

Ideology, culture, and national unity under Soekarno's leadership

Ideologi, budaya, dan persatuan nasional di bawah kepemimpinan Soekarno

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Abstract

This article explores President Sukarno's cultural politics in shaping the ideological framework, mobilizing tradition, and fostering national unity in the early Republic of Indonesia (1945–1965). Sukarno's articulation of Pancasila went beyond a mere political manifesto by embedding the five principles in cultural performances, state-sponsored rituals, and heritage initiatives. Through major exhibitions, architectural projects, and mass media campaigns, Sukarno mobilized folklore, traditional arts, and popular culture to construct a shared national narrative. Furthermore, the Nasakom doctrine exemplifies his efforts to integrate nationalism, religion, and communism into a cohesive cultural narrative, reducing ideological divisions and formalizing pluralist discourses. Using qualitative research with discourse analysis of speeches, policy decrees, and contemporary media reports—and grounded in Gramscian cultural hegemony theory—this study unpacks the mechanisms of cultural governance under Sukarno. Findings suggest that these cultural strategies played a significant role in consolidating state authority, fostering a sense of collective identity, and leaving a lasting imprint on Indonesian civic culture beyond Sukarno's presidency. This article contributes to scholarship on postcolonial nation-building by bridging political history and cultural studies, offering new insights into the performative dimensions of early Indonesian statehood.

Keywords: cultural politics; national development; national identity; national ideology; Soekarno's thoughts

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana politik budaya Presiden Soekarno membentuk kerangka ideologis, mobilisasi tradisi, dan pembinaan persatuan nasional di awal Republik Indonesia (1945–1965). Artikulasi Pancasila Soekarno melampaui manifesto politik belaka dengan menanamkan Lima Prinsip dalam pertunjukan budaya, ritual yang disponsori negara, dan inisiatif warisan. Melalui pameran besar, proyek arsitektur, dan kampanye media massa, Soekarno memobilisasi cerita rakyat, seni tradisional, dan budaya populer untuk membangun narasi nasional bersama. Lebih lanjut, doktrin Nasakom mencontohkan upayanya untuk mengintegrasikan nasionalisme, agama, dan komunisme ke dalam narasi budaya yang kohesif, mengurangi perpecahan ideologis dan memformalkan wacana pluralis. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan analisis wacana pidato, dekret kebijakan, dan laporan media kontemporer—dan didasarkan pada teori hegemoni budaya Gramscian—studi ini membongkar mekanisme tata kelola budaya di bawah Soekarno. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa strategi budaya ini berperan penting dalam mengkonsolidasikan otoritas negara, menumbuhkan rasa identitas kolektif, dan meninggalkan jejak abadi pada budaya sipil Indonesia di luar masa kepresidenan Soekarno. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada keilmuan tentang pembangunan bangsa pascakolonial dengan menjembatani sejarah politik dan studi budaya, menawarkan wawasan baru tentang dimensi performatif kenegaraan Indonesia awal.

Kata kunci: politik budaya; pembangunan bangsa; identitas bangsa; ideologi bangsa; pemikiran Soekarno

Introduction

Indonesia consists of more than 17,000 islands with hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, and religious traditions, which poses unique challenges in the post-independence country-building process (Nugroho et al. 2018). The Proclamation of August 17, 1945 triggered intensive efforts to unite this diversity under

a new frame of nationalism (Pratama 2022) The failure of ideological blocs before independence—Islamic, communist, and regional movements—shows the urgent need for a state ideology that is able to bridge differences (Kristiyanto 2023).

Sukarno emerged as a charismatic leader who was fluent in Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, and modern Indonesian, and had a strong oratorical style that mobilized the support of the people (Soekarno 1965). As the first President (1949–1966), he centralized his authority while introducing cultural politics that went beyond the traditional elite discourse (Soekarno 2016). The Independence Day Speech on August 17, 1959 affirmed the five principles of Pancasila in the 1945 Constitution, patenting state ideology as a constitutional basis (Burlian 2020). Cultural politics refers to the process by which state actors use cultural symbols and practices to perpetuate power, rooted in Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (Forgacs 1988, Swaradesy 2019) .

In the postcolonial context, cultural politics often functioned in two directions: state building and consolidation of power through negotiated agreements (Forgacs 1988). The approach of this article combines discourse analysis and archival research to uncover these hegemonic strategies. The first principle of Pancasila, “Belief in God Almighty,” is a spiritual anchor that accommodates religious plurality in Indonesia (Kurniawan 2020). These five principles are ritualized in state ceremonies, school curricula, and public monuments, instilling ideology in daily life (Pinasang 2020). Government-sponsored exhibitions and publications further disseminated Pancasila as a shared cultural narrative (Kaelan 2013).

