Province, non-military national defense finds its practical form through the provision of equitable and inclusive transportation services (Arbani, 2024). The geographical character of Southeast Sulawesi as an archipelago with a distribution of large and small islands makes transportation not merely a supporting sector for development, but a basic necessity that determines the quality of life of the community (Hasina & Satyadharma, 2023; Razak & Mokodompit, 2024). Access to sea, ferry, and air transportation is a primary prerequisite for population mobility, logistics distribution, and social and economic connectivity between regions (Fageda et al., 2018; Rodrigue, 2020).

The presence of the state through the provision of ferry transportation, public ports, and pioneer airports is a tangible symbol of state sovereignty in geographically difficult-to-reach areas (Kusumaningrum, 2019; Rachman et al., 2024). This transportation infrastructure and services are concrete evidence that the state is present to serve all citizens without discrimination based on region (Archer, 2020). From a national defense perspective, the state's presence in remote areas is not merely an administrative matter but also a form of protection for citizens' basic rights.



Figure 2 Christmas and New Year 2026 Transportation Services at Baruga Terminal

Source: Southeast Sulawesi Transportation Department (2025)

Equitable transportation is increasingly important because Southeast Sulawesi's geographical conditions result in relatively high transportation costs and the community's dependence on certain modes, particularly sea transportation (Novianti & Rizal, 2024). If transportation policies are solely oriented toward economic efficiency and profitability, regions with low demand and high operational costs will be neglected. This situation has the potential to widen inter-regional disparities and undermine the sense of social justice.

Therefore, transportation subsidies, pioneering transportation services, and basic infrastructure development are integral parts of non-military national defense (Prakoso et al., 2024). These policies reflect the state's support for communities structurally vulnerable due to geographical limitations. Equitable transportation does not mean eliminating efficiency, but rather placing social justice as a primary principle in policy formulation.

Therefore, equitable transportation in Southeast Sulawesi must be understood as a strategic instrument in maintaining regional integration and strengthening nationalism (Ogayo, 2024). National defense is realized not through force of arms, but through public policies that ensure all citizens, wherever they are, have equal access to transportation services as a basic right.

Nationalism and Connectivity in the Archipelago

Nationalism in Southeast Sulawesi cannot be separated from efforts to build and strengthen connectivity in the archipelago (Butcher, 2021; Ranubaya et al., 2024). Geographical separation between islands has the potential to create social and economic fragmentation if not balanced by an adequate transportation system. In this context, transportation serves as a social glue that connects communities, facilitates interaction between regions, and strengthens a sense of togetherness as a unified nation.



Figure 3 Situation at Amolengo Ferry Port

Source: Southeast Sulawesi Transportation Department (2025)

Reliable transportation enables communities on small islands to stay connected to government and economic centers (Ranjitha et al., 2025). This ongoing interaction plays a crucial role in building an inclusive national identity. Nationalism does not grow in isolation, but through social encounters, economic exchanges, and cultural interactions facilitated by an effective transportation system (Stearns, 2023).

The maritime transportation and inter-district/city ferry program in Southeast Sulawesi reflects a development nationalism oriented towards regional equity (Pujayanti & Roza, 2019). Although not always economically profitable, this policy has strategic value in maintaining unity and reducing disparities between regions. Improving road access to ports and airports is also part of the connectivity chain that determines overall transportation effectiveness.

Nationalism in the context of archipelagic connectivity is not merely symbolic, but stems from the community's real experiences of experiencing the benefits of the nation's presence (Zuhdi et al., 2019). When transportation is available regularly, affordably, and safely, people feel an integral part of the nation. Conversely, limited connectivity can create feelings of alienation and injustice, potentially weakening national spirit.

Therefore, strengthening archipelagic connectivity must be positioned as a strategic national and regional agenda (Pulungan, 2024; Taharuddin et al., 2025). Transportation is not merely a means of mobility, but also a medium for social and political integration (Cresswell, 2016; Kaplan, 2020; Rembaen et al., 2018). Within the framework of national defense, strengthening regional connectivity means maintaining unity and preventing disparities that could threaten the nation's integrity (Saputra et al., 2023).

Transportation, Regional Resilience, and National Integration

Equitable transportation in Southeast Sulawesi plays a strategic role in strengthening regional resilience, which ultimately contributes to national resilience (Ciriaco et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Regional resilience is determined not only by physical security but also by the region's ability to maintain social, economic, and logistical stability. In an archipelagic region, the transportation system is the backbone of this resilience.

A reliable transportation system enables the distribution of basic necessities, local products, and public services to continue (Yannis & Chaziris, 2022). Delays or disruptions in transportation can directly impact goods shortages, price increases, and disrupt economic activity (Wei et al., 2022). From a national defense perspective, this condition constitutes a non-military vulnerability that must be addressed through strengthening transportation infrastructure and services.

Southeast Sulawesi is also a region prone to natural disasters, such as extreme weather and high waves (Haryanto et al., 2019). In emergency situations, transportation is a crucial factor in aid mobilization, victim evacuation, and the distribution of humanitarian logistics. Regional transportation resilience is thus an integral part of the non-military defense system aimed at protecting the safety and welfare of the community (Ronaldi, 2025). Disruptions in inter-island connectivity not only impact the economy but also have the potential to undermine social stability and public trust in the state. When the state is unable to guarantee smooth transportation, people can experience prolonged uncertainty. Therefore, strengthening transportation must be viewed as a strategic investment, not simply a budgetary burden (A. Putri et al., 2025).

