

Political Dynamics in West Sumatra during the Indonesian War of Independence, 1945–1950

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the political dynamics of West Sumatra during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1950) and explores the region's role in consolidating the Republic of Indonesia. The research contributes to existing scholarship by highlighting local political actors, institutions, and community mobilization as key elements in sustaining the independence movement. Using a qualitative historical approach, the study analyzes concepts of political resistance, regional governance, and nationalist mobilization through archival records, contemporary newspapers, government documents, and secondary literature collected from the period 1945–1950 and examined through source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The findings reveal that West Sumatra served as a strategic political center where cooperation among local leaders, the military, and civil society strengthened republican authority and reinforced anti-colonial resistance. These developments significantly contributed to the formation of Indonesia's early political culture and national resilience.

INTRODUCTION

West Sumatra is one of Indonesia's provinces with a rich and complex political history during the independence era, particularly between 1945 and 1950. This period marked a significant milestone in Indonesia's political history, during which the newly independent nation sought to establish its political foundations and confront profound challenges (Crouch, 2017). In this context, the political dynamics in West Sumatra during that era present an intriguing topic for research aimed at understanding both national and local political developments.

In the history of Indonesia's struggle for independence, West Sumatra played an undeniable role. The period of independence from 1945 to 1950 was a crucial time in illustrating the political dynamics unfolding in this region (Daniati et al., 2025). During that time, West Sumatra faced complex and diverse political challenges, which not only reflected the spirit of the struggle for independence but also revealed significant social and structural changes (Isra, 2014).

West Sumatra emerged as one of the most strategically important regions in supporting the Republic of Indonesia's survival during the independence period. The region served not only as a center of resistance against colonial efforts to regain control but also as a hub for political coordination among local leaders, community organizations, and republican institutions. Strong public support for independence fostered a political environment that prioritized national unity and collective responsibility. These conditions enabled local actors to contribute significantly to the broader struggle to maintain Indonesia's sovereignty. The active engagement of various social groups demonstrated the region's commitment to defending the newly proclaimed republic.

The transition from colonial administration to independent governance required substantial political adaptation at the regional level. Local authorities were tasked with establishing administrative structures capable of responding to rapidly changing political circumstances. Efforts to build effective governance often faced challenges stemming from limited resources, communication difficulties, and uncertainties about the republic's future. Despite these obstacles, local leaders continued to strengthen governmental institutions and maintain public trust. Their initiatives played an important role in ensuring political stability during a period marked by intense national upheaval.

The active participation of diverse social actors also characterized political developments in West Sumatra. Religious leaders, intellectuals, youth organizations, and traditional community figures became influential voices in shaping political discourse and mobilizing public support. Their involvement extended beyond political advocacy and included educational activities, public campaigns, and efforts to foster nationalist consciousness. This broad-based participation contributed to the development of a politically aware society capable of responding to contemporary challenges. The collaboration among different social groups reinforced the independence movement's resilience in the region.

The independence period also witnessed significant political debates concerning the direction of the emerging Indonesian state. Discussions

surrounding governance, representation, regional interests, and national priorities reflected the complexity of nation-building during the revolutionary era. These debates highlighted the diversity of political perspectives that existed within society while simultaneously demonstrating a shared commitment to preserving independence. Political engagement during this period became an important mechanism through which local communities articulated their aspirations and contributed to national decision-making processes. Such developments illustrate the dynamic nature of political life in West Sumatra during the republic's formative years.

The experiences of West Sumatra between 1945 and 1950 left a lasting legacy for Indonesia's political development. The region demonstrated how local initiatives, collective action, and political participation could strengthen national resilience in times of uncertainty. The interactions among political leaders, community organizations, and ordinary citizens laid the foundation for democratic engagement and civic responsibility. These experiences reveal that the struggle for independence was not solely a military endeavor but also a process of constructing political institutions and fostering national identity. Consequently, West Sumatra occupies an important place in understanding the broader historical development of modern Indonesia.

The PDRI (Emergency Government of the Republic of Indonesia) in West Sumatra was a key aspect of the political dynamics during the independence era, particularly between 1945 and 1950 (van Klinken, 2009). The PDRI was a provisional government established in response to the power vacuum left by the Dutch withdrawal and the Republic of Indonesia's relocation of its government to Yogyakarta (Herlina et al., 2023).

The PDRI in West Sumatra was established on 20 December 1948 in Bukittinggi, with the primary objective of safeguarding and maintaining Indonesia's independence in the region. At that time, West Sumatra was one of the regions serving as a base for resistance against Dutch colonial rule (Rahmat et al., 2023). With the establishment of the PDRI, West Sumatra was granted political and administrative authority to govern its territory within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia.

