



The Idea of Pasundan Province 1926: Between Colonial Decentralization and the Politics of Identity

Mumuh Muhsin Zakaria,^{1*} Abdul Rasyad²

¹Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia

²Universitas Hamzanwadi, Indonesia

*mumuh.muhsin@unpad.ac.id

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Abstract: The idea of establishing the Pasundan Province in 1926 marked a crucial moment in the history of the colonial administration of the Dutch East Indies, bringing together the policy of decentralization (*bestuurshervorming*) with the dynamics of local identity politics. This article analyzes the complexities behind the formation of the Pasundan Province as a response to the colonial elite's fear of the political dominance of a specific ethnic group, as well as a manifestation of the sociopolitical aspirations of the Sundanese people. Utilizing critical historical methods—including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography—this study explores colonial archives, periodical publications (*de Locomotief*, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*), and contemporary local documents. Theoretically, this article applies Furnivall's concept of colonial decentralization alongside modern political sociology theories of identity politics. The novelty of this article lies in its deconstruction of the singular narrative of decentralization; rather than viewing it merely as a matter of bureaucratic efficiency, this study demonstrates that the 1926 Pasundan Province was designed as an instrument of geopolitical engineering to curb nationalist radicalism while mapping ethno-regional boundaries. The findings indicate that the fear of identity politics dominance—both from the colonial government's perspective regarding Pan-Islamism and communism, and the Sundanese elite's anxiety over Javanese cultural dominance—served as the primary catalyst accelerating the realization of this province.

Keywords: colonial decentralization; Dutch East Indies; geopolitical engineering; identity politics; Pasundan Province 1926

Abstrak: Gagasan pendirian Provinsi Pasundan pada tahun 1926 menandai momen krusial dalam sejarah administrasi kolonial Hindia Belanda, yang mempertemukan kebijakan desentralisasi (*bestuurshervorming*) dengan dinamika politik identitas lokal. Artikel ini menganalisis kompleksitas di balik pembentukan Provinsi Pasundan sebagai respons terhadap ketakutan elite kolonial terhadap dominasi politik etnis tertentu, sekaligus manifestasi dari aspirasi sosiopolitik masyarakat Sunda. Menggunakan metode sejarah kritis yang meliputi heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi arsip kolonial, publikasi berkala (*de Locomotief*, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*), dan dokumen lokal sezaman. Secara teoretis, artikel ini menerapkan konsep desentralisasi kolonial dari Furnivall dan teori politik identitas dari sosiologi politik modern. Kebaruan artikel ini terletak pada dekonstruksi narasi tunggal desentralisasi; alih-alih melihatnya semata sebagai efisiensi birokrasi, penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa Provinsi Pasundan 1926 dirancang sebagai instrumen rekayasa geopolitik untuk meredam radikalisme nasionalis sekaligus memetakan batas-batas etno-regional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketakutan akan dominasi politik identitas, baik dari perspektif pemerintah kolonial terhadap gerakan pan-Islamisme dan

komunisme, maupun kecemasan elite Sunda terhadap dominasi budaya Jawa, menjadi katalisator utama yang mempercepat realisasi provinsi ini.

Kata Kunci: desentralisasi kolonial; Hindia Belanda; politik identitas; Provinsi Pasundan 1926; rekayasa geopolitik



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Introduction

The early twentieth century in the Dutch East Indies was marked by a paradigm shift from economic exploitation toward a more modern and systematic administrative order. The Ethical Policy introduced in 1901 not only promoted reforms in education, irrigation, and migration but also stimulated the restructuring of governmental administration through the spirit of decentralization (Ricklefs, 2008). The culmination of this administrative transformation was embodied in the *Bestuurshervormingswet* (Administrative Reform Act) of 1922, which authorized the establishment of autonomous provincial-level administrative units on the island of Java. West Java Province (Provincie West-Java), which was subsequently associated both politically and discursively with the concept of Pasundan Province, was officially established on 1 January 1926 under *Staatsblad* No. 378 of 1925 (Vandenbosch, 1944).

Behind the formal narrative of bureaucratic efficiency, public service modernization, and the redistribution of Batavia's administrative burden, however, the establishment of Pasundan Province concealed a far more complex layer of socio-political tensions. The Priangan region and its surrounding areas, constituting the historical core of Sundanese territory, were not merely geographical spaces but arenas of dynamic identity contestation. Since the era of the *Preangerstelsel* through the abolition of the Cultivation System, this region had been integrated into the global economy, producing a new indigenous elite composed of educated bureaucratic aristocrats (*menak*) and influential Islamic scholars (*santri*) with extensive social networks (Sutherland, 1979).