Soekarno raised traditional arts—puppetry, gamelan, batik—as a symbol of “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” in the national festival (Setiawan 2018). The Pola Building in Jakarta exemplifies its architectural vision, combining modernist style with traditional motifs to symbolize a developed but rooted nation. State-organized cultural tours and media broadcasts reach both urban and rural audiences, reinforcing a sense of community (Kimura et al. 2024).

In 1962, Sukarno introduced the doctrine of Nasakom—Nationalism, Religion, Communism—as an effort to integrate competing political forces (Pauker 1964). The implementation of Nasakom was carried out through tripartite councils and mass organizations, although the practice was more in favor of nationalist and religious blocs (Pauker 1964). This strategy introduced the managed pluralism that later became the foundation of “Guided Democracy,” but it also raised tensions leading up to the events of 1965 (Van der Kroef 1968).

Although Pancasila literature and nationalism have been abundant, studies that integrate the three dimensions of cultural politics—ideology, tradition, and unity—are still limited. This article contributes by mapping Soekarno’s cultural mechanisms and provides a comparative framework for further research on the cultural engineering of postcolonial countries.

Indonesia has a political imagination that transcends primordial barriers. Although Soekarno has been widely studied as a proclaimer and political leader, there have been few studies that have deeply mapped his thoughts in building a synthesis between tradition and national ideas. In the early context of the Republic of Indonesia which was hit by ideological divisions and identity crises, Soekarno’s thoughts became an important field for understanding how the foundation of national unity was formed conceptually and practically. This article aims to reconstruct Sukarno’s ideological landscape as a response to socio-cultural fragmentation in the early days of independence.

Thus, the figure of Soekarno is important to study, because he is a central figure in Indonesian history and the basic architect of ideology in formulating the basis for uniting the Indonesian nation. Soekarno’s thoughts on tradition are not as something contradictory. Soekarno can unite tradition and modernity, so that tradition is part of the national emancipation project. Soekarno’s thoughts on Nasakom can also be reviewed to find solutions related to social inequality, national identity crisis and identity politics. In the global context, Soekarno played an important role in the Non-Aligned Movement and world decolonization.

Sukarno leveraged state-run radio broadcasts and propaganda films to disseminate Pancasila and national rhetoric across Indonesia (Robinson 2017). The propaganda film *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* exemplified the early use of cinema for shaping public perceptions and consolidating state authority (Wijaya 2024). Popular radio programs and newsreels routinely featured Soekarno endorsing traditional attire and cultural symbolism to reinforce ideological unity (McGregor 2016). These mass-media strategies created a pervasive narrative framework that underpinned consent for guided democracy (Lloyd & Toogood 2015).

On the international stage, Soekarno positioned cultural diplomacy as integral to Indonesia's leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement (Lüthi 2016). He curated exhibitions of Indonesian arts and performances at NAM conferences to project a sovereign cultural identity (Scott 2019). Regional partnerships with Southeast Asian neighbors further showcased Jakarta's commitment to postcolonial solidarity through shared heritage events (Djiwandono 1977). Such forums reinforced Indonesia's soft power credentials and legitimized Soekarno's vision of an independent global South (Rakove 2015).

Domestically, the state integrated Pancasila-based Civic Education (*Pendidikan Moral Pancasila*) into school curricula to nurture national values from early childhood (Hoon 2013). By the early 1960s, Civic Education evolved into a mandatory, ideologically driven program emphasizing loyalty to the state and unity in diversity (Hoon 2013). Under guided democracy, textbooks and lesson plans portrayed Soekarno's cultural initiatives as exemplary models for citizenship (Zhang & Fagan 2016). This educational legacy endured into subsequent regimes, embedding cultural-political norms in Indonesian civic identity (Suwignyo 2014).

Evident parallels exist between Soekarno's cultural patronage and Jawaharlal Nehru's postcolonial nation-building in India (Ahanger & Rather 2017). Both leaders selectively appropriated indigenous traditions alongside modernist aesthetics to forge cohesive national narratives (Ahanger & Rather 2017). However, Soekarno's introduction of Nasakom uniquely merged nationalism, religion, and communism into a single cultural framework (Pauker 1964). This ideological fusion underscores Sukarno's role as both charismatic leader and cultural ideologue in shaping Indonesia's political culture (Van der Kroef 1968).