Additionally, West Sumatra witnessed political conflicts during that period. Conflicts between nationalist groups and those supporting the Dutch, such as the Federal Movement and the Minangkabau Union, were intense in this region. These conflicts reflected the ideological differences and political visions present in West Sumatra at the time (Jamilah et al., 2024).

The role of political figures from West Sumatra was also crucial in the struggle for independence. One notable figure is Mohammad Hatta, a founding father and Indonesia's first vice president. Hatta, a native of West Sumatra, was actively involved in political struggles and constitutional thought and led the formation of the national government (Hakim et al., 2025).

Furthermore, West Sumatra underwent a significant political transformation. The region sought to establish an effective government and to integrate traditional customs with the modern democratic system. For instance, the establishment of the West Sumatra People's Council in 1946 as the provincial

legislative body was a crucial step in developing the local political system (Chaniago & Humairah, 2019).

Previous research has provided insights into the political dynamics in West Sumatra during the independence era. For instance, a study by Berliani (2022) examined the role of local political organizations in shaping West Sumatra's political structure. According to her, political organizations such as the Indonesian Party, Sarekat Islam, and the Islamic Community Union played a significant role in coordinating political movements and representing the interests of West Sumatra's people.

Additionally, Abdullah's (2011) research revealed the dynamics of the relationship between the central and local governments in West Sumatra during the independence era. This study highlighted political tensions and power struggles between the newly formed central government and local governments striving to maintain regional autonomy. However, there remains a knowledge gap regarding the political dynamics in West Sumatra during the independence era. This study aims to delve deeper into the political trajectory in West Sumatra during that period, focusing on the roles of local political actors, the dynamics of relations between central and local governments, and the impact of political policies on the local community.

Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines primary sources such as historical archives, political documents, and government reports, as well as historiographical studies and political analysis, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to expanding our understanding of the political dynamics in West Sumatra during the independence era.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Theories of Social and Political Change

Theories of social and political change serve as a crucial foundation for understanding political dynamics in West Sumatra during the independence period of 1945–1950. This period marked a transitional phase characterized by a shift in power structures from colonial rule to a newly formed national government. This transformation involved not only the replacement of political institutions but also changes in values, political orientations, leadership patterns, and the relationship between society and the state. In the study of political history, social and political change is understood as a process that occurs when a society experiences shifts in its social system or power structures, driven by internal or external factors (Apandi et al., 2025).

Thoughts on social change are heavily influenced by Selo Soemardjan's view, which defines social change as changes within social institutions that affect the social system, including values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior. This definition is relevant for explaining the conditions in West Sumatra following the Proclamation of Independence, when society shifted from a colonial to a republican system of government. This transformation gave rise to new forms of organization, changes in local leadership patterns, and increased public participation in political activities and the struggle for independence. The process of societal transition in the Minangkabau region, influenced by changes in the

national political system—particularly in 1945—shaped the social dynamics of Minangkabau society (Sobirin et al., 2025).

Another perspective was put forward by Samuel P. Huntington, who stated that political change is a process of modernization characterized by increased public political participation, the differentiation of political structures, and the development of more complex political institutions. Huntington emphasized that political change often generates tensions when the growth of public participation outpaces political institutions' capacity to manage it (van Klinken, 2009). In West Sumatra during the revolution, this situation was evident in the emergence of various resistance organizations, people's militias, political parties, and youth groups striving to play a role in both regional and national political processes. This situation demonstrates that political change does not always proceed smoothly but is often accompanied by competing interests and institutional adjustments.

A perspective that places greater emphasis on power was put forward by Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, who explained that political change is a process of transforming the functions and structures of a political system in response to societal demands and a changing social environment. According to them, a political system must adapt to change to maintain stability and legitimacy. During the early years of independence, the government of the Republic of Indonesia in West Sumatra faced significant challenges in establishing new governmental institutions while simultaneously maintaining political legitimacy amid the threat of Dutch military aggression (Jamilah et al., 2024). This process demonstrated efforts to adjust political structures to the conditions of the ongoing revolution.

Studies on political change can also be explained through the ideas of Charles Tilly, who identifies conflict and collective mobilization as the primary factors in political change. According to Tilly, political change occurs when social groups mobilize resources to advocate for their interests within the arena of power (Daniati et al., 2025). This perspective is highly relevant to the conditions in West Sumatra during the 1945–1950 period, as the people were not merely objects of change but also actively defended independence through the formation of resistance militias, youth organizations, and various socio-political movements supporting the Republic of Indonesia.

