

Towards the Consolidation of Local Democracy in Indonesia: A Historical Approach of Traditional Nagari in Minangkabau vs Colonial State

Tengku Rika Valentina * and Roni Ekha Putera

Faculty of Social Science & Political Sciences, Universitas Andalas, Indonesia

Received 7 August 2024; Received in revised form 18 February 2025

Accepted 6 March 2025; Available online Day Month year

Abstract

Local democracy is still being developed in Indonesia and precedents for the modern form, such as the *nagari* of West Sumatra are of interest as models but also for the culture that may yet influence local politics today. An examination of the deconstruction of traditional nagari history and its contribution to local democratic consolidation in Indonesia constitutes an intriguing analysis of the democratic "experiment" that accompanied this development. This article analyzes three fundamental historical narrative themes as regards the nagari's development as a model for local democracy: (i) the impact of supranational intervention on the traditional nagari system in Minangkabau, beginning with the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung and continuing through the Islamic transformation of the 16th century; (ii) the impact of the Padri Wars (1803-1838), political movements, and social disorder on the political and governmental structure of traditional nagari in Minangkabau; and (iii) the structural changes brought by Dutch colonial rule. Our research produced three conclusions: first, big state intervention in the development of nagari transpired due to pressure and Islamic influence stemming from the syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung (1560s) and the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung (1400s); second, the political and governmental structure of traditional nagari was transformed as a consequence of social unrest in the Padri Wars; and third, further intervention was instigated by the struggle for power between the Dutch and nagari. This article examines the discourse surrounding the political structure of traditional nagari, which emerged in the 1990s as a scholarly investigation of the process of democratic consolidation at the local level in West Sumatra, Indonesia.

Keywords

Local Democracy, Consolidation, Nagari, Minangkabau, Political Power, Indonesia

Introduction

The Minangkabau are an ethnic group indigenous to West Sumatra, Indonesia. Traditionally, their communities were organized into small, kinship-based political units known as nagari—autonomous village-like polities with social, political, and economic authority rooted in customary law (adat). Over time, more centralized state structures emerged among the Minangkabau, particularly with the rise of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung in the fourteenth century, centered in what is now Tanah Datar Regency and led by Adityawarman. This kingdom adopted administrative systems inspired by Majapahit, which gradually evolved after the spread of syncretic Islam in the region during the 1560s. The influence of both Indic and Islamic political-religious systems played a significant role in transforming the political structure of the nagari. According to Dobbin (2008), the religious history of the inland community of Minangkabau is based on a substratum of animistic belief that continually developed with the infusion of foreign religions, until the 19th century. The key figures in the practice of religion of Minangkabau were the *handlers* or *shamans* who were believed to be associated with the supernatural and who were tasked with bringing a sense of security within the community (Suryadi, 2006).

After Islam entered Minangkabau in the 1560s, animistic supernatural beliefs could not be eliminated entirely and became part of the predominant religious practice (syncretism) (Peel, 1968; Stewart, 1999). This complexity continued until many dynamics occurred, such as transformation, political movements, and social chaos of the Padri Wars in Minangkabau from 1803 to 1838 (Azwar et al., 2018; Dinata, 2013). The goal of the Padri Muslim clerics was to purify the syncretized Islam which meant purging the government and political structure of the nagari and their Adat aristocracy. The Dutch used the disruption of war to enter Minangkabau in suppressing the Padri and subsequently changed the legislative and political structure of traditional nagari from 1828 into the 1900s (Dobbin, 2008).

Nagari is an extant pre-modern governmental structure in Minangkabau that has operated for at least over six hundred years as an autonomous social and political entity, established as a governance system rooted in "customs of the Nagari informed by Islamic principles" (Sebastian, 2022). Leadership is executed by traditional leaders, religious authorities, and intellectuals within its system and framework. The social structure is organized into tribes, with customary land as the primary economic resource handled jointly by the community (Fajria et al., 2023; Kahn, 2020). Numerous sources indicate that nagari was a traditional governmental system that has existed since at least the 15th century (Junus, 1964; Peel, 1968; Stewart, 1999). Nevertheless, written records

from that century are scarce; there is corroboration that the nagari system existed alongside, and evolved following the impact of, Hindu-Buddhist religious and political culture and was subsequently adapted to Islamic doctrines.

