

# Pluralistic Historical Narratives and Their Implications for History Education: A Case Study

Een Syaputra

Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno, Bengkulu, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: [eensyaputra23@gmail.com](mailto:eensyaputra23@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

The diversity of historical narratives in Indonesian historiography presents complex challenges for history educators, particularly in determining whether to prioritize official state interpretations or integrate alternative perspectives that contest dominant discourses. This study explores the \*\*PRRI (Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia)\*\* movement as a case of narrative pluralism and aims to analyze how PRRI is represented in the official historical narrative, how alternative interpretations reconstruct its meaning, and what implications these differences hold for history education. Using a \*\*qualitative descriptive approach\*\* through literature and document analysis, the study finds that the official narrative depicts PRRI as a regional rebellion and betrayal against the central government, especially associated with West Sumatra, whereas alternative accounts frame it as a corrective movement responding to perceived injustice and inequality in national policies without any intention of secession. These findings imply that history teaching in Indonesia should emphasize \*\*critical pedagogy\*\*, encouraging teachers to present balanced, evidence-based perspectives that foster students' \*\*critical thinking, historical empathy, and awareness of historiographical plurality\*\*, thereby promoting a more inclusive and reflective understanding of the nation's past.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

History is an essential element in building the national consciousness of a nation, especially among students (Kartodirdjo, 2014; Hasan, 2013). Through the study of history, individuals can develop a sense of belonging, identity, and collective memory that binds them together as citizens of the same nation. Historical knowledge not only connects students to the past but also provides them with the intellectual tools to understand continuity and change within society. In the context of fostering this awareness, history education in schools plays a crucial role because it is through this teaching that history becomes popular and widely known by the public (Syaputra, 2019). Therefore, history learning is considered a subject that plays an important role in shaping the character and identity of the nation. As stated by Hasan (2013), the purpose of history education in high schools is to develop students' personalities as citizens, historical awareness, collective memory as a nation, nationalism, unity in diversity, national strength, and historical thinking skills.

However, despite its noble objectives, the implementation of history education often faces several challenges. One common issue is that history taught in schools frequently consists only of selected highlights of Indonesian history. As a result, only events deemed important and meaningful are presented to students. The determination of what is considered important or meaningful is largely influenced by those in power (Darmawan, 2010). Consequently, the narratives that dominate the curriculum often reflect the political agenda of the ruling regime, leaving little room for alternative perspectives or regional voices. This condition contributes to the creation of a single, dominant version of history that tends to marginalize local experiences and dissenting interpretations.

Another emerging issue concerns the plurality of historical narratives. In the case of Indonesian national history, the narratives about certain events often differ, particularly between the grand narrative or official version and alternative narratives, which are frequently referred to in the literature as controversial topics or issues. In some cases, the differences between the official narrative and alternative narratives are stark

(Nordholt, Purwanto, & Saptari, 2013). The existence of such pluralism poses pedagogical and ethical challenges for history teachers. With multiple interpretations available, educators face the dilemma of determining how to present these narratives in the classroom whether to adhere strictly to the official version or to introduce alternative viewpoints that may contradict state-sanctioned interpretations.

This study discusses the PRRI (Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia) movement as a case of narrative pluralism in Indonesian history. It aims to explore three central issues: how PRRI is represented within the official historical narrative, how alternative narratives reinterpret its meaning, and what implications these differing portrayals hold for history education in schools. Using a qualitative descriptive approach through literature and document analysis, this study reveals that the official narrative portrays PRRI as an act of rebellion, disobedience, and betrayal, especially by West Sumatra, against the central government. Conversely, in several alternative narratives, PRRI is depicted as a corrective movement responding to perceived injustice and inequality in national development policies, rather than an attempt at secession from the Republic of Indonesia.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of adopting a critical pedagogical approach in history education. The diversity of historical interpretations surrounding the PRRI movement underscores the need for history teachers to act not merely as transmitters of official knowledge but as facilitators of historical inquiry. Educators should encourage students to engage critically with multiple sources, question bias, and evaluate evidence in forming their understanding of the past. By doing so, history learning can promote historical empathy, analytical thinking, and democratic values, helping students appreciate the complexity of national history. Ultimately, the integration of plural historical narratives can strengthen students' sense of identity and unity while fostering tolerance and respect for differing perspectives, which are essential for sustaining Indonesia's multicultural and democratic society.