When the colonial government introduced its decentralization proposal, indigenous public responses were far from homogeneous. On one hand, the colonial administrative elite feared the rapid development of radical identity politics in major urban centers such as Bandung and Batavia. The 1920s represented a critical period during which Sarekat Islam (SI) experienced ideological fragmentation, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) consolidated its mass support among railway and plantation workers, and secular nationalist organizations began to strengthen their political influence (McVey, 1965). For the colonial administration, dividing Java into provinces based on ethno-cultural boundaries was viewed as a preventive strategy to contain the expansion of trans-ethnic anti-colonial solidarity (Nordholt, 2008).

On the other hand, a growing sense of local ethno-nationalism emerged among Sundanese intellectuals themselves. Organizations such as Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan, established in 1913, reflected Sundanese cultural concerns regarding what they perceived as the "Javanization" of the public sector and colonial bureaucracy (Ekadjati, 2004). Sundanese elites believed that important administrative positions within their own region were increasingly occupied by officials originating from Central and East Java, who simultaneously introduced Javanese cultural norms into local governance. Consequently, the proposal for Pasundan Province was received ambivalently: it represented both an unprecedented opportunity to institutionalize Sundanese cultural and political autonomy and a potentially dangerous colonial administrative instrument capable of fragmenting the broader Indonesian nationalist movement.

To examine the complexities surrounding the establishment of Pasundan Province in 1926, this study integrates two principal theoretical perspectives: the theory of colonial decentralization from an institutional political-economy perspective and the theory of identity politics within plural societies.

Conceptually, decentralization in democratic states is generally understood as the transfer of governmental authority from the central government to local administrations in order to improve public services and enhance citizen participation. Within colonial states, however, decentralization served a fundamentally different function. J. S. Furnivall (1944), in his seminal work on plural societies, argued that colonial administrative policies were consistently dictated by the imperatives of economic exploitation and political stability. Colonial decentralization was therefore not designed to promote self-government but rather to increase fiscal efficiency and redistribute administrative risks. As Batavia's financial burden intensified after the First World War, decentralization became an instrument for transferring taxation responsibilities and infrastructure expenditures to newly established regional governments without granting genuine political sovereignty to the indigenous population.

Furthermore, political sociologist Harry J. Benda (1966) argued that the colonial bureaucracy functioned as a *beamtenstaat*—an administratively rational yet politically repressive governing apparatus. From this perspective, the *bestuurshervorming* (administrative reform) of 1922, which resulted in the creation of West Java Province in 1926, should be interpreted as an effort to modernize colonial administration while simultaneously reinforcing mechanisms of social control. Decentralization delegated only technical administrative responsibilities—such as road maintenance, irrigation, and public health—whereas policing, security, and supreme political authority remained firmly under the control of the Governor-General. Through this theoretical lens, Pasundan Province can be understood as an "artificial political space" deliberately constructed to channel local political aspirations into administrative institutions that remained securely under Batavia's supervision.

The internal dynamics of Sundanese society in responding to the establishment of Pasundan Province are analyzed through theories of identity politics alongside the debate between primordialism and constructivism. Clifford Geertz (1973) argued that societies undergoing modernization frequently experience the strengthening of primordial attachments—including ancestry, language, territory, and tradition—as collective responses to anxieties concerning the potential loss of group identity within larger political entities. In West Java during the 1920s, Sundanese identity emerged not merely as a passive effort to preserve cultural traditions but also as a defensive reaction against the dominance of Javanese elites within both court culture and the indigenous administrative bureaucracy (*Inlandsch Bestuur*).

At the same time, this study adopts a constructivist understanding of identity as formulated by Benedict Anderson (1983). Anderson conceptualized political communities as "imagined communities" actively constructed through print capitalism, language, and educational institutions. Accordingly, Pasundan identity in 1926 should not be regarded as a timeless cultural inheritance but rather as a political project consciously developed by educated Sundanese elites associated with Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan. They envisioned the autonomous province as a territorial framework through which a modern, educated, and politically equal Sundanese imagined community could be established alongside other ethnic communities within the Dutch East Indies.