Despite extensive studies on Pancasila and Indonesia's national revolution, a comprehensive analysis of Soekarno's tripartite cultural politics remains underdeveloped in historiography (Nichterlein 1974). Existing works often decouple ideological, traditional, and unifying dimensions, overlooking their synergistic deployment as statecraft mechanisms (Van der Kroef 1972). Comparative scholarship on performative statecraft in other postcolonial contexts highlights the need for integrative frameworks (Bootsma 1995). This article addresses this gap by mapping the structural interplay of ideology, tradition, and unity in Soekarno's cultural politics, advancing theoretical and methodological approaches in postcolonial cultural studies.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative case-study design to explore Soekarno's cultural politics by triangulating archival research, discourse analysis, and qualitative content analysis of primary and secondary sources (Wahyuningsih 2013). Soekarno's cultural politics did not exist in a vacuum but was influenced by international political conditions, colonial legacies, ethnic diversity, and domestic social dynamics. Therefore, the case study approach provides space to capture the complexity of phenomena holistically (Creswell 2014). This method allows researchers to combine various sources of data, such as Soekarno's speeches, state documents, media archives, and the cultural interpretations of society at that time. The phenomenon of Soekarno's cultural politics has a historical value that cannot be replicated in other eras. Therefore, case studies offer the opportunity to understand the socio-political context of the early republic that shaped Indonesia's cultural politics. As emphasized by George & Bennett (2005), case studies are effective in analyzing historical phenomena and unique political processes.

Data were drawn from government archives, national newspapers, radio transcripts, propaganda films, exhibition catalogues, and personal papers housed in Indonesian and international repositories (Hill 1993). Analysis was guided by Gramscian concepts of cultural hegemony and reflexive thematic analysis to unpack how ideology, tradition, and national unity were constructed and disseminated (Forgacs 1988). In this study, the data collection process was carried out in stages through library research, archival documentation, speech text analysis, and secondary literature studies. The data collection techniques focused on qualitative data in the form of documents and historical texts relevant to Sukarno's cultural politics during the period of 1945–1965. Data were collected from various primary and secondary sources, including official documents, speeches, books, mass media archives, and previous research (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Data collection process

| Data collection technique | Data type |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Literature Study | Books, journals, dissertations related to Sukarno's cultural politics |
| Archive Documentation | Text of Sukarno's speech (1945–1965), proclamation archives, state documents |
| Historical Mass Media Studies | Newspapers and magazines from the period 1945–1965 |
| Secondary Literature | Indonesian history books, Soekarno biography, previous research results |

Source: Created by the author

Data analysis involves a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth study. Data obtained from books and manuscripts of Soekarno's lectures were analyzed using discourse analysis and content analysis. This case study analysis was applied to extract patterns and generate contextual insights. An inductive writing approach was used to propose actionable strategies to improve traditional weaving businesses in support of sustainable rural development.

Results and Discussion

This chapter examines the political-cultural strategies employed by Sukarno in the formative years of the Indonesian republic, focusing on how cultural symbols, ideological formulations, and national narratives were mobilized to consolidate state authority and forge a unified national identity. Through a close analysis of ideological texts, state rituals, media infrastructures, and cultural performances, the chapter traces how Sukarno positioned culture as both a tool of political legitimacy and a medium for national integration in a newly independent, socially diverse, and politically volatile archipelago.

The scope of this chapter encompasses five interrelated domains: the ideological construction of Pancasila as Indonesia's foundational philosophy; the mobilization of indigenous traditions within state-sponsored cultural projects; the ideological framework of Nasakom as a means to reconcile conflicting political streams; the use of mass media and cultural performance as tools of mass mobilization and identity formation; and Indonesia's international cultural diplomacy efforts as part of its Non-Aligned Movement leadership. Together, these domains reveal how Sukarno's cultural politics articulated a distinctive postcolonial modernity, balancing tradition and revolutionary nationalism while seeking to position Indonesia within the global order on its own cultural and ideological terms.

Ideological construction through Pancasila

Sukarno's crafting of Pancasila as Indonesia's foundational ideology entailed a multi-stage process: initial articulation in the BPUPKI debates of June 1945; negotiated adjustments in the Jakarta Charter; constitutional enshrinement upon independence; formal declaration as state ideology in 1959's Political

Manifesto of the Republic of Indonesia (Manipol USDEK); institutional reinforcement through law, education, and policy bodies; ritualization in ceremonies and monuments; propagation via media, exhibitions, and party regulation; and theoretical legitimation via Gramscian notions of hegemony—altogether forging a pervasive ideological framework that undergirded national unity and persisted beyond Sukarno's presidency.