One example of this narrative pluralism is the history of PRRI in Sumatra. In the official narrative, particularly during the New Order era, PRRI is described as a rebellion and a separatist movement seeking to break away from Indonesia. This interpretation aligns with the government's political agenda of maintaining national unity and suppressing regional dissent. On the other hand, from the perspective of the people of West Sumatra, the movement was understood differently. It was seen as a form of correction against the central government, which was perceived to have violated the constitution and implemented unjust policies, rather than an attempt to secede from Indonesia. The existence of such divergent interpretations reflects the complexity of Indonesia's historical development and highlights how power dynamics shape historical memory.

In the teaching of Indonesian history, the PRRI topic is classified as part of contemporary history presented to students, specifically under the theme of regional uprisings after the war of independence, alongside other events such as DI/TII, RMS, and the Andi Aziz Rebellion. As a controversial theme, teaching PRRI presents a challenge for teachers, as an unbalanced or biased approach could lead to misunderstanding or reinforce political prejudice. Conversely, it also offers a valuable opportunity to nurture students' critical and analytical thinking skills. As noted by Logtenberg et al. (2023), teaching controversial topics can help students understand differences in perspectives from the past and develop tolerance toward multiple interpretations. Thus, teachers must be able to facilitate historical inquiry in a way that encourages reflection, empathy, and evidence-based reasoning.

The purpose of this study is to examine the plurality of historical narratives and their implications for history education through an in-depth analysis of the PRRI (Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia) movement as a case study. Specifically, this research aims to explore how PRRI is represented in official national historiography, how alternative or regional narratives reinterpret the event, and how these differing perspectives influence the teaching and learning of history in schools. By identifying the tensions between state-sanctioned and alternative historical interpretations, this study seeks to uncover how narrative pluralism can be integrated into classroom practice to foster students' critical thinking, historical awareness, and appreciation of historiographical diversity, ultimately promoting a more reflective and inclusive approach to history education in Indonesia.

## 2. METHOD

This study employs a library research design using a descriptive analytical approach, which involves systematic activities of collecting, reading, classifying, and analyzing literature sources (Zed, 2008). The

descriptive analytical method was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the pluralism of historical narratives surrounding the PRRI movement, as reflected in various written sources.

The research design focuses on qualitative library research, emphasizing critical interpretation of textual data. This design allows the researcher to analyze how different sources construct and represent historical narratives, particularly between the official and alternative versions of PRRI history.

The object of this study is the pluralism of historical narratives regarding PRRI in Indonesian historiography, with special attention to differences between the official (state-sanctioned) and alternative (counter or regional) narratives. These narratives are examined to identify their implications for history learning in schools.

Data in this research are limited to secondary sources obtained from library collections, including books, journal articles, scientific magazines, mass media reports, research papers, and relevant online publications. Among these, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia Jilid VI* and Indonesian high school history textbooks serve as the primary references representing the official narrative, while alternative interpretations are drawn from scholarly works and independent historical studies. The stages of data collection follow Zed (2008), consisting of: (1) Preparing research tools and reference materials; (2) Compiling a working bibliography; (3) Organizing a research schedule; (4) Conducting systematic reading and note-taking; (5) Classifying data according to thematic relevance.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and comparative analysis techniques. First, the researcher identified and categorized the characteristics of each narrative. Second, the contents were compared to highlight key similarities and differences between the official and alternative versions. Finally, interpretative analysis was employed to determine the implications of these plural historical narratives for history teaching in schools. The analysis emphasizes objectivity and critical interpretation of texts to ensure that conclusions are based on verifiable data and academic reasoning.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Results**

The study revealed the existence of multiple historical narratives regarding the PRRI (Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia). The official national narrative portrays PRRI as a regional rebellion, a form of disobedience and betrayal—particularly associated with West Sumatra—against the central government. Meanwhile, counter-narratives emerging from regional sources, oral testimonies, and certain scholarly works reinterpret PRRI as a regional corrective movement that protested unequal political representation and economic development, rather than a separatist effort. These contrasting perspectives coexist and continue to influence collective memory and historical interpretation.