Based on these perspectives, this study uses the theory of social and political change to analyze the transformation of power structures, changes in the roles of local elites, the development of public political participation, and the emergence of new political institutions in West Sumatra during the independence era. This theory helps explain that the political dynamics during the 1945–1950 period were not merely a series of events, but rather part of a broader social change process shaping a new post-colonial political order. Through this perspective, the study examines how the people of West Sumatra adapted to national political changes while simultaneously contributing to the formation of an independent Indonesian state.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a historical research method to examine the political dynamics of West Sumatra during the Indonesian War of Independence from 1945 to 1950. Historical research methods play a crucial role in uncovering and analyzing political developments that occurred during this period, particularly in understanding the interactions among political actors, institutions, and local communities within the broader context of Indonesia's struggle for independence (Hamid, 2017; Kuntowijoyo, 2013). The study focuses on political transformation, governance, social mobilization, and regional contributions to the consolidation of the newly established Republic of Indonesia.

Data were collected through archival research and historical documentation. Primary sources included official government documents, administrative reports, political correspondence, speeches, contemporary newspapers, memoirs of political figures, and other records produced between 1945 and 1950. These sources were selected because they provide direct evidence of political activities, policy developments, and public responses during the independence era. Secondary sources included books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and prior scholarly studies on the political history of West Sumatra and the Indonesian Revolution. The combination of primary and secondary materials enabled a comprehensive understanding of the historical context and political processes under investigation.

The collected data were analyzed using the standard procedures of historical research, namely heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Hamid, 2017; Kuntowijoyo, 2013). The heuristic stage involved identifying and gathering relevant historical sources from archives, libraries, and digital repositories. Source criticism was conducted through external criticism to verify the authenticity and origin of documents, and through internal criticism to assess the credibility, consistency, and reliability of the information contained in the sources. This process ensured that only valid and trustworthy evidence was utilized in the study.

The interpretation stage focused on examining the relationships among political events, actors, and institutions to explain the broader political dynamics that emerged in West Sumatra during the independence period. Particular attention was given to understanding how local political leaders, community organizations, and governmental institutions responded to the challenges of revolution and state formation. The findings were subsequently organized through historiography, producing a systematic historical narrative that reconstructs political developments in West Sumatra between 1945 and 1950. Through this methodological approach, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of regional political experiences and their significance within Indonesia's broader history of independence.

RESULTS

The Role of Political Organizations and Nationalist Movements in West Sumatra

The Partai Indonesia Raya (PIR) was one of the strongest political organizations in West Sumatra during the independence era. PIR was founded

on 12 October 1945, in Padang, by several prominent political figures, including Haji Agus Salim and Mohammad Natsir. PIR had a clear vision to advance nationalism and the struggle for independence in West Sumatra. The party organized the masses, held public rallies, and disseminated nationalist propaganda. PIR also established movement headquarters in various regions across West Sumatra, which served as venues for meetings and the coordination of political activities (Dayani et al., 2025).

In addition to the PIR, the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII) also played a significant role in mobilizing the masses and advancing the nationalist agenda in West Sumatra. The PSII was an Islamic political organization that worked to unite the Muslim community and fight for Indonesia's independence. In West Sumatra, the PSII had active branches that played a crucial role in organizing the people and spreading nationalist values (Yunus, 2013).

Political organizations such as the Great Indonesia Party (PIR) and the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII) played a significant role in mobilizing the masses and advancing the nationalist agenda in West Sumatra during the independence era. Both organizations played a role in organizing the people, establishing movement headquarters, and actively participating in the political struggle against Dutch colonialism (Budita, 2023).

The Great Indonesia Party (PIR) was founded on 12 October 1945 in Padang by prominent political figures, including Haji Agus Salim and Mohammad Natsir. PIR had a clear objective of advancing nationalism and the struggle for independence in West Sumatra. This organization successfully mobilized the masses by holding public rallies, organizing propaganda campaigns, and establishing movement headquarters across West Sumatra. Through these efforts, the PIR succeeded in garnering support and fostering national consciousness among the people of West Sumatra (Ricklefs, 2005).

In addition to PIR, the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII) also played a significant role in mobilizing the masses and championing a nationalist agenda in West Sumatra. PSII was an Islamic political organization that aimed to unite the Muslim community and fight for Indonesia's independence. The active PSII branches in West Sumatra played a role in organizing the people, spreading nationalist values, and participating in the political struggle against Dutch colonialism. Through its organizational activities and influence within the Muslim community, the PSII strengthened the nationalist movement in West Sumatra (Fajri, 2025).