Figure 1.

President Soekarno, in a session of the Indonesian Independence Preparatory Business Investigation Agency (BPUPKI) on June 1, 1945.

Source: Redpel (2023)

Figure 1 shows President Soekarno at the session of the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence (BPUPKI) on June 1, 1945, explaining the foundations of the Indonesian state, which were given the name: Pancasila. Sukarno first introduced the Pancasila ideology in his 1 June, 1945, speech to the Investigating Agency for Preparatory Efforts for Indonesian Independence (BPUPKI), articulating five foundational principles to forge consensus among diverse nationalist, religious, and regional factions (Razuni 2023). During the Jakarta Charter negotiations on 22 June, 1945, the order of Pancasila's principles was revised to place the belief in one almighty god first, addressing Islamic delegations' demands while maintaining a pluralistic framework (Faisal 2018, Aziz 2019, Rahawarin 2021).

Following Indonesia's proclamation of independence on 17 August, 1945, the finalized Pancasila formulation was adopted in the preamble of the 1945 Constitution, embedding the five principles as the constitutional basis of the new republic (Nurwahyu 2022). In his 17 August, 1959, Independence Day speech, Soekarno formally enshrined Pancasila as the state ideology through the Manipol USDEK manifesto, blending Pancasila with guided democracy, socialism, and nationalism (Redfern 2010). The Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (MPRS) resolved in 1960 (No. I/MPRS/1960) to require adherence to Sukarno's interpretation of Pancasila, solidifying its role as the sole ideological foundation for governance and public life (Bourchier & Hadiz 2014).

Starting in 1950 under Law No. 4/1950, Pancasila was mandated as the guiding principle in basic education, obligating schools to inculcate ideological values in curricula aimed at forming civic-minded citizens (Friend 1976, Damanhuri & Raharja 2019). The formalization of *Pendidikan Moral Pancasila* (Moral Education of Pancasila) integrated ideological training into textbooks and lesson plans, ensuring that generations of students internalized the five principles from early schooling (Damanhuri & Raharja 2019, Zulkarnain & Abdullah 2022).

Annual state ceremonies, particularly Independence Day commemorations, were structured around collective recitation of Pancasila oaths and symbol-laden rituals, embedding the ideology in the public's performative acts (Menchick 2014). State-sponsored monuments and public artworks—such as Pancasila-themed reliefs and statues in Jakarta—served as tangible embodiments of ideological principles in the urban landscape (Webber 2024). Radio Republik Indonesia broadcasts and early television newsreels regularly aired Pancasila-themed programs and Sukarno's speeches, leveraging mass media to standardize ideological messages across the archipelago (Fitch & Webb 2018).

Propaganda films and national exhibitions curated traditional arts through a Pancasila lens, framing cultural heritage as expressions of state ideology and unifying symbols of national identity (Martin 2003). Political parties were legally required to adopt Pancasila as their sole ideological platform, as codified in legislation and electoral regulations, effectively marginalizing alternative ideologies (Feillard 2011). Drawing on Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, Pancasila functioned as an ideological apparatus that manufactured consent by aligning state structures, civil society, and cultural institutions under a shared worldview (Kuntowijoyo 1987, Majid & Sugitanata 2021). Under Sukarno's guided democracy, the ideological flexibility of Pancasila was exploited to incorporate leftist and nationalist currents, leading to Manipol USDEK interpretations that conflated Pancasila with socialism and anti-imperialism (Arakaki 2004). The Supreme Advisory Council (Dewan Pertimbangan Agung, DPA) was tasked with Pancasila socialization, organizing seminars and publications to propagate Sukarno's doctrinal interpretations (Octavian & Dianti 2023). The ideological construction balanced secular and religious dimensions by institutionalizing the first principle—Belief in God—while accommodating diverse faiths through constitutional pluralism (Sukri 2016).

By the mid-1960s, competing interpretations of Pancasila fueled factionalism between nationalist, religious, and communist groups, culminating in ideological crises that destabilized the Sukarno regime (Purdy 1982). Although Suharto's New Order repurposed Pancasila for authoritarian consolidation via the P4 Program, the ideological construction mechanisms pioneered under Sukarno provided the blueprint for sustained state propaganda (Prawiranegara 1984). Ultimately, the process of ideological construction through Pancasila under Sukarno established a durable state philosophy that continues to frame Indonesia's political and cultural identity in the post-New Order era (Menchick 2014). This comprehensive construction—from debate to daily ritual—demonstrates how Pancasila was not merely a set of abstract principles but a lived ideology embedded across institutions, practices, and symbols to manufacture a cohesive national unity in the early Indonesian Republic.