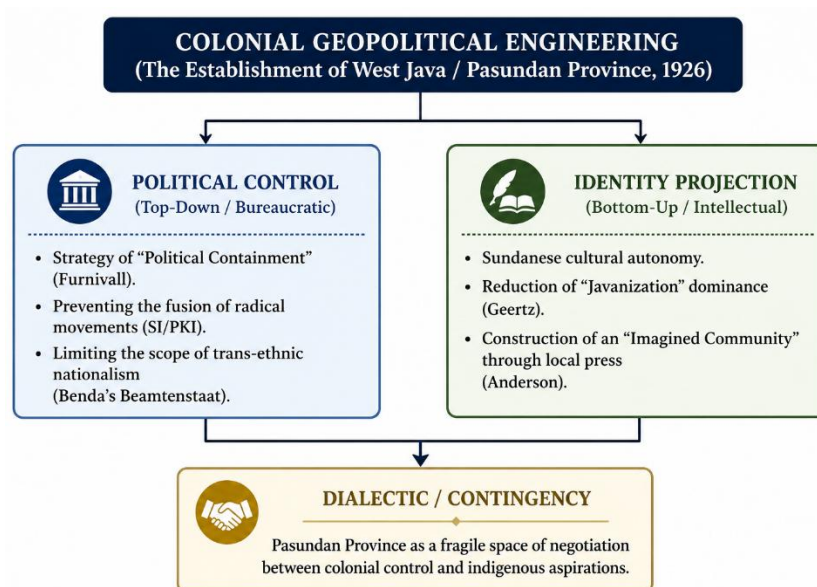


Figure 2. Contestation within the West Java Provincial Council (1926): Colonial Political Containment and Sundanese Elite Mobilization

By synthesizing these two theoretical approaches, this article argues that Pasundan Province represented a fragile intersection between two competing interests: the colonial government's objective of implementing geopolitical fragmentation to preserve political stability through a refined form of divide-and-rule policy, and the aspirations of Sundanese elites, who strategically appropriated colonial institutions to mobilize ethnic-based politics in pursuit of greater cultural recognition and political bargaining power.

Previous scholarship on colonial decentralization in the Dutch East Indies has generally concentrated on constitutional law and macroeconomic history (e.g., Amry, 2010; Cribb, 2000). Conversely, historiographical studies of local ethno-nationalist organizations such as Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan have predominantly been framed within cultural history, portraying the organization primarily as a guardian of Sundanese cultural traditions (Ekadjati, 2004). The originality of this study lies in its deconstruction of these conventional narratives through three major historiographical contributions.

First, this study interprets the establishment of Pasundan Province in 1926 as a deliberate form of colonial geopolitical engineering that exploited ethno-linguistic boundaries to contain the expansion of radical trans-ethnic nationalism. Previous historians have rarely linked the implementation of the *Bestuurshervormingswet* of 1922 in West Java directly to Batavia's concerns over the Communist uprising of 1926 and the radicalization of Sarekat Islam in the Priangan region. This article demonstrates that the creation of the province functioned as an instrument of political containment designed to confine local political activities within ethno-regional boundaries, thereby preventing the emergence of broader anti-colonial movements across Java and the Dutch East Indies.

Second, this article uncovers the political ambivalence of Sundanese identity during the late colonial period. Earlier studies frequently interpreted the relationship between Sundanese elites and the colonial government through a binary framework of resistance versus collaboration. This study offers a more nuanced interpretation by demonstrating that Sundanese elites strategically employed colonial decentralization as a dual-purpose instrument. They collaborated with colonial administrative structures to secure bureaucratic positions against the

perceived dominance of Javanese officials while simultaneously utilizing the *Provinciale Raad* (Provincial Council) as a political arena to criticize colonial economic injustice. Consequently, ethnic identity politics in West Java during the 1920s emerged as fluid, pragmatic, and strategically negotiated rather than ideologically fixed.

Third, this study introduces previously underutilized primary sources, particularly the intensive debates published in the Sundanese newspaper *Sipatahoenan* and the colonial newspaper *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* between 1924 and 1926. Through historical discourse analysis of these newspapers, the study reconstructs the psychological and discursive tensions experienced by both grassroots communities and indigenous intellectuals when "Pasundan" was proposed as the official designation of a colonial province. In doing so, this article fills an important historiographical gap concerning the interaction between macro-level colonial administrative policies and micro-level identity politics within local societies in Indonesia.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the formation of Pasundan Province in 1926. Rather than focusing solely on administrative chronology, it investigates the dialectical relationship between the formal decentralization policies promoted by colonial policymakers within the *Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië* and the political anxieties surrounding ethnic and ideological identity. Through a critical examination of both colonial and indigenous primary sources, this study seeks to explain how decentralization functioned as an instrument of political containment while simultaneously examining how Sundanese society utilized this limited institutional autonomy to assert its cultural existence amid colonial hegemony and the perceived dominance of other ethnic groups.

Research Methods

This study employed the critical historical method, which consists of four principal stages: heuristics, source criticism (verification), interpretation (analysis), and historiography (Gottschalk, 1969). The research adopted a socio-political historical approach by integrating interdisciplinary perspectives from history, political sociology, and colonial public policy studies.

