

MONUMEN NASIONAL: SYMBOLS OF AUTHORITY AND MODERNITY IN JAKARTA'S DEVELOPMENT FROM 2012 TO 2022

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the National Monument (Monas) as a dynamic symbolic structure that reflects shifting configurations of state authority and urban modernity in Jakarta from 2012 to 2022. The research is grounded in the premise that urban monuments in postcolonial cities function not only as historical markers but also as political instruments that articulate national identity and territorial power. The study aims to trace the historical evolution, symbolic transformations, and spatial politics surrounding Monas within the broader context of Jakarta's development. Employing a historical method combined with a symbolic-critical qualitative approach, data were collected from state documents, archival records, city planning maps, photographic documentation, and media reports. The findings reveal that the meaning of Monas has transitioned from a revolutionary symbol under Sukarno to a contested urban icon shaped by modernization, revitalization policies, and shifting political agendas. These transformations highlight tensions between heritage preservation, state authority, and contemporary urban aesthetics. The study contributes to understanding how public monuments generate political meaning and how urban spaces become sites of negotiation between the state and society. It concludes by emphasizing the need for participatory and interdisciplinary approaches in future research on public space and symbolic landscapes.

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INTRODUCTION

In urban history and representation politics, cities are perceived not merely as geographical locations, but as strategic arenas where the state establishes legitimacy and disseminates ideology through symbols, architecture, and spatial design. Multiple studies indicate that urban space operates as a visual medium through which the state can subtly yet effectively communicate political messages via monumental designs, curated public spaces, and ideologically driven architectural structures (Handanovic & Marinic, 2025; Viva, 2025). In numerous post-colonial nations, urban development has emerged as a battleground for narrative conflict, wherein the state endeavors to define national identity while exerting authority (Kombonaah et al., 2025). In this context, examining urban artifacts like the National

Monument (Monas) is essential for comprehending how the state constructs its political representations through spatial arrangements.

The history of urban development in post-independence Indonesia illustrates the persistence of colonial practices in urban space management as a means of control, albeit recontextualized within the paradigms of modern nationalism and development (Budiman & Kusno, 2025). The design of public squares, governmental edifices, and monumental structures serves not merely utilitarian purposes but also functions as a vehicle for communicating ideological narratives regarding history, collective identity, and the nation's developmental aspirations (Cudny & Appelblad, 2019). This transformation exemplifies the utilization of public space as a mechanism for expressing state power through symbols, monumental architecture, and spatial configurations that serve specific political objectives.

Jakarta, as the capital of the nation, holds a distinguished status in this regard. The city serves as the nation's primary platform for showcasing modernity, economic progress, and the representation of a robust and centralized government. Numerous studies indicate that Jakarta is perceived as a "showcase of the state," wherein national aspirations and visions are conveyed to both domestic and international audiences through spatial planning, monumental architecture, and visual depictions of authority (Kusumawardhani & Widyawati, 2020).

Within this context, the National Monument (Monas) stands as one of the most significant symbols of Indonesia's state history. The monument, constructed from 1961 to 1975, was conceived as an ideological focal point that integrates narratives of revolution, recollections of independence, and aspirations for modernity, reflecting President Sukarno's vision for development. The architecture, characterized by monumental verticality, is frequently viewed as a symbol of national strength, unity, and renewal. Numerous studies affirm that Monas functions both as a memorial and as a conduit for political communication, illustrating state authority and influencing the public's collective perception of national history (Maria et al., 2025). Its position at the geographic and political core of Jakarta reinforces its role as the capital's symbolic axis.

Nonetheless, the significance of Monas has transformed in accordance with shifting political and social dynamics, especially since the Reformation period. This shift in Monas's interpretation is apparent in numerous revitalization initiatives and spatial reorganizations undertaken by both regional and central authorities. Monas is now perceived not only as a symbol of state authoritarianism from the Old and New Order periods but also as an emblem of urban modernity that embodies openness and inclusivity, reflecting Jakarta's identity as a global city. (Karsono, 2021). This transformation manifests not only in its physical characteristics but also in narratives that situate Monas within the contexts of tourism, urban aesthetics, public space, and the construction of the city's identity.