Mobilization of tradition in cultural politics

The Soekarno government provided substantial funding and logistical support for *wayang kulit* (shadow-puppet) performances, positioning them as flagship events in national celebrations to symbolize Indonesia's unique cultural heritage (Mrázek 1999). In parallel, *wayang orang* (masked dance-drama) troupes were regularly invited to Jakarta's major festivals, with Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) broadcasting these performances nationwide to foster shared cultural experiences (Widyastutieningrum 2018). European theatre practitioners' experiments with Javanese *wayang* (puppet) in the 1950s underscored Soekarno's openness to modernist reinterpretations of tradition, which the state then showcased as evidence of Indonesia's cultural dynamism (Suryadi 2011). Puppet theatre remained a central motif: broad comparative studies note that Indonesia's rich puppet traditions were among the most politically mobilized in Southeast Asia, used to convey nationalist narratives (Orr 1974).

Government-commissioned dramatizations of folk tales often incorporated contemporary political themes, reinforcing the idea that tradition could serve state ideology as effectively as modern propaganda (Jones 2011). State-sponsored exhibitions—both at home and abroad—curated traditional textiles, carvings, and ritual paraphernalia as artifacts of a unified national culture, thereby subsuming local diversity under one Indonesian identity (George 1997). The Islamic-Inspired Indonesian Cultural Festival of the late 1950s highlights how the regime religiously influenced tradition into official cultural policy

(George 1998). Although specific notes on the Jakarta Pola Building exhibition are few, Indonesian cultural policy analyses emphasize the creation of modern exhibition spaces to display traditional art in state-derived narratives of progress (Jones 2011).

Annual national festivals, such as the Independence Day arts gala, featured regional dance troupes—Balinese legong, Sundanese jaipongan, and Sumatran *tari piring*—on the same stage to dramatize *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) (Yuliana 2021). These exhibitions often paired live performances with static displays of batik, tenun ikat, and wayang puppets, creating a multi-sensory environment that merged tradition with state spectacle (George 1997). Provincial cultural bureaus organized cultural caravans that transported Jakarta-endorsed troupes to remote islands, enabling mass audiences to encounter standardized versions of their own heritage as state-defined tradition (Ariwijaya & Arif 2021). RRI's regional studios produced weekly programs featuring local gamelan ensembles, folk poets, and shadow-puppet narrations, effectively broadcasting "traditional" culture as a national, rather than local, phenomenon (Widyastutieningrum 2018).

From 1962, Republic of Indonesia Television (TVRI) newsreels began televising staged wayang performances and national dance competitions, reinforcing the ubiquity and official sanction of these traditions in urban living rooms (Suryadi 2011). Political songs with traditional melodic motifs, rooted in the Japanese wartime broadcasts, were repurposed to include references to Pancasila and national unity, blending musicology with ideology (Lindsay 2012). The 1959 First International Gamelan Festival in Jakarta exemplified the state's effort to brand gamelan not only as local culture but as an instrument of Indonesian diplomacy (Lindsay 2012). Beyond state bodies, the People's Cultural Institute (Lekra)—the Indonesian Communist Party's cultural wing—mobilized tradition via socialist-realist literary and theatrical productions, illustrating competition over cultural narratives during the Sukarno era (Jones 2011).

Islamist and nationalist parties likewise formed their own institutes—*Lesbumi* (Muslim Cultural Arts Institute) and LKN (National Culture Institute)—each promoting distinct traditional repertoires aligned with ideological commitments (Castellano 2021). Despite overt political differences, these organizations shared the strategy of "turun ke bawah" (going to the people) by staging traditional performances in villages, demonstrating the pervasiveness of tradition mobilization (Maksum et al. 2019, Castellano 2021). Following the 1965 coup attempt, the New Order regime banned Lekra and re-aligned cultural institutions under the Department of Information, but retained Soekarno's template of tradition as statecraft (Nasirin & Abdurakhman 2024). Overall, the Soekarno administration's mobilization of tradition transformed disparate regional cultures into orchestrated spectacles of national identity, embedding tradition within a deliberate project of state-building and cultural hegemony.