The first stage, heuristics, involved the systematic collection of relevant primary sources. Archival research focused on official documents of the Dutch East Indies government, including *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* (1920–1926), records of the *Algemene Secretarie* preserved at the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia—ANRI), and reports produced by the *Adviseur voor Inlandsche Zaken* (Advisor for Indigenous Affairs). In addition to official government documents, this study extensively examined contemporary newspapers to reconstruct public discourse surrounding the proposed establishment of Pasundan Province. Dutch-language newspapers, including *De Locomotief*, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, and *Indische Gids*, together with Sundanese- and Malay-language newspapers such as *Sipatahoenan* and *Kaoem Moeda* published between 1924 and 1927, were systematically analyzed using digital archival repositories, particularly *Delpher* and the digital collections of the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia.

The second stage involved source criticism. External criticism was conducted to verify the authenticity of archival documents and newspapers through physical examination whenever direct access was available or by validating official digital metadata. Internal criticism was subsequently applied to evaluate the credibility and reliability of the information contained in these sources. Particular attention was given to the inherent bias of official colonial reports, which generally emphasized administrative efficiency while obscuring the political motives underlying the establishment of Pasundan Province. To identify potential class, ethnic, and

ideological biases, colonial administrative perspectives were critically compared with the writings of Sundanese intellectuals published in independent indigenous newspapers.

The third stage consisted of interpretation, during which verified historical evidence was analyzed using the method of historical discourse analysis. The formation of Pasundan Province in 1926 was contextualized within the broader political landscape of the Dutch East Indies in the aftermath of the First World War, particularly in relation to the rapid expansion of left-wing radical movements and political Islam. The concepts of colonial decentralization and identity politics served as the principal analytical frameworks for examining both the underlying motivations of colonial administrative policies and the political rhetoric articulated in contemporary public discourse.

The final stage was historiography, involving the systematic construction of a coherent, analytical, and critical historical narrative. The article is organized into a logical and argumentative structure intended to provide both theoretical and empirical contributions to the historiography of colonial Indonesia, particularly to the study of West Java's local history within its broader national political context..

Research Result

The Political Context of the Dutch East Indies in the 1920s and Colonial Decentralization

The 1920s represented one of the most turbulent periods in the political history of the Dutch East Indies. The organizational consolidation of Sarekat Islam, which had successfully attracted millions of members, combined with the spread of Marxist–Leninist ideology through the *Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging* (ISDV), later transformed into the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), created a highly unstable political environment for the colonial government (McVey, 1965). West Java, characterized by its mountainous geography and its concentration of plantation and railway workers, emerged as one of the principal centers of radical political activity. In urban areas such as Batavia, Bandung, and Cirebon, labor strikes became increasingly frequent, while Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) throughout the Priangan hinterland continued to nurture latent anti-tax and anti-colonial sentiments (Kartodirdjo, 1973).

Confronted with these growing threats to political stability, Governor-General Dirk Fock (1921–1926), whose administration was characterized by strict fiscal austerity (*bezuiniging*), recognized that the highly centralized colonial administrative system based in Batavia had become increasingly ineffective. The central government was no longer capable of responding promptly to local political disturbances, nor could it adequately finance the modernization of regional infrastructure. As a legal solution, the colonial administration implemented the long-prepared *Bestuurshervormingswet* (Administrative Reform Act) of 1922. Under this legislation, the island of Java was divided into three major provinces: West Java, Central Java, and East Java.

The establishment of West Java Province (Provincie West-Java) on 1 January 1926 was formalized through *Staatsblad* No. 378 of 1925. Administratively, the new province incorporated the former Residencies of Banten, Batavia, the *Preangerregentschappen* (Priangan), Karawang, and Cirebon (Vandenbosch, 1944). The provincial government was headed by a Dutch governor and assisted by the *Provinciale Raad* (Provincial Council), whose members represented three officially recognized population groups: Europeans, indigenous Indonesians, and Foreign Orientals (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*) (Vandenbosch, 1944).

Nevertheless, internal documents of the *Algemene Secretarie* reveal that the motivations underlying the establishment of the province extended well beyond administrative efficiency. The colonial authorities deliberately employed territorial reorganization as a strategy to prevent

the spread of radical political ideologies. By grouping regions according to perceived ethnic and cultural similarities, Batavia expected political conflicts to remain geographically localized. Should political unrest occur in West Java, the newly established provincial administration would ideally resolve the disturbance locally without encouraging broader solidarity movements in Central or East Java. In this sense, decentralization functioned as a political safety valve, channeling indigenous political grievances into bureaucratic deliberations within the Provincial Council rather than allowing them to develop into coordinated anti-colonial resistance (Nordholt, 2008).