This shift in meaning generates new conflicts between the preservation of historical heritage and the necessity for modernization. Revitalization initiatives reveal a conflict between preserving Monas's symbolic significance as a national monument and the necessity of developing the area to meet modern urban aesthetic and functional criteria (Ardiansyah, 2024). The ongoing public discourse indicates that Monas has become a disputed area among the state, local government, and society, with the authority to interpret history and the manner in which the monument's symbolic narrative should be re-presented amidst the complexities of

urban development. This scenario underscores the necessity for a comprehensive historical analysis to comprehend how the state and society collaborate in shaping new interpretations of this symbolic space.

(Susilo & Suryaningsih, 2015) It is asserted that the National Monument (Monas) was initially erected as a symbolic tool embodying national identity and state legitimacy after independence, with its architectural design and central location in Jakarta intentionally crafted to convey the historical narrative and political ideology of the Sukarno era. Research conducted by (Nugraha & Putra, 2023) on the revitalization of the Monas area during the 2019-2024 period indicates that the provincial government restructured the Medan Merdeka area by increasing green space, enhancing public access, and modernizing infrastructure, thereby altering the utilization patterns, visibility, and function of the space surrounding the monument. Nevertheless, these two research groups operate independently; symbolic-historical research does not associate the significance of Monas with current spatial alterations, whereas revitalization studies concentrate on technical dimensions without exploring the symbolic and political ramifications of the transformation. This research addresses the gap by providing a novel long-term historical-critical analysis that encompasses the evolution of the meaning of Monas from the Soekarno era to its recent revitalization, while elucidating how the physical transformation of space and urban planning policies contributes to the reconfiguration of Monas's symbolic narrative as a representation of the state within Jakarta's modern context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a historical methodology alongside a qualitative, symbolic-critical framework to analyze the National Monument (Monas) as both a physical artifact and a political symbol embodying state authority and Jakarta's modernity. This research design was selected to empirically elucidate the process of Monas's development, interpretation, and transformation within the contexts of political history and urban spatial planning. The research adheres to four principal stages within the historical research tradition (Bashith et al., 2024; Gottschalk, 1953; Irwanto & Sair, 2014; Putra & Mufidah, 2022), commencing with heuristic data collection from official state documents (Presidential Decrees, Gubernatorial Decrees, and the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan), Monas development archives, spatial maps, photographic documentation, and both print and digital media reports.

All gathered data undergoes external evaluation to determine the authenticity and validity of the sources, as well as internal analysis to interpret their content, identify potential biases, and assess consistency with historical facts (Afiyanto & Sun, 2024; Hidayah & Sujastika, 2024). The interpretation phase employs a symbolic-critical framework to reveal the connections among policies, socio-political contexts, and the ideological representations embedded in Monas throughout history. The analysis results are consolidated in the historiography phase to create a systematic, argumentative, and comprehensive historical narrative concerning the alterations in the function and significance of Monas throughout different periods of Jakarta's development, aligning with the research objective of tracing the evolution of this monument as a national icon and a symbol of urban modernity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Origins and Political Context of Monas' Construction

The establishment of the National Monument (Monas) as a symbol of Indonesian nationalism is intrinsically linked to the state's strategic role in formally overseeing and guiding this initiative. This was accomplished via Presidential Decree of the Republic of Indonesia Number 116 of 1961, enacted on February 8, 1961. The decree sought to fortify the legal and administrative foundation for the ongoing Monas construction. The establishment of a new committee signifies President Sukarno's commitment to transforming Monas into a symbol of revolutionary ideals and national resurgence in Indonesia (Keppres, 1961). The appointed committee members' names are as follows:

Table 1. Committee for National Monuments

No	Name	Position
1	Ir. Soekarno	President of the Republic of Indonesia, Chairman, and Member
2	Kolonel Umar Wirahadikusuma	Pandam Djaja, Executive Chairman, and member
3	Chaerul Saleh	Chairperson of the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly, Deputy Chairperson, and member
4	Djenderal A.H.Nasution	Minister of National Security, Deputy Chairperson, and member
5	Notohamiprodo	Minister of Finance, Deputy Chairperson, and member
6	Sukarno Djojonegoro	Minister and Chief of National Police, Deputy Chairperson, and a member
7	Brigadir Jenderal Dr.Sumarno	Governor of Jakarta Raya, Deputy Chairperson, and Member
8	Mr. Santoso	Secretary and member
9	H.Mualliff Nasution	Secretary and member
10	Nj.Harjati Siagian	Secretary and member
11	Mr.Sumarno	Governor of Bank Indonesia
12	Hasjim Ning	Treasurer and member
13	Henk Ngantung	Assistant and member
14	Jsuf Muda Dalam	Assistant and member
15	Ir. Abuprajitno	Assistant and member
16	F. Silaban	Assistant and member
17	Sudarsono	Assistant and member
18	A.M. Hanafi	Assistant and member
19	Supeno	Assistant and member

The establishment of the National Monument (Monas) is intrinsically linked to Sukarno's political and ideological vision for defining the national identity in the post-independence era. Sukarno, a pivotal figure in the Indonesian Revolution, aspired to establish a tangible emblem that embodied the essence of independence, the nation's grandeur, and the perseverance of the revolutionary endeavor. The concept of Monas originated within the framework of nation-building, wherein monumental symbols were deemed vital to preserving collective memory and reinforcing state legitimacy (Jazulli & Liana, 2015).

Monas ideologically represents Sukarno's notion of an incomplete revolution. The monument was conceived as a perpetual reminder of the Indonesian people's resistance to colonialism, serving both as an educational tool for history and a symbol of national sovereignty. Sukarno described it as "the eternal flame of struggle." By establishing Monas as

the focal point of the capital, he aimed to signify a new center of authority that was neither colonial nor imperialistic, but rather revolutionary and national (Muhammad Rizaldy et al., 2020).

In symbolic power theory, as articulated by (Geertz, 1980) in the concept of "theater state," the construction of grand monuments by newly independent regimes serves as a manifestation of political legitimacy. The architecture of Monas is imbued with profound symbolism. The principal pillar, rising to a height of 132 meters, represents the lingam, an emblem of masculinity and strength. In contrast, the circular plaza beneath it signifies the yoni, a representation of femininity and fertility. Both draw inspiration from the Hindu-Buddhist cosmology of the Nusantara region, intentionally selected to highlight the continuity of national history from the classical to the republican era.

The National Monument (Monas) was intentionally positioned in the center of Jakarta to symbolize the state's power both literally and figuratively within public space, employing a visual politics framework. This placement was not solely an architectural choice but a component of a visual power strategy that employed urban space to convey state ideology. (Edelman, 1985) Elucidates that political symbols are instrumental in influencing public perceptions of power legitimacy; in this instance, Monas functions as a "focal point" symbolizing the nation-state's presence to its populace.

The location of Monas exhibits a center-periphery pattern that aligns with the panoptic concept in Michel Foucault's theory. Within this framework, power spaces are established centrally, characterized by a dominant center that possesses the symbolic ability to metaphorically "observe" all societal movements (Foucault, 1977). Elucidates in *Discipline and Punish* that the panopticon represents a structural manifestation of power, facilitating imperceptible yet tangible control, which engenders social discipline through the emblematic presence of authority. The positioning of Monas at the center of Merdeka Square generates a comparable visual and ideological impact; it serves not merely as a visible object but also as an entity that "observes" in return, influencing the national power dynamics through its imposing vertical stature.

The strategic positioning of Monumen Nasional (Monas) in central Jakarta serves as a calculated act of spatial decolonization, consistent with postcolonial theory's concept of spatial reappropriation, wherein newly independent nations reclaim, redefine, and reconstruct urban areas previously governed by colonial powers. This strategy demonstrates a deliberate attempt by the postcolonial Indonesian state to supersede the spatial and symbolic remnants of colonialism by establishing new national narratives within the city's physical structure. The establishment of Monas as the focal point of contemporary Jakarta aimed to supplant the colonial centers of power and memory, such as Old Batavia (Kota Tua) and Koningsplein (now Lapangan Merdeka), which had previously functioned as hubs of Dutch imperial authority. In this manner, Monas serves as both a spatial focal point and an ideological axis that shifts public awareness towards a government-endorsed conception of national identity, unity, and modernity (Said, 1993). In *Culture and Imperialism*, it is contended that the appropriation of space and representational symbols by emerging postcolonial powers is a crucial mechanism for these states to express new historical and political identities. In this context, Monas

transcends its role as a mere monument; it serves as a symbolic instrument of resistance and redefinition, embodying sovereignty, independence, and the dismantling of colonial spatial hierarchies in favor of a cohesive national identity.