According to Valentina et al. (2011), since it was institutionalized in the form of modern state political policy in 1903 through the Decentralized Law (staatsblaads No. 329/1903), it has operated under continued state oversight. This law allowed the Dutch to use nagari as administrative units under central government authority, with their budgets provided directly by the colonial government. The traditional councils (Raad) of nagari communities served as local executive bodies (Valentina, T, 2017).

From the colonial period (1838-1900s) to the period of independence struggles (1945-1949), the Liberal Democracy (1950-1959) and then the Guided Democracy periods (1959-1966) and then the New Order period of Suharto (1966-1998), there was a tendency for the the nagari government system to wane and weaken in the face of new Indonesian political interventionist forces (Zulchairiyah, 2008). Under the New Order in particular, efforts by nagari leaders to secure local rights and self-governance were met with increased centralization. Rather than being empowered, nagari were undermined structurally, administratively, and functionally (Beckmann & Beckmann, 2013). As a result, the nagari were officially disbanded in 1983 and replaced by the uniform desa system, before being revived in 1999 during Indonesia's post-Suharto democratization.

The erosion of local democracy under successive Indonesian regimes, particularly during the New Order, reignited scholarly interest in nagari institutions as models for local democracy. This prompted new investigations into the historical development, conflicts, and state-local dynamics surrounding nagari. These inquiries help contextualize how historical governance structures continue to shape local political arrangements and center-periphery relations in contemporary Indonesia.

The succession of conflicts between the large literate suprapates of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung, the syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung, the Dutch colonial state on one side and the traditional nagari of Minangkabau on the other precipitated these issues of the place of local government in the modern unitary Indonesian state (Valentina et al., 2019). In the language of Clifford Geertz' theatre state concept, the authoritative nature of the state ultimately instigated a "drama" within the political system, specifically of the traditional nagari government, which displayed the suprapate's authority. In examining the local political phenomena of nagari, the nagari model and its conflicts with the succession of suprapates in Sumatra, shines light on aspects of local democratization and its consolidation in the present.

Democratic consolidation refers to the process by which a newly established democracy becomes stable, resilient, and unlikely to return to authoritarianism. It typically occurs after a period of democratization, which itself follows the fall of an authoritarian regime. In Indonesia, this trajectory began in May 1998, marked by the resignation of President Suharto after more than three decades of authoritarian rule. Since then, Indonesia has undergone a democratization process and is widely considered to be in a phase of democratic consolidation. Schedler (1998) asserted the consolidation of democracy was meant to describe new freedom in a country. There are two positive versions of the democratic continuum towards consolidation: first, the strengthening of democracy, that is, the continuation of democratic transition by conducting a series of liberal-democratic electoral processes; and second, the continuum of freedom as the creation of a liberal civic culture which deepens democracy, pushing the political system towards the consolidation of democracy. Linz & Stepan (1996) argues there are several criteria mostly used by some scholars to identify a consolidated democracy, namely the enforcement of civil and political rights, as well as competitive and inclusive elections.

The theoretical discussion of democracy developed significantly when Linz and Stepan (1996), Schedler (1998), and Freedman (2006), and others coined the term *democratic consolidation* to describe a process that reduced the possibility of the reversal of democratization. This process is characterized by the negotiation and institutionalization of new political norms, structures, and procedures that gradually replace the old system without abrupt disruption. The political structures and procedures during the transition process will be strengthened, internalized, and validated in the consolidation process. Finally, the consolidation process will lead to the establishment of an operationally effective democratic system and gain credibility before the public and state.

The examination of the process of democratic consolidation, with emphasis on the concept of deepening democracy, entails a study of not only the establishment of democratic institutions but also the focus on enhancing the overall quality and essence of democracy (Jepsen, E, 2011). Asrinaldi (2014) and Robert (1998) contend that democracy prioritizes public empowerment, self-governance, and sovereignty in collective decision-making, resulting in a gradual advancement of democratic principles and practices. In line with these words, the local democracy in the nagari area of West Sumatra is based on a community framework that depends on collaborative decision-making (Valentina et al., 2019).