Menak, Santri, and the Construction of Sundanese Identity

Understanding why the idea of Pasundan Province resonated so strongly throughout West Java requires an examination of Sundanese social structure during the first half of the twentieth century. Broadly speaking, the indigenous elite of the Priangan region consisted of two principal groups that frequently competed with one another while simultaneously sharing a common concern for preserving Sundanese identity: the *menak* (bureaucratic aristocracy) and the *santri* (Islamic religious scholars and their communities) (Lubis, 1998).

The *menak* occupied strategic positions within the *Inlandsch Bestuur* (Native Civil Administration), serving as regents (*bupati*), deputy regents (*patih*), and district heads (*wedana*). From the VOC period through the era of *Pax Nederlandica*, their political legitimacy depended largely upon the support of the Dutch colonial government. However, the increasing appointment of civil servants from Central and East Java—many of whom had benefited from earlier access to modern education—generated growing anxiety among Sundanese aristocrats. They perceived that influential administrative positions within West Java were becoming dominated by Javanese *priyayi*, who introduced their own cultural etiquette, language, and administrative traditions into local governance. This perceived process of "Javanization" encouraged the *menak* to strengthen Sundanese cultural identity as a means of protecting both their bureaucratic positions and their economic interests.

In contrast, the *santri*, whose influence centered on major Islamic boarding schools in Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, and Garut, possessed a much broader grassroots constituency. Unlike the relatively secular and bureaucratic orientation of the *menak*, the *santri* interpreted Sundanese identity primarily through an Islamic framework. For them, being Sundanese was inseparable from being a devout Muslim (Horikoshi, 1976). This group proved highly responsive to issues of social injustice and colonial economic oppression. Their close association with Sarekat Islam transformed many rural areas of West Java into important centers of ideological resistance against colonial rule.

The convergence of the *menak's* cultural concerns and the *santri's* religious activism created fertile conditions for the emergence of modern Sundanese ethno-nationalist organizations, the most prominent of which was Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan, established in 1913. Led initially by educated figures such as Raden Pandji Soeroso and later by Raden Oto Iskandar di Nata, the organization evolved from a cultural association into a significant political force (Ekadjati, 2004). Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan consistently advocated greater political representation for the Sundanese people and demanded that administrative authority in West Java be entrusted to local indigenous officials. Consequently, when the proposal to establish West Java Province was introduced in 1926, the organization interpreted it as a historic opportunity to institutionalize a territorial-political entity officially identified as Pasundan.

Debating "Pasundan" in the Public Sphere: An Analysis of Contemporary Newspapers

The proposal to establish a new province in West Java generated intense intellectual debate in contemporary newspapers. These competing perspectives reflected the diverse ways in which decentralization and identity politics were interpreted by different segments of colonial society. *Sipatahoenan*, the official newspaper of Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan, emerged as the most vocal advocate of Sundanese aspirations. Throughout its editorials published in 1925, the newspaper consistently argued that the new province should officially be named "Pasundan Province" rather than "West Java Province" (Provincie West-Java). According to its editors, the designation "West Java" ignored the existence of the Sundanese people as a culturally and linguistically distinct ethnic community. The name "Pasundan" was therefore presented as an affirmation of the historical and cultural homeland of the Sundanese.

One editorial highlighted the continued dominance of Javanese-speaking indigenous officials in government institutions such as post offices, railway administrations, and customs offices in Bandung. The newspaper consequently demanded that the establishment of the new province be accompanied by policies prioritizing "*oemoet Pasoendan*" (the people of Pasundan) in civil service recruitment (*Sipatahoenan*, 1925). Thus, the debate over provincial nomenclature was closely connected to broader concerns regarding political representation, bureaucratic access, and cultural recognition.

Conversely, Dutch-language newspapers representing the perspectives of the colonial administration and the European community—including *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* and *De Locomotief*—approached the proposal for the official designation "Pasundan" with skepticism and concern. Colonial officials feared that institutionalizing the name "Pasundan" as an official administrative entity would encourage exclusive ethnic consciousness and ultimately complicate Batavia's political control over the region. Reports prepared by the *Adviseur voor Inlandsche Zaken* (Advisor for Indigenous Affairs) warned that granting formal institutional recognition to Sundanese identity might generate resentment among other ethnic communities residing within the proposed province, including the Chinese population of Batavia and Tangerang, as well as Javanese-speaking communities in Cirebon, each possessing distinct linguistic and historical identities (*Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 1925).