Monas in the Evolution and Procreation of State Authority

The National Monument (Monas) is a significant structure that dominates the geographical center of the capital, symbolizing the state's ideological and cultural initiative in constructing national identity through architecture and urban planning. Monas is a tangible representation of the state's endeavors to visually, spatially, and historically construct and assert the narrative of nationalism. Monas, as a national emblem, is intended to integrate official history into the everyday experiences of urban inhabitants, instilling the concepts of independence, struggle, and collective identity within a politically and symbolically structured urban environment (Sulistyo, 2020).

This concept aligns with Benedict (Anderson, 1983) Perspective in Imagined Communities, which posits that a nation is not an organically occurring entity, but a political community that is "imagined" by its constituents through shared symbols, such as flags, national anthems, and public monuments. In this context, Monas functions as a significant instrument for the Indonesian state in articulating the narrative of collective identity, not only to the inhabitants of Jakarta but also to the entire Indonesian nation as a cohesive and sovereign imagined entity.

The geographical positioning of Monas in the center of the capital, adjacent to significant state institutions like the Merdeka Palace, the Supreme Court, and vital ministries, illustrates that urban space has been meticulously crafted into a symbolic domain of authority. This space is deliberately designed to serve as the focal point of the state's visual and ideological dominance over its populace (Lefebvre, 1991). Elucidates in *The Production of Space* that space is not a passive construct; rather, it is a social and political artifact employed by dominant actors to establish hegemony. Within this framework, Monas serves as ideological architecture. This tool illustrates how the state constructs the spatiality of its produced environment to assert its presence and authority both symbolically and materially.

The meticulously curated historical narrative in the Monas underground museum, featuring dioramas illustrating the transition from colonialism to independence and national development, exemplifies the state's endeavor to regulate collective memory. This process is termed state-sponsored memory (Winter, 1995), denoting memories constructed and promoted by the state to shape the past in alignment with the ideological objectives of the governing authority. This narrative in the Indonesian context highlights the valorous shift from colonialism to revolution and subsequently from revolution to development under robust, centralized state governance. The museum and its narratives serve as ideological pedagogical instruments to instill loyalty to the state and validate the official national historical account.

Moreover, Monas serves as the nation's political platform. From the Sukarno era to the post-Reformation period, Monas has served as the principal venue for numerous state ceremonies, Independence Day festivities, military parades, and public demonstrations. According to (Geertz, 1980) The state manifests itself not only through policy but also through the symbolic enactment of a theatrical state that exhibits power through aesthetics, ceremonies,

and symbolism. In this context, Monas functions as a venue for the performative depiction and reiteration of power.

Under Sukarno's leadership, the construction of Monas was integral to a significant initiative aimed at projecting Indonesia as a formidable and sovereign nation. Sukarno served as the "architect of the nation," shaping both its structures and the collective national consciousness. The architectural symbolism of Monas, particularly the towering vertical obelisk, represents masculinity, strength, and stability (Kusno, 2000). Study Behind the Postcolonial interprets the Monas obelisk as a "national phallus," symbolizing Sukarno's aspiration to construct the state as a grand and centralized entity. This vertical symbolism signifies both magnificence and the hierarchical relationship between the center and the peripheries, as well as between the state and its citizens.

Monas in the Context of Jakarta's Modernization Dynamics

The National Monument (Monas) serves as both a commemorative edifice and a pivotal element in the spatial, symbolic, and political evolution of Jakarta as a modern city, embodying national and global significance. Monas, inaugurated in 1961 by President Sukarno, serves as a symbol of Indonesia's evolution from colonialism to independence and modernity. In this context, Monas serves as an ideological artifact with two principal functions: firstly, as a historical emblem of the nation's quest for independence; and secondly, as a symbol of Indonesia's modernity in the development of the post-colonial city within a more sophisticated and organized global context (Septiawan, 2022).