National unity: Nasakom and beyond

Soekarno formally introduced Nationalism, Religion, and Communism (Nasakom) in 1962 as a political strategy to reconcile Indonesia's three major ideological streams—nationalism, religion, and communism—into a single national front (Putra 1965). By naming each element in the acronym, Sukarno signaled equal conceptual weight, even as practical power dynamics varied among the factions (Van der Kroef 1962). The doctrine emerged amid Sukarno's drive to replace parliamentary democracy with Guided Democracy, aiming to neutralize partisan conflict and mobilize mass support for state projects (Suryadi & Nelwati 2024). Nasakom's ideological appeal rested on its promise to transcend East–West Cold War binaries by crafting an indigenous synthesis aligned with Indonesia's pluralist ethos (Bandyopadhyaya 1977).

Nasakom's articulation drew on Soekarno's speeches, notably his 1962 address to the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly, where he invoked national history and cultural symbolism to legitimize the tripartite formula (Syaifulah 2015, Hongxuan 2018). Sukarno portrayed Nasakom not as a mere political pact but as a cultural narrative that fused modernist goals with traditional values (Van der Kroef

1964). The PKI's enthusiastic endorsement of Nasakom reflected the party's strategic adaptation to Guided Democracy, even as underlying suspicions about communist intentions persisted (Pauker 1964). Meanwhile, Islamic and nationalist groups negotiated their participation, insisting on constitutional guarantees for religious and cultural autonomy (Hongxuan 2023).

Despite the veneer of equality, Nasakom's ideological balance favored Sukarno's personal vision, which blended anti-imperialism with state-led socialism and moral nationalism (Nasoha et al. 2024). Sukarno's invocation of historical figures—Diponegoro, Kartini, and Soedirman—served to sacralize Nasakom as a continuation of Indonesia's hero-founders, thus embedding the formula in national mythos (Alfian 1971). The conceptual flexibility of Nasakom allowed Sukarno to shift emphasis among the three pillars depending on political exigencies, reinforcing his image as a unifier above partisan fray (Putra 2019). Nasakom thus functioned as both ideology and performative statecraft, integral to Soekarno's cultural politics.

National Nasakom councils were established at the presidential, cabinet, and provincial levels to oversee policy coordination among the three factions (Van Klinken 1967). Provincial and district committees mirrored this structure, facilitating local implementation of Nasakom directives and enabling Sukarno's administration to penetrate remote regions (Legge 1970). These councils convened representatives from the PKI, Masyumi (later Parmusi), and nationalist parties, although minutes reveal that Communist delegates were often marginalized in decision-making (Hongxuan 2023).

To operationalize Nasakom in civil society, state-sponsored mass organizations were restructured into tripartite bodies, such as SOKSI (Central Organization of Indonesian Socialist Employees) for workers and HMI (Islamic Students Association) for students, each mandated to reflect the Nasakom balance (Feith 1964). The Indonesian Women's Movement (GOWI) and youth groups (Pemuda Pancasila) likewise incorporated Nasakom principles into their constitutions and activities. Periodic Nasakom congresses showcased these organizations' achievements, reinforcing the narrative of a harmonious national front (Case 2010).

Nasakom themes permeated state-sponsored cultural events: Independence Day ceremonies included tri-pillar representations, and official publications profiled "model citizens" exemplifying Nasionalis-Agama-Komunis harmony (Van der Kroef 1964). Propaganda films commissioned by the Ministry of Information dramatized Nasakom unity in fictional village settings, blending folklore with contemporary political messaging. Through these mechanisms, Nasakom was synchronized with Pancasila rituals, school curricula, and monument inaugurations, embedding the doctrine in everyday life (Ward 1982).

Political parties were legally required to align programs with Nasakom, as codified in Presidential Decree No. XXX/1963, effectively outlawing ideologies deemed incompatible with the tripartite formula (Ward 1982). This regulatory environment curtailed oppositional movements and centralized ideological control under Sukarno's guided democracy model (Bass 1970). As a result, Nasakom became both an organizing principle and a litmus test for political legitimacy.

Nasakom, a policy in Indonesia during the early 1960s, aimed to reduce parliamentary strife by channeling competition into controlled council settings. It fostered collaborative development projects, such as rural cooperatives and literacy campaigns, and gained popular support for "guided unity." Nasakom's cultural manifestations, particularly in music and visual arts, resonated with urban youth who embraced "new nationalist" styles. The regime's emphasis on televised Nasakom festivals in Jakarta's TVRI broadcasts further amplified the doctrine's appeal. However, archival records reveal growing dissatisfaction among PKI cadres over unequal resource allocation and the inclusion of leftist content in communal festivals (Bass 1970, Budirahayu et al. 2018).