Criticism also emerged from left-wing and radical nationalist circles. *Kaoem Moeda*, a newspaper closely associated with radical factions within Sarekat Islam, argued that an excessive emphasis on regional identity—framed as Pasundan versus Java—constituted a sophisticated colonial trap. Its editors interpreted the colonial government's willingness to grant regional autonomy as an extension of the classic *divide et impera* strategy. From the perspective of radical nationalists, the principal enemy remained Western colonial capitalism. Consequently, dividing Java into ethnically based provinces was viewed as a calculated attempt to weaken the emerging national movement led by prominent figures such as Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and Soekarno (*Kaoem Moeda*, 1925).

The newspaper debates therefore reveal that the establishment of West Java Province was not merely an administrative reform but also a contested political discourse concerning identity, representation, and the future direction of Indonesian nationalism. Competing interpretations of "Pasundan" reflected broader struggles over ethnicity, colonial authority, and the meaning of national unity during the late colonial period.

Identity Politics: Between Colonial Anxiety and Sundanese Aspirations

When West Java Province was officially established in 1926, political developments within the *Provinciale Raad* (Provincial Council) demonstrated that this newly created administrative institution rapidly evolved into an arena of identity-based political contestation.

Colonial fears concerning identity politics were partially confirmed, although not in the form of ethnic rebellion. Instead, identity politics became an instrument of sophisticated electoral mobilization employed by the Sundanese elite (Mukrimin, 2018; Santoso, 2011).

The colonial government initially expected that the Provincial Council—whose membership consisted of representatives from European, indigenous, and Chinese communities—would create a balanced political structure in which indigenous representatives remained divided, thereby allowing the European minority to retain effective control over strategic decision-making (Vandenbosch, 1944). Contrary to these expectations, however, the first Provincial Council election in West Java resulted in a decisive victory for Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan within the indigenous electoral bloc. Prominent leaders such as Oto Iskandar di Nata transformed the council into an increasingly assertive political platform.

Within the Provincial Council, Sundanese identity politics gradually shifted beyond opposition to Javanese bureaucratic dominance. Instead, it became a vehicle for exposing structural inequalities embedded within the colonial political economy. Sundanese representatives demanded increased budget allocations for Sundanese-language primary education, improvements in sanitation within indigenous settlements, and reductions in land taxes that imposed heavy burdens upon Priangan farmers. Consequently, the identity politics initially feared by the colonial administration as a potentially divisive and parochial movement evolved into a sophisticated form of parliamentary resistance against colonial inequality.



Figure 2. Dialectical Contestation between Dutch Colonial Political Containment and Sundanese Elite Mobilization in the West Java Provincial Council (1926).

This transformation illustrates the flexibility of identity politics within colonial society. Rather than serving merely as a mechanism for ethnic exclusivity, Sundanese identity became a strategic political resource through which local elites articulated broader demands for social justice, educational reform, and equitable economic development (Nordholt, 2008; Mukrimin, 2018).

Nevertheless, concerns regarding the potentially divisive consequences of identity politics also emerged within West Java itself. The regions of Cirebon and Banten demonstrated varying degrees of resistance toward the growing political dominance of the Priangan-centered conception of "Pasundan." The people of Cirebon, whose historical background was closely associated with the Cirebon Sultanate and whose language exhibited strong affinities with

Javanese, were reluctant to become incorporated into a province culturally dominated by the Sundanese aristocratic traditions of Priangan (Lubis, 1998).

These internal tensions provide empirical support for Furnivall's theory concerning the fragile nature of integration within plural societies. As one ethnic community attempted to institutionalize its political identity, neighboring communities simultaneously experienced anxieties regarding the emergence of new forms of cultural and political domination. Ultimately, the establishment of Pasundan Province in 1926 revealed a profound political paradox. For the colonial administration, decentralization constituted a sociopolitical experiment intended to contain radical nationalism by fragmenting indigenous political solidarity along regional and ethnic lines. For Sundanese elites, however, the same colonial institution represented an unprecedented opportunity to legitimize their cultural identity and construct a formal political base. During the following decade, this regional political identity gradually transcended ethnic boundaries and became increasingly integrated into the broader Indonesian nationalist movement.

The Contemporary Movement to Rename West Java Province as "Pasundan Province": History Repeating Itself

The proposal to rename West Java Province as Pasundan Province is far more than a temporary political discourse within Indonesia's regional politics. Rather, it represents the continuation of a cultural, sociological, and historical movement that has repeatedly resurfaced from the colonial period through the early years of Indonesian independence and into the post-Reformasi era. In October 2020, this discourse regained prominence when Sundanese intellectuals, cultural leaders, and academics affiliated with the Mufakat Komunitas Sunda convened a congress in Bandung. During the meeting, they publicly urged the central government and the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI) to replace the name West Java with either Pasundan or Tatar Sunda.