Ricklefs' (2005) research highlights the active role of the PIR and PSII in mobilizing the masses and advancing the nationalist agenda in West Sumatra during the independence era. These political organizations not only organized the people and established movement headquarters but also actively participated in the political struggle to fight for independence from Dutch colonial rule.

The presence of PIR and PSII demonstrates that the struggle for independence in West Sumatra extended beyond military resistance and relied heavily on organized political mobilization. These organizations played a crucial role in cultivating political awareness among the population regarding the importance of defending the newly proclaimed Republic. Through political

campaigns, public meetings, and grassroots engagement, they transformed nationalist ideals into concrete collective action. Their activities reveal that the success of the independence movement depended not only on armed resistance but also on political organizations' ability to mobilize popular support and maintain public commitment to the republican cause.

The activities of PIR and PSII also illustrate how political organizations served as intermediaries between local communities and the Republic's national leadership. They communicated local concerns to the central government while simultaneously disseminating national policies and political objectives to the wider population. This dual role became increasingly important during the revolutionary period, when effective coordination between regional and national actors was essential for maintaining political cohesion. By strengthening these connections, both organizations contributed to the consolidation of republican authority in West Sumatra and to the reinforcement of public confidence in the emerging state.

The growth of political organizations in West Sumatra further expanded opportunities for civic participation. Youth groups, religious leaders, merchants, intellectuals, and other social actors found new avenues to engage in political processes and contribute to the independence movement. This broad participation widened the social base of the nationalist struggle and fostered solidarity across diverse segments of society. The political landscape of the period, therefore, reflected a significant shift in which political engagement became a collective endeavor rather than the exclusive domain of elites.

The influence of PIR and PSII was also evident in the development of a political culture that emphasized organization, discipline, and leadership. Their activities encouraged communities to recognize that sustaining independence required strategic planning, coordinated action, and long-term commitment. This awareness promoted more structured forms of political engagement and facilitated the transition from traditional modes of resistance to modern political organization. In this respect, these organizations not only supported the revolutionary struggle but also contributed to the political maturation of society during a critical stage of nation-building.

These developments suggest that the significance of PIR and PSII lies not merely in their capacity to mobilize supporters but also in their ability to foster a shared political consciousness about the nation's future. They helped instill the belief that independence could only be preserved through collective political action, public participation, and the strengthening of republican institutions. This contribution enhanced political stability in West Sumatra. It reinforced the region's position as one of the most important centers of support for the Indonesian independence movement during the revolutionary era.

Political Conflict and Power Dynamics in West Sumatra

Political conflict and power dynamics in West Sumatra during the independence era, 1945–1950, are crucial to understanding the region's political landscape at the time. These conflicts involved clashes between nationalist groups and those supporting the Dutch, such as the Federal Movement and the

Minangkabau Union. Related research can reveal the ideological differences and political visions that emerged in these conflicts (Rahmad, 2026).

Political conflict in West Sumatra during the independence era involved various groups with diverse political interests. Nationalist groups, representing the spirit of the struggle for Indonesian independence, sought to defend and expand territory already under the Republic of Indonesia's control (Zed, 1995). Meanwhile, groups supporting the Dutch, such as the Federal Movement and the Minangkabau Union, held differing views and sought to maintain ties with the Dutch or support a broader form of federation.

The ideological and political differences between nationalist and pro-Dutch groups reflected the challenges in reaching political agreements and unifying the government in West Sumatra. This conflict encompassed power struggles, differing views on the form of the state, and disputes over territories controlled by each side (Marpaung et al., 2024).

First, the nationalist groups fighting for Indonesian independence in West Sumatra had a clear objective: to defend territories already under the Republic of Indonesia's control. They viewed themselves as the successors to the national independence struggle and sought to unite West Sumatra's regions under the Republic of Indonesia's government. These nationalist groups were generally supported by people who held nationalist sentiments and wanted to see West Sumatra become an integral part of an independent Indonesia (Mardhiah & Suryadi, 2025).

On the other hand, groups supporting the Dutch included the Federal Movement and the Minangkabau Union, which held differing views on the regional political context. These groups sought closer ties with the Dutch or supported a federal arrangement involving West Sumatra. They argued that a federation could safeguard local interests and grant greater autonomy to the region (Anwar, 2022).