Sukarno envisioned the construction of Monas as a fundamental element of the overarching narrative of "Jakarta as the republic's showcase." This concept not only designated Jakarta as the administrative capital but also as a platform for showcasing national advancement. Sukarno perceived urban space as a means to influence collective consciousness via symbolic representations of progress, discipline, and power (Raharjo & Kanumoyoso, 2013). This concept aligns with (Holston, 1989) Assertions in *The Modernist City* suggest that modernization initiatives in Third World cities often manifest as symbolic architecture that combines rational governance, state dominance, and aspirations for technological and social advancement.

The central location of Monas in Jakarta, adjacent to significant state institutions such as the Merdeka Palace, the Supreme Court, and ministry offices, exemplifies modern urban planning principles that emphasize visual cohesion, symbolic hierarchy, and administrative efficiency. This symmetrical and axial configuration illustrates the design of urban space as a representation of authority and organization (Graham & Marvin, 2001). In this context, Monas serves as both a geographical landmark and an ideological focal point, centralizing the representation of the state within the urban environment. Monas contributes to Jakarta's city branding, featuring in logos, tourism promotions, and cultural campaigns, thus serving as a symbol that encapsulates Jakarta's identity as a nationalist, modern, and cosmopolitan metropolis.



Figure 1. Revitalization strategy for the National Monument (Monas)

Source: Records of the Jakarta Provincial Administration

Entering the contemporary era, the function of Monas has transformed in line with the development of a more responsive urban planning paradigm that addresses environmental, technological, and inclusivity issues. One of the key moments in this dynamic process was the launch of the Monas Area Revitalization Project by the Jakarta Provincial Government in 2020. The revitalization aims to increase the proportion of Green Open Space (GOS) from 56% to 64%, exceeding the minimum standard of 53% as stipulated in Presidential Decree No. 25 of 1995 on the Planning of the Medan Merdeka Area. This effort is not merely a physical project to beautify public spaces but also a new expression of how the state and city government are redefining the relationship between space, power, and urban identity (Keppres, 1995).

Michel Foucault's theoretical framework views the revitalization of Monas as a manifestation of "technologies of power" that operate through spatial engineering. Urban planning serves not only as a technical management instrument but also as a manifestation of symbolic and ideological authority. The reorganization of pedestrian pathways, the expansion of parks, the elimination of commercial areas like Lenggang Jakarta, and the integration with public transportation systems exemplify the principles of governmentality, illustrating how the state governs public life through aesthetics, order, and spatial regulation (Foucault, 1980). Simultaneously, Monas is integrated into the discourses of smart cities and sustainable urbanism, two prevailing narratives that currently shape metropolitan development in the postcolonial context.

This revitalization project has encountered controversy and criticism. Numerous activists and scholars have emphasized that the planning and execution processes are predominantly top-down and deficient in public engagement. This initiative has prompted concerns regarding the rise of aesthetic authoritarianism, characterized by urban planning policies that prioritize the symbolic aesthetics favored by the political elite while neglecting democratic engagement with the communities that utilize urban spaces (Costa, 2020). In this context, Monas remains a site of conflict between governmental ambitions and societal demands. Public spaces, such as

Monas, serve not only as symbols of power but also as venues for redefining the prevailing state narrative and expressing citizens' identities.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the National Monument (Monas) serves as a symbolic space that undergoes evolving interpretations in response to the city's political dynamics and development. The results indicate that Monas serves as both a historical monument and a platform for contesting interpretations, where the state, society, and urban economic forces converge. The findings affirm that the evolving function and symbolism of Monas signify changing power dynamics within the contemporary urban landscape, rendering it a crucial indicator for understanding how the state constructs and regulates public space as part of its political representation strategy.

This study provides substantial theoretical and historical insights; however, it is constrained by its failure to thoroughly explore grassroots perspectives regarding the transformation of Monas and its significance in daily life. We recommend that future research adopt participatory methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from urban anthropology, public history, and community-oriented spatial planning. This methodology will expand the study's scope and yield a more thorough comprehension of the social and ideological construction of public space. This article emphasizes that monuments like Monas should be viewed as dynamic entities, with their meanings continually redefined in the context of social, political, and urban transformations, thereby facilitating a broader discourse on the role of monuments in shaping the identity and collective memory of urban communities.

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