From an administrative and geographical perspective, the designation West Java reflects a centralized colonial geopolitical framework based solely on cardinal directions. This nomenclature originated directly from the colonial territorial division of West Java Province (Provinsie West-Java) established by the Dutch East Indies government in 1925 (Ricklefs, 2008). Advocates of the renaming movement argue that the term West Java reduces the historical and cultural identity of the Sundanese people, who constitute the dominant indigenous population of the region. A geographical designation alone, they contend, fails to represent the philosophical values, collective memory, and cultural heritage of a civilization that existed long before the emergence of the modern Indonesian nation-state.

Historically, the terms Tatar Sunda and Pasundan referred to the territories formerly governed by the Sunda and Galuh kingdoms (Lubis, 2003). Anthropologically, these regions possess distinctive linguistic traditions (basa Sunda), customary legal systems, social values, and cultural worldviews that differentiate them from the Javanese cultural sphere of Central and East Java (Ekadjati, 1995). During the early twentieth century, modern Sundanese political consciousness was institutionalized through the establishment of Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan in 1913. The organization pursued educational, social, economic, and political objectives while striving to improve the social standing of the Sundanese people under colonial domination and amid the perceived cultural influence of other ethnic communities (Kartodirdjo, 1993).

The politics of Sundanese identity reached its most controversial stage during the Indonesian Revolution. Amid the conflict between Republican forces and the Allied-Dutch military administration, the Partai Rakyat Pasundan (PRP) under Raden Soeria Kartalegawa proclaimed the establishment of the State of Pasundan on 4 May 1947. The state was

subsequently incorporated into the federal structure of the Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RIS) in 1948, with Raden Aria Adipati Wiranatakoesoema V serving as its president (Kahin, 1952).

Although the Dutch-sponsored State of Pasundan was dissolved in March 1950, public memory of a political entity officially bearing the name Pasundan has never entirely disappeared (Schiller, 1955). Its historical legacy remains highly ambivalent. Indonesian nationalists generally regarded the state as a colonial puppet created through the Dutch divide et impera strategy. Conversely, many Sundanese intellectuals consider it historical evidence that the name Pasundan possesses significant geopolitical and historical legitimacy within western Java (Suryanegara, 2010).

Supporters of the renaming movement consistently frame their argument within the broader concept of the decolonization of toponymy. According to this perspective, the designation West Java represents a colonial administrative label that neglects indigenous cultural identity and local historical consciousness (Abdullah, 1987). When the Dutch East Indies government implemented the Bestuurs hervorming reforms following the Administrative Reform Act of 1922, Java was divided into several provinces to facilitate bureaucratic control and economic administration. The western region was consequently designated Provincie West-Java (Ricklefs, 2008). Following Indonesian independence, this colonial nomenclature was retained through Law No. 11 of 1950 concerning the Establishment of West Java Province (Asshiddiqie, 2006).

From the perspective of cultural sociology, maintaining the name West Java is interpreted as preserving a colonial worldview that overlooks the original cultural identity of the indigenous population (Moriyama, 2005). Advocates of renaming therefore argue that restoring the name Pasundan Province possesses a level of historical and moral legitimacy comparable to previous state decisions replacing colonial place names, such as Batavia with Jakarta, Ujung Pandang with Makassar, Kutaraja with Banda Aceh, and Irian Jaya with Papua (Asshiddiqie, 2006).

Despite these historical and cultural arguments, contemporary West Java presents a considerably more complex sociological reality. Today the province is Indonesia's most populous province, with more than fifty million inhabitants representing diverse ethnic backgrounds. This demographic complexity has generated substantial debate concerning the proposal to adopt the name Pasundan.

Anthropologically and culturally, West Java is far from ethnically homogeneous. The province may be broadly divided into three principal cultural regions:

1. The Priangan Cultural Region (Core Sundanese Area): encompassing Bandung, Garut, Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, Sumedang, Cianjur, and Sukabumi, where Sundanese language and Priangan cultural traditions remain dominant.
2. The Cirebon Coastal Cultural Region: including Cirebon, Indramayu, eastern Subang, and parts of Majalengka, characterized by a distinctive cultural synthesis of Sundanese, Javanese, and maritime influences.
3. The Betawi–Malay Cultural Region: covering Depok, Bekasi, and northern Bogor, whose cultural orientation is generally closer to Betawi traditions than to classical Sundanese culture.

The proposal to rename the province has encountered both explicit and implicit resistance, particularly from communities along the northern coastal region, especially Cirebon and Indramayu. Many residents perceive the designation Pasundan as excessively Sundanese-centered and potentially marginalizing the historical identities of non-Sundanese communities that have coexisted within West Java for centuries.