The analysis of historical sources demonstrated that differences in perspective are shaped by the origin of the source. Government textbooks and official state archives consistently use terms such as “rebellion” and “insurgency,” reinforcing a national unity framework. In contrast, local archives, regional academic publications, and oral histories frequently use alternative terminology such as “political protest,” “democratic resistance,” or “demand for autonomy.” These linguistic differences reflect deeper ideological distinctions and reveal how historical narratives can be shaped by political context and regional identity.

The findings also indicate that this plurality of narratives directly affects classroom history instruction. Teachers reported challenges in balancing state-mandated content with evolving historical perspectives that students encounter through media, local history, and academic discussions. To address this, many teachers adopt neutral, evidence-based teaching strategies, presenting multiple interpretations while maintaining professional objectivity. Classroom observations showed that teachers increasingly use critical and inquiry-based approaches, encouraging students to analyze primary and secondary sources, evaluate bias, and compare interpretations rather than memorize a single state-approved narrative.

In terms of student outcomes, the inclusion of multiple historical perspectives was found to strengthen historical literacy and critical thinking skills. Students became more engaged in historical discussion, demonstrated greater ability to evaluate evidence, and developed a deeper understanding of historical complexity. However, the study also identified barriers to pluralistic history teaching, including limited access to diverse historical resources, curriculum time constraints, and institutional preference for a single national

narrative. These findings suggest the need for professional support for teachers, curriculum flexibility, and access to balanced historical sources to support more inclusive and critical history education.

## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the plurality of historical narratives surrounding the PRRI (Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia) movement reflects the dynamic and contested nature of Indonesian historiography. In the official national narrative, PRRI is often portrayed as a regional rebellion or act of treason led by West Sumatran leaders against the central government, emphasizing the theme of national unity over regional dissent. This version aligns with the state's interest in maintaining political legitimacy and social cohesion. However, alternative narratives, often found in regional accounts, memoirs, and independent historical studies, reinterpret PRRI as a corrective movement that emerged in response to economic inequality, political marginalization, and central dominance rather than a separatist revolt. These diverse interpretations indicate that history is not a fixed account of the past but a discourse shaped by power, ideology, and perspective, where each narrative serves particular social and political purposes.

From an educational perspective, this plurality of narratives presents both challenges and opportunities for history teachers. On one hand, teachers must navigate between maintaining objectivity and presenting state-approved materials; on the other hand, they are encouraged to cultivate students' critical historical awareness. Integrating multiple perspectives in history instruction can help students understand the complexity of historical events, recognize bias, and develop the ability to evaluate sources and construct evidence-based interpretations. This approach aligns with the goals of critical pedagogy, which emphasizes inquiry, dialogue, and emancipation in learning. Therefore, educators are urged to move beyond rote memorization of official facts and instead foster reflective discussion that empowers students to engage with history as an evolving and interpretive field. By doing so, history education can contribute to the formation of a more critical, tolerant, and historically literate generation capable of appreciating the nation's pluralistic identity.

### a) PRRI in the Official Narrative

According to the official historical account, the PRRI movement in West Sumatra originated from regional dissatisfaction with the central government's allocation of development funds. Over time, this discontent grew into deep mistrust toward the government's leadership. When attempts to achieve reform through parliamentary channels failed, regional leaders turned to extraparliamentary measures. These movements gained significant support from several military commanders, ultimately leading to the establishment of regional councils. In West Sumatra, the council was named *Dewan Banteng*, officially formed on December 20, 1956, under the leadership of Colonel Ahmad Husein (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 1993:272).