Despite these tensions, Nasakom's initial success in convening disparate groups around state-led cultural events demonstrated the potency of cultural politics in forging temporary unity (Menchik 2014). The

doctrine's ability to adapt symbolically to different contexts—from rural cooperatives to international forums—underscored its flexibility as a unifying strategy. By 1964, documented factional disputes within Nasakom councils intensified, with Communist representatives accusing military-backed nationalists of subverting tripartite decision-making (Hongxuan 2023). Parallel youth organizations—Pemuda Pancasila and Pemuda Rakyat—engaged in street clashes, signaling the erosion of Nasakom's controlled pluralism (Pauker 1965). The regime's inability to mediate these conflicts revealed structural weaknesses in the doctrine's governance framework.

Sukarno's pivot toward confrontations with Malaysia in late 1963 further polarized Nasakom factions, as leftist groups endorsed anti-imperialist actions while religious leaders questioned the policy's moral justification (Sutter 1966). This foreign policy gamble diverted attention from domestic cohesion efforts and deepened intra-elite mistrust. The 30 September Movement (G30S) coup attempt in 1965 exposed the fatal fault lines in Nasakom's integrative project, as the PKI's alleged involvement provided a pretext for military-backed purges of communist elements (Hindley 1968). Nasakom councils collapsed as the army and Islamic militias conducted mass arrests, effectively dismantling the PKI's organizational infrastructure (Bass 1970). In the coup's aftermath, Sukarno's authority waned rapidly, and Nasakom was officially abandoned in state discourse by early 1966, marking a decisive end to the doctrine's short-lived experiment in managed pluralism (Galbraith 1986).

Under Suharto's New Order, Nasakom, a model of state-led unity, was incorporated into the P-4 program, which controlled civil society through hierarchical councils. The doctrine's emphasis on cultural performance and mass mobilization led to subsequent regimes using cultural engineering to legitimize authoritarian rule. Although Nasakom vanished, its legacy continues in Indonesia's ongoing negotiation of unity and diversity through state-sponsored cultural politics. The study of Nasakom highlights the potential and perils of ideological integration projects in diverse societies.

Mass media and cultural performance

Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) was established to broadcast Sukarno's speeches and cultural programs, reaching rural populations with patriotic music, folk tales, and state news. TVRI began transmitting staged wayang kulit performances and state ceremonies to urban audiences in 1962, amplifying cultural-political messaging. Government-run institutions like RRI and TVRI were repurposed as "tools of the revolution," airing ceremonies, scripted wayang and gamelan segments, and Sukarno's speeches to create a unified national narrative. State-owned Berita Film Indonesia produced newsreels and documentaries chronicling key events, which were screened in cinemas before feature films as part of a curated cultural spectacle. RRI became the regime's flagship broadcaster in 1945, and by 1946 it was incorporated into the Department of Information. Regional RRI studios produced weekly segments featuring local gamelan ensembles and wayang kulit narrations, standardizing disparate traditions into a cohesive, nationally-circulated repertoire. Sukarno's recorded speeches were broadcast live on RRI to cultivate his charismatic persona across the archipelago.

Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI) began official broadcasts on 24 August, 1962, during the Asian Games, marking television's entry as a state-controlled medium for cultural performance (Kriswanto 2013, Neliawati et al. 2024). Early TVRI programming mixed live coverage of Independence Day ceremonies, choreographed dance routines, and news segments, embedding Pancasila rituals within the visual culture of emerging urban audiences (Kriswanto 2013). Although initially limited to Jakarta and a handful of cities, televised cultural broadcasts acquired prestige, reinforcing the capital's cultural leadership and setting aspirational standards for national unity.

Indonesian Film News – *Berita Film Indonesia (BFI)*, founded in 1945, produced 13 newsreels and documentaries by 1950, showcasing Indonesia's state achievements. These films were screened before feature films in cinemas, transforming theaters into quasi-ritual spaces. In the late 1950s, Sukarno banned foreign film imports, ensuring domestic productions dominated cinema programs, and suppressed

external cultural influences. The Ministry of Information commissioned propaganda films that merged entertainment with Pancasila values. In 1945, Indonesian President Sukarno declared freedom of the press, but strict oversight was implemented to ensure editorial conformity with state objectives. Newspapers were legally mandated to adopt Sukarno's Manipol-USDEK and Pancasila principles, with those refusing to comply facing suspension or closure. The 1964-1965 New York World's Fair served as a global stage for Indonesia, with daily music and dance performances broadcast domestically. Under Guided Democracy (1959-1966), censorship laws centralized media control, disseminating ideology and cultural performances, forging a durable national identity.