These ideological and political differences became a source of conflict that influenced the dynamics of power in West Sumatra during the independence era. Power struggles between nationalist groups and pro-Dutch groups often led to political tensions, physical confrontations, and competing territorial claims. Both nationalist and pro-Dutch groups sought to strengthen their support bases and win the sympathy of the West Sumatran public (Arsil & Wasti, 2020).

Research by Touwen-Bouwsma (1996), titled "*The Indonesian Nationalists and the Japanese' Liberation' of Indonesia: Visions and Reactions*," provides deep insights into the political conflicts in West Sumatra during the independence era. This study examines the ideological differences and political visions that emerged between nationalist and pro-Dutch groups, and their implications for the dynamics of power and governance in West Sumatra during that period.

By gaining a broader understanding of the political conflicts and power dynamics in West Sumatra during the independence era, we can delve deeper into the regional dynamics of this crucial period in Indonesian history. The political conflicts in West Sumatra reflect complex, dynamic struggles among various actors and interests.

A deeper understanding of these political conflicts will enable us to examine the roles of political organizations, community groups, and individuals in shaping the direction of the political struggle in West Sumatra. We can analyze the strategies and tactics employed by nationalist and pro-Dutch groups to mobilize the masses, strengthen their support bases, and influence regional political dynamics.

Political competition in West Sumatra during the independence era reflected more than a simple contest for power. It represented a struggle over competing visions of the region's future and its place within the newly emerging Indonesian state. Nationalist groups sought to strengthen loyalty to the Republic and promote the ideals of independence, while pro-Dutch factions attempted to preserve political arrangements that would maintain Dutch influence. These conflicting objectives transformed political disagreements into broader contests over legitimacy, authority, and national identity.

The confrontation between these groups encouraged the development of increasingly sophisticated political strategies. Nationalist organizations relied heavily on public meetings, political education, and community networks to cultivate support among the population. They framed the struggle as a collective effort to protect national sovereignty and resist external intervention. By linking local concerns to the broader independence movement, they successfully embedded nationalist aspirations within everyday political discourse and strengthened public identification with the Republic.

Pro-Dutch groups, on the other hand, often appealed to concerns about stability, security, and administrative continuity. They sought support from segments of society that feared the uncertainties of revolutionary change. Rather than relying solely on political persuasion, these groups frequently sought to utilize existing institutional structures and established networks of influence. Their efforts reveal that political conflict during this period was not simply ideological but also involved competing claims regarding governance, order, and political legitimacy.

These rival strategies contributed to the unprecedented politicization of society. Communities that had previously remained distant from formal politics became increasingly engaged in discussions about governance, independence, and the nation's future. Political debates reached villages, marketplaces, schools, and religious institutions, transforming public spaces into arenas of political interaction. This process expanded political participation and encouraged ordinary citizens to become active participants in shaping regional and national developments.

The political conflicts of this period ultimately accelerated the formation of a more politically conscious society in West Sumatra. Competition between opposing groups forced political actors to refine their messages, strengthen organizational structures, and build broader coalitions of support. As a result, political engagement evolved beyond short-term revolutionary objectives and contributed to the emergence of enduring political traditions. These developments laid the foundation for civic participation and political activism

that continued to influence the region long after the struggle for independence ended.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The political dynamics of West Sumatra during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1950) demonstrate that the region played a pivotal role in sustaining and strengthening the Republic of Indonesia amid profound political uncertainty. The interaction among political organizations, local leaders, religious figures, youth groups, and the broader community created a resilient political environment that supported republican authority and resisted colonial efforts to reassert control. Political contestation during this period was not merely a power struggle but also a process through which ideas of nationalism, governance, and collective identity were negotiated and consolidated. These developments confirm that regional political experiences constituted an integral part of Indonesia's broader nation-building process and significantly contributed to the formation of the country's early political culture.

This study highlights the importance of examining local political experiences to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's independence struggle. The findings demonstrate that regional actors and institutions played a crucial role in shaping political developments that cannot be fully explained through national-level narratives alone. Incorporating local perspectives into historical analysis enriches the understanding of how political mobilization, community participation, and institutional adaptation contributed to the survival and consolidation of the Republic during its formative years.

FURTHER STUDY

Future studies should explore comparative analyses of political dynamics across different regions of Indonesia during the independence era to identify similarities and variations in patterns of political mobilization, leadership, and resistance. Researchers may also employ interdisciplinary approaches that integrate political, social, and oral history to capture the experiences of local communities that remain underrepresented in existing scholarship. Such investigations would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between regional political developments and the broader trajectory of Indonesian state formation.

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