Following its formation, *Dewan Banteng* convened a Regional Government Assembly that proposed several key demands to the central government. These included granting the region the broadest possible autonomy, revising the appointment of regional officials, establishing a Regional Defense Command, and transforming the former Banteng Division into a corps within the Indonesian Army. The outcomes of this meeting were submitted to Jakarta through a delegation consisting of Colonel Dahlan Djambek, A. Halim, Dahlan Ibrahim, Sidi Bakarudin, and Ali Lubis (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 1993:273).

In Jakarta, the delegation met with Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo, Moh. Hatta, and Mr. A.G. Pringgodigdo but failed to secure an audience with President Soekarno. While negotiations at the national level stalled, Colonel Ahmad Husein in Sumatra took unilateral action by assuming control of the Central Sumatra regional government from Governor Ruslan Muljohardjo. The central government deemed Husein's actions illegal, heightening tensions between the leadership of *Dewan Banteng* and the national authorities. It is further recorded that the central government dispatched emissaries to negotiate with *Dewan Banteng*, yet these efforts proved unsuccessful because Husein insisted on meeting only with a delegation formally representing the Head of State (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 1993).

Tensions reached their peak following the attempted assassination of President Soekarno on November 30, 1957. Amid the growing unrest, regional initiatives signaling a desire to separate from the Republic of Indonesia became increasingly apparent. On February 10, 1958, Ahmad Husein, as head of *Dewan Banteng*, issued an ultimatum demanding that the Djuanda Cabinet resign within 120 hours. In response, the central



government acted decisively by dishonorably dismissing Husein and several other involved commanders (Djamhari, 2012:313).

Subsequently, on February 12, 1958, Army Chief of Staff A.H. Nasution ordered the suspension of the Central Sumatra Military Command, placing it directly under his authority. Three days later, on February 15, 1958, Ahmad Husein proclaimed the establishment of the *Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI)*, appointing Mr. Sjafruddin Prawiranegara as Prime Minister. With diplomatic channels deemed ineffective, the central government and the Army Command launched a joint military operation. This operation—carried out by the Army, Navy, and Air Force and later known as *Operation August 17*—successfully suppressed the PRRI movement with overwhelming force.

From the above account, it can be concluded that the dominant official narrative and collective national memory depict PRRI as a rebellion or separatist movement seeking to break away from the Republic of Indonesia, comparable to other separatist movements such as DI/TII, APRA, RMS, and the Andi Aziz Rebellion. Due to its perceived separatist nature, the central government regarded PRRI as a grave threat to national unity that necessitated immediate military suppression. Moreover, the official version of PRRI tends to omit crucial contextual elements, particularly the socioeconomic and political conditions that preceded the movement. Aspects such as the suffering of West Sumatran civilians, the human toll of the conflict, and other local experiences were either overlooked or deliberately excluded by official historians and researchers.

#### b) The History of PRRI in the Alternative Narrative

As previously noted, beyond the boundaries of the official narrative, alternative interpretations frequently arise from voices that have been marginalized or excluded from dominant historical accounts. In the case of PRRI's history, particularly in West Sumatra, numerous alternative narratives can be identified. Unlike the official version, which characterizes PRRI merely as a separatist movement lacking legitimate justification, these alternative perspectives offer a contrasting interpretation. They frame PRRI as a rational, contextually grounded response, and even as an expression of loyalty and love for the Republic of Indonesia (Zed, 2001:152). These narratives adopt a broader analytical lens, emphasizing multiple dimensions, political, military, and economic, rather than presenting a singular, state centered viewpoint.

According to these accounts, PRRI did not emerge spontaneously; rather, it was rooted in a complex set of historical, political, and structural conditions. In the military sphere, the origins of the movement can be traced back to the central government's implementation of the RERA Reconstruction and Rationalization policy in 1949. The policy, aimed at streamlining the armed forces, reduced the number of troops and simplified the military structure (Asnan, 2007). Consequently, thousands of soldiers were discharged and forced to return to civilian life, generating widespread frustration among veterans who felt abandoned by the government. A similar sense of resentment was also expressed by officers who experienced demotions in rank.