International cultural diplomacy

As a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Sukarno curated Indonesian art exhibitions and performance troupes at international conferences, presenting the republic as a cultural pioneer among newly independent states (Menchik 2014). Diplomatic gifts—batik textiles, wayang puppets, and gamelan instruments—were exchanged with NAM partners, symbolizing solidarity in diversity (Elson 2008). These efforts reinforced Indonesia's soft power by linking cultural heritage to political sovereignty, enhancing Sukarno's stature on the world stage.

In 1955, Sukarno hosted The Asia-Africa Conference at Bandung, uniting 29 newly independent nations around anti-colonial and cultural solidarity. The conference featured nationalist speeches, traditional music, and dance performances, showcasing Indonesia's cultural maturity and international leadership. The success of these performances cemented Bandung's reputation as a model of cultural diplomacy. At the 1964-65 New York World's Fair, Indonesia's pavilion showcased its cultural vibrancy, featuring daily gamelan concerts and traditional dance recitals. A teenage Sardono Kusumo performed avant-garde gamelan pieces, showcasing Indonesia's heritage and innovation.

Cultural diplomacy featured prominently at subsequent NAM summits, including the 1961 Belgrade meeting, where Indonesian arts were showcased alongside political declarations (Mousa et al. 2021). National delegations performed their traditional music and dance during official receptions, reinforcing NAM's ethos of pluralistic solidarity through cultural mediums (Mousa et al. 2021). Indonesia often provided logistical support—venues, funding, and broadcast coverage—for NAM cultural nights, demonstrating state commitment to the movement's holistic vision (Mousa et al. 2021). Such initiatives helped institutionalize cultural diplomacy within NAM's operating framework, influencing small and large member states alike.

In 1960, Indonesian President Sukarno framed Pancasila as an alternative global ethos, integrating political ideals with cultural identity (Purdy 1982). UNESCO archives note Sukarno's appeals for the recognition of newly independent states and cultural heritage as central to global justice and peacebuilding. Indonesia's successful bid to inscribe gamelan on UNESCO's list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2021 traces its roots to early Soekarno-era advocacy for cultural recognition. Sukarno dispatched batik textiles, wayang puppets, and miniature gamelan instruments as official gifts to foreign dignitaries, embedding Indonesian tradition in diplomatic rituals. The distribution of gamelan recordings and film footage further extended Indonesia's sonic and visual presence abroad. Soekarno's pioneering cultural diplomacy established templates for subsequent Indonesian administrations to leverage arts and heritage in foreign relations.

Soekarno's international cultural diplomacy mapped ideological cohesion, tradition mobilization, and unity projection onto global stages, reinforcing the early republic's political and cultural sovereignty (Wardaya 2012). His holistic approach—spanning conferences, world fairs, art exchanges, and media outreach—demonstrates the potency of cultural politics in statecraft (Li 2023). Future research might compare Indonesia's strategies with those of other NAM founders—such as India's ICCR or Egypt's cultural missions—to further elucidate patterns of postcolonial cultural diplomacy (Aryal 2025). Such comparative studies will deepen understanding of how cultural performance, material gifts, and diplomatic forums collectively shape national reputation and international alignments.

Conclusion

This article offers several key contributions to the scholarly understanding of cultural politics in postcolonial Indonesia. First, by systematically mapping President Soekarno's ideological discourse, traditional symbolism, and nationbuilding rhetoric, it elucidates how cultural narratives were strategically employed to forge a sense of collective identity in the early Republic. Whereas earlier research has tended to treat Soekarno's speeches, rituals, and visual iconography in isolation, our integrated framework demonstrates the mutually reinforcing dynamics among ideology, tradition, and unifying symbolism. This holistic perspective fills a critical gap in the literature on political symbolism and stateformation in Southeast Asia.

Second, the article advances methodological innovation by combining discourse analysis with network mapping of intellectual and cultural actors. This mixedmethods approach reveals not only the content of Soekarno's cultural policies but also the institutional and personal ties that undergirded their circulation. As a result, the study charts new territory in our understanding of how political modernism and indigenous traditions were synthesized, offering a replicable model for analyzing cultural politics in other postcolonial contexts.

Finally, the findings have broader implications for the field of political history and cultural studies. By demonstrating the formative role of cultural policy in consolidating national unity, the research challenges prevailing assumptions that material development and party politics were the sole drivers of early Indonesian statehood. Instead, it foregrounds the performative and symbolic dimensions of political authority. In doing so, this study not only deepens our comprehension of Indonesia's founding era but also contributes to comparative debates on the instrumentalization of culture in nationbuilding across the Global South.

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