Within the framework of national integration, equitable transportation ensures that all regions, including remote areas, remain connected within the national system (Antipova et al., 2020). This integration is a crucial foundation for maintaining national unity. Therefore, equitable transportation in Southeast Sulawesi is part of a national defense strategy oriented toward regional resilience and national stability.

Social and Cultural Dimensions of Equitable Transportation

Equitable transportation in Southeast Sulawesi encompasses not only technical and economic dimensions but also social and cultural dimensions closely linked to nationalism (Sanchez, 2018). Equal access to transportation creates a space for encounters between ethnic groups, cultures, and local communities spread across the islands (Rasyid et al., 2024). This interaction strengthens tolerance, mutual understanding, and social cohesion, the foundations of national life.

In the an island society, transportation serves as a primary medium for social and cultural exchange. Smooth mobility enables people to participate in social, educational, and religious activities across regions (Korkiya et al., 2022; Prus & Sikora, 2021). This strengthens a sense of togetherness and collective identity as part of the Indonesian nation. Equitable transportation thus contributes to the formation of an inclusive nationalism rooted in everyday social experiences.

However, transportation development also faces significant social challenges. Low safety awareness, limited supporting facilities, and unruly transportation user behavior indicate that physical development has not been fully balanced by the development of a transportation culture. Accidents, damage to facilities, and violations of transportation regulations remain issues that require serious attention (Nævestad et al., 2018; Ramsi et al., 2025). From the perspective of national defense, discipline and concern for transportation facilities are part of the responsibility of citizens (Sarjito, 2024). National defense education is not

only carried out through formal education but also through the cultivation of orderly, safe, and responsible behavior when using public transportation. This awareness reflects nationalism in everyday life (M. F. J. L. Putri et al., 2025). Therefore, equitable transportation must be accompanied by strengthening the social and cultural dimensions. The state not only builds infrastructure but also fosters a collective awareness that maintaining transportation is part of safeguarding the common interest and the integrity of the nation (Johnson et al., 2025).

Challenges and Directions for Equitable Transportation Policy

Equitable transportation in Southeast Sulawesi faces various complex structural challenges. Budget constraints, difficult geographic conditions, and inter-regional disparities are major obstacles to the provision of equitable transportation services. These challenges often prevent transportation development from being optimal and sustainable (Rajulan et al., 2025; Xu & Zhu, 2024).

Regional budget constraints require appropriate policy priorities. In many cases, regions with low economic potential tend to receive less attention, even though they are socially and strategically important and require government intervention (Rajulan et al., 2025). The archipelagic geography also increases the costs of transportation development and operation, necessitating stronger policy support from the central government (Syauqi et al., 2021).

Therefore, a collaborative approach between the central government, regional governments, the private sector, and the community is crucial (Florini & Pauli, 2018). Cross-sector synergy is needed to ensure that transportation policies are not partial, but integrated and oriented toward regional equity. Public participation is also key to maintaining the sustainability of transportation services.

Nationalism in transportation policy must be realized through a long-term orientation that favors the public interest (Rajulan et al., 2025). Transportation should not be assessed solely on the basis of economic benefits, but also on its contribution to equitable development and national integration. A regional justice approach is a key principle in maintaining public trust in the state (Litman, 2017).

Therefore, the direction of equitable transportation policy in Southeast Sulawesi must prioritize social justice. Consistent and sustainable policies will strengthen nationalism and make transportation an effective instrument of national defense (Rajulan et al., 2025).

Reflection on National Defense Day in the Context of Southeast Sulawesi

National Defense Day is an important reflective moment for Southeast Sulawesi to emphasize that equitable transportation development is an integral part of efforts to maintain national integrity.

National defense is not always manifested in heroic or militaristic actions, but also in consistent policy implementation that supports social justice (Armawi, 2020; Mattis & Schake, 2016; Safitri & Satyadharma, 2025).

In the context of an archipelagic region, equitable and inclusive transportation is a tangible symbol of the state's presence. When people on small islands experience adequate access to transportation, a sense of belonging to the nation naturally grows. Nationalism is not imposed through rhetoric, but is built through concrete experiences in daily life (Calhoun, 2017).

Reflection on National Defense Day reminds us that transportation development is not merely a technocratic agenda but has ideological and strategic dimensions (Prasetyo et al., 2025). Equitable transportation strengthens unity, reduces inequality, and maintains regional integration. Thus, transportation becomes an instrument of national defense that is relevant to the challenges of the times.



Figure 4 Commemoration of National Defense Day 2025

Source: Southeast Sulawesi Transportation Department (2025)

For Southeast Sulawesi, this reflection emphasizes the importance of a shared commitment between the government and the community to make transportation a unifying tool. Contextual nationalism grows when development policies align with the geographic characteristics and needs of the community (Mylonas & Tudor, 2021; Varma, 2024).

By prioritizing equitable transportation, National Defense Day goes beyond ceremony, but serves as a reminder of the collective responsibility to maintain the nation's integrity. Equitable and inclusive transportation is a concrete manifestation of national defense in an era of development and decentralization.

4. Conclusion

Nationalism, from the perspective of equitable transportation in Southeast Sulawesi Province, is a relevant and strategic manifestation of non-military national defense. Equitable transportation plays a crucial role in reducing regional disparities, strengthening archipelagic connectivity,

and maintaining national integration. Reflections on National Defense Day emphasize that the nation's presence through equitable and inclusive transportation is a concrete manifestation of love for the homeland and commitment to national unity. Regional and central governments need to strengthen equitable transportation policies with an archipelagic approach and the needs of local communities. Furthermore, internalization of national defense values through the transportation sector needs to be encouraged through education, public participation, and governance oriented toward social justice.

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