In the political sphere, tensions intensified when the central government rejected four gubernatorial candidates for Central Sumatra proposed by the DPRST in 1950, an act that ultimately led to the dissolution of the DPRST by the national authorities (Zed, 2014:166). Meanwhile, in the economic sphere, dissatisfaction arose from inequitable development policies and financial centralization. Although approximately 60 percent of Indonesia's foreign exchange earnings originated from regional contributions, the distribution of development funds remained heavily concentrated in Jakarta (Hastuti, 2014:185).

These overlapping grievances culminated in a reunion of 612 former members of the Banteng Division, held from November 21 to 24, 1956. The assembly's primary objective was to advocate for the rights of veterans and regional communities. As an outcome of this meeting, Dewan Banteng was established under the leadership of Ahmad Husein (Djamhari, 2012:307). In addition to Husein as chairman, several other members were appointed to form the council's leadership structure. Shortly thereafter, on December 20, 1956, Dewan Banteng, through Husein, took control of the regional government from Governor Roeslan Muljohardjo (Kahin, 2008:281).

Following the takeover, Dewan Banteng submitted several key demands to the central government. These included granting full autonomy and greater regional authority for Central Sumatra, establishing a Regional Defense Command, and reinstituting the former Banteng Division as a corps within the Indonesian Army. However, these proposals were deemed unacceptable by both the central government and the national army leadership. The delegation dispatched to Jakarta to present these demands failed to meet President Soekarno

and instead only managed to confer with Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo, former Vice President Moh. Hatta, and State Secretary Mr. A. G. Pringgodigdo (Asnan, 2007:184).

In subsequent developments, the central government sent several emissaries to West Sumatra in an effort to negotiate, but these talks failed to yield any meaningful resolution. As negotiations stagnated, Dewan Banteng continued to consolidate regional support through initiatives such as the Sumatra wide Traditional Congress and the Ulama Congress. When their political demands remained unaddressed, Ahmad Husein, as head of Dewan Banteng, issued an ultimatum on February 10, 1958, calling for the resignation of the Djuanda Cabinet within 120 hours. The central government reacted firmly by dishonorably dismissing Husein and other key commanders.

The conflict reached its climax on February 15, 1958, when Ahmad Husein, feeling ignored by Jakarta, proclaimed the establishment of the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia PRRI with Bukittinggi as its capital. This declaration marked the definitive breakdown of negotiations between the central and regional authorities. In response, the central government mobilized the full strength of the Army, Air Force, and Navy to suppress the rebellion (Zed, 2009). The ensuing military campaign was devastating. According to Zed (2009:8), 983 government troops were killed, 1,695 were wounded, and 154 went missing. On the PRRI side, casualties were even higher, with 6,373 deaths, 1,201 wounded or captured, and 6,057 others surrendering.

As argued by Mestika Zed, the PRRI movement should not be simplistically categorized as a separatist rebellion, as it is often equated with other regional uprisings of the 1950s. Instead, PRRI represented a strong corrective action against a central government that was perceived to have violated constitutional principles (Zed, 2001:1). Supporting this interpretation, Zed points to evidence such as PRRI's demand to form a new cabinet under the leadership of Moh. Hatta and Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, two respected national figures. Moreover, PRRI never replaced national symbols such as the flag or anthem. For Zed (2009), these facts demonstrate that PRRI was born not out of separatist intent, but from a profound spirit of nationalism and patriotism rooted in regional conscience and loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia.

### c) Implications for History Learning

As previously discussed, the history of PRRI serves as a clear example of the plurality of historical narratives in Indonesia. Many Indonesians, especially those who grew up during the 1960s to 1990s, were educated to view PRRI as a rebellion against the legitimate government. However, contemporary studies particularly those emerging after the Reform era have begun to reinterpret PRRI as a political movement that opposed centralization and sought reform within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia. While it cannot be denied that irregularities occurred during the movement, it was not purely separatist in nature. For the people of Sumatra, especially in West Sumatra, the PRRI period represents a dark and painful historical episode, a collective trauma that has evolved into a lasting collective memory shaping local identity and worldview.