Concerns regarding possible bureaucratic "Sundanization" and the increasing dominance of Sundanese cultural symbols have encouraged defensive counter-discourses. Community leaders from the northern coastal region have warned that if the renaming proposal is implemented without broad regional consensus, the Ciayumajakuning region (Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka, and Kuningan) may intensify demands for the establishment of a separate Cirebon Province.

Comparative Analysis of the Cultural Regions of West Java

To illustrate the sociocultural diversity underlying this debate, Table 1 summarizes the principal characteristics of the major cultural regions within contemporary West Java.

Table 1. Comparative Characteristics of the Cultural Regions of West Java

Cultural Region	Principal Areas	Primary Linguistic Identity	Position toward the Name "Pasundan"	Potential Geopolitical Implications
Priangan (Core Sundanese Region)	Bandung, Garut, Tasikmalaya, Sumedang, Cianjur, Sukabumi	Sundanese Language (Priangan Dialect)	Strongly supportive (initiators of the movement)	Strengthening the integration of Sundanese culture and revitalizing local philosophical values.
Northern Coastal Region (Cirebonese Area)	Cirebon, Indramayu, Eastern Subang	Cirebonese Language / Coastal Sundanese	Opposed / Resistant (perceiving cultural marginalization)	Potentially encourages regional fragmentation and stimulates demands for the establishment of a separate Cirebon Province.
Betawi–Malay Region	Depok, Bekasi, Northern Bogor	Betawi Language / Indonesian	Neutral / Indifferent (predominantly pragmatic)	Limited cultural implications but raises concerns regarding bureaucratic representation and administrative balance.

Source: Author's synthesis based on historical and anthropological literature

Within Indonesia's constitutional framework, changing the official name of a province is legally possible but requires a lengthy legislative process supported by broad political consensus. The principal legal foundation governing such changes is Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government (Asshiddiqie, 2006). The contemporary proposal to rename West Java as Pasundan Province therefore represents the continuation of a historical cycle of cultural dissatisfaction with colonial administrative nomenclature. On one hand, the movement possesses strong historical and cultural legitimacy as an effort to preserve Sundanese heritage in the face of globalization and national cultural homogenization. As a peaceful expression of ethno-cultural identity, such aspirations constitute a legitimate component of democratic political participation.

On the other hand, contemporary West Java is an exceptionally diverse multicultural province. Renaming the province without securing broad consensus among its major cultural communities—including the Priangan Sundanese, the Cirebonese, and the Betawi population—could unintentionally intensify regional divisions. Rather than fostering unity, the designation Pasundan might stimulate demands for further territorial fragmentation through the creation of new autonomous provinces. Consequently, although the name West Java may appear culturally

neutral, secular, and rooted in colonial administrative traditions, it continues to function as the most inclusive geopolitical designation capable of accommodating the province's remarkable ethnic and cultural diversity.

Conclusion

The establishment of West Java Province in 1926, together with the proposal for Pasundan Province, illustrates the complex interaction between colonial decentralization and identity politics in the Dutch East Indies. Rather than representing a purely administrative reform, the creation of the province emerged from a dynamic dialectic between the colonial government's top-down strategy of political control and the bottom-up aspirations of the Sundanese elite. From the colonial perspective, the Bestuurshormingswet of 1922 functioned as an instrument of geopolitical engineering and political containment. By dividing Java into ethnically defined administrative units, the colonial state sought to fragment radical nationalist movements, limit trans-ethnic political solidarity, and strengthen bureaucratic control. However, the implementation of decentralization produced unintended political consequences.

Educated Sundanese elites, particularly those associated with Pagoeyoeban Pasoendan, appropriated the new provincial institutions to advance their own political agenda. Initially motivated by concerns over the perceived "Javanization" of the colonial bureaucracy, they transformed Pasundan identity into a vehicle for political representation, advocating greater educational funding, fiscal autonomy, improved public welfare, and reduced colonial economic burdens. Consequently, identity politics evolved beyond ethnic exclusivism into a pragmatic strategy for political negotiation and institutional participation.

The contemporary movement to rename West Java as Pasundan Province demonstrates the enduring legacy of these colonial-era debates. While the proposal reflects legitimate aspirations for cultural recognition and the decolonization of regional toponymy, it also highlights the challenges of accommodating diverse ethnic and cultural identities within a pluralistic province. Any future policy concerning regional identity should therefore be based on inclusive democratic deliberation. Overall, the Pasundan case demonstrates that colonial decentralization not only reinforced imperial control but also created institutional spaces that enabled indigenous elites to negotiate political authority, redefine cultural identity, and contribute to the broader development of Indonesian nationalism. It thus reveals identity politics as both a product of colonial governance and a catalyst for political transformation.

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