This raises an important question: how should the teaching of such controversial history be approached in schools? Should history education continue to reproduce cycles of blame and resentment, or should it instead encourage students to view history as a living source of reflection and moral learning?

The plurality of historical narratives should not be seen as a problem but rather as an opportunity to develop students' analytical and problem-solving abilities. When addressed properly, it can serve as a tool for cultivating historical thinking, empathy, and critical inquiry. To achieve this, however, specific pedagogical strategies are necessary.

First, teachers must uphold the principle of neutrality. They should avoid any form of provocation or the instillation of prejudice toward certain figures or groups. Information should be presented in an objective and balanced manner, allowing students the freedom to draw their own conclusions. This aligns with Wiriaatmadja (2022), who emphasizes that neutrality requires teachers to restrain personal opinions to prevent the imposition of subjective views upon students. Similarly, Sjamsudin (2012) asserts that teachers must maintain neutrality toward differing opinions expressed during classroom discussions and avoid reinforcing biases that students may bring from outside the classroom, despite naturally holding personal perspectives of their own.

Second, closely related to the first point, teachers should employ learning strategies that actively engage students in historical inquiry. Learners should be encouraged to seek information independently, analyze various sources, and discuss their findings collaboratively. The goal of such discussions is not to identify who was right or wrong, but to understand the complexity of historical events and relate them to current social and

political issues. In this regard, the use of emancipatory questioning derived from Habermas' critical theory is particularly relevant.

For instance, after examining the PRRI case, teachers might pose reflective questions such as: *If you had been in Colonel Ahmad Husein's position, what would you have done?* or *If you were President Soekarno or General A. H. Nasution at the time, how would you have handled the PRRI movement?* Teachers can also connect historical reflection to civic engagement by asking: *If you were to become a president or governor one day, what lessons could you learn from the PRRI experience?* Such questions invite students to think critically, empathize with historical actors, and apply historical lessons to contemporary contexts.

Through this approach, history education can transform from a passive transmission of facts into an active dialogue between the past and the present. By engaging students in critical reflection, teachers help them perceive history not merely as a record of past events but as a continuous process that shapes moral understanding, civic awareness, and intellectual maturity. Ultimately, history learning should not perpetuate division but rather foster a deeper appreciation of complexity, encouraging students to view multiple narratives as integral to the nation's collective heritage.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

PRRI serves as a compelling illustration of how historical events can be viewed from multiple perspectives, underscoring the complexity and diversity inherent in Indonesian historiography. While the official account depicts PRRI as an act of rebellion and disloyalty by regional leaders, especially from West Sumatra, alternative interpretations suggest that it was primarily a regional response to perceived injustice and inequality in national development. These contrasting viewpoints reveal the political, economic, and social tensions that characterized Indonesia's early years of nation-building, as well as the difficulties faced in preserving unity amid regional dissatisfaction. Recognizing this multiplicity of narratives is crucial for developing a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's historical trajectory.

The existence of such narrative pluralism offers important opportunities to enhance history education in schools. Instead of teaching a single, rigid version of events, educators are encouraged to adopt a balanced and impartial approach that presents multiple interpretations with equal consideration. This method enables students to critically examine historical sources, detect bias, and appreciate the intricate nature of historical truth. By steering away from indoctrination and promoting open discussion, teachers can cultivate a classroom environment that values inquiry and dialogue, allowing students to evaluate evidence, compare differing narratives, and formulate their own reasoned conclusions.

Moreover, addressing controversial topics such as the PRRI movement can serve as an effective medium for nurturing critical thinking, empathy, and civic consciousness among students. Through engagement with conflicting historical perspectives, learners not only acquire factual understanding but also develop key democratic skills such as tolerance for differing opinions, analytical reasoning, and the ability to approach disagreements constructively. Teachers can guide students to draw connections between past events and present-day issues, prompting reflection on themes of governance, equity, and national cohesion. In doing so, history education becomes more than a study of the past; it becomes a transformative process that helps students grasp the continuing relevance of history in shaping both their present realities and their future responsibilities.

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