In our study, we explored various perspectives on democratic consolidation, particularly its processes of institutionalization and sustainability. Scholars have noted a

gap in understanding the consolidation of local democracy, underscoring the need for well-managed governance and institutional structures to strengthen democratic awareness. They argue that chaotic political institutionalization can lead to poor stability and that the strengthening of local government at the village level can mitigate this impact.

Our research approached this issue by focusing on the discourse around how local democracy is sustained over time. We identified a gap in understanding the consolidation process at the local level, particularly in the context of the nagari system. The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening democratic governance and improving institutional performance to support ongoing democratic consolidation. Additionally, we argue that chaotic political conditions can undermine local democracy, and thus, reinforcing local governance through legal recognition and decentralized authority is essential to maintaining stability and resilience.

This study discusses the discourse prevalent among the Minangkabau political classes and educated elite, which outlines the stages and processes of local democratic consolidation in West Sumatra, Indonesia. Nagari remains compelling research subject due to its theoretical nature as an independent, self-governing entity rooted in the community, its utilization of democratic mechanisms and its comprehensive integration of sociocultural instruments. Our research consisted of three questions: (i) To what extent was there state intervention (starting from the era of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung until the transition of power into the Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung) at the nagari level? (ii) How did the political movement and social disorder of Padri Wars (1803-1838) change the political and government structure of the traditional nagari of Minangkabau? and (iii) How did Dutch colonial intervention change the political and legal structure of nagari?

In conclusion, we argue that integrating historical perspectives, empirical insights, and contemporary views on local democracy such as those seen in the revival of nagari governance is essential to understanding how democratic consolidation unfolds in the Indonesian context. This approach helps illuminate the cultural dynamics of center-periphery relations and clarifies the institutional and contextual innovations required to support locally grounded democratic models in regions like West Sumatra. This study is the first to investigate the consolidation of local democracy in nagari (Minangkabau) using a *longue durée* historical approach, while also incorporating contemporary qualitative methods to analyze current governance practices.

Research Methodology

The post-positive exploratory method was employed in this research project. Strauss & Corbin (2003) assert that qualitative research generates robust conceptual theories via in-depth interview data and field observations. Qualitative and post-positivist research data sources from interviews and observations can establish effective and impactful methodologies. The procedure involves fixed ratios, generative queries, research frameworks, and variations of conceptual integration (Saputra et al., 2024). Denzin & Lincoln (2009) characterized post-positive research as engaging in logically interconnected stages. They emphasized the importance of diverse participant perspectives, advocated meticulous data collection and analysis, promoted the application of validity methods, and recommended presenting qualitative research in scientific reports.

We obtained verbal authorization to interview Minangkabau cultural experts, including members of provincial and local governments, academics, and heads of traditional institutions. Among these were respected figures in the Minangkabau cultural structure, such as Ninik Mamak (clan leaders who hold customary authority within the nagari), and Alim Ulama (religious scholars who provide Islamic guidance in community affairs). These individuals represent key components of the traditional tripartite leadership model in Minangkabau society, alongside state officials. Through further screening, interviews with selected participants were conducted with stages of consent to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation. These interviews aimed to facilitate a more comprehensive examination of democratic practices and consolidation at the local level, especially in the nagari area of West Sumatra Province.

Table 1 Research Informants

Institution	Position	Informant
Central Government	Expert Staff for Government Affairs of the Ministry of Home Affairs.	2
West Sumatra Provincial Government	West Sumatra Province Regional Government Bureau	2
Overseas Luhak / Luhak Rantau	Nagari Government's Head of Minangkabau Natural Traditional Density Institute (LKAAM)	4
	Head of Indigenous Village Density Minangkabau	4

Table 1 Research Informants (continued)

Institution	Position	Informant
Overseas Luhak / Luhak	Governance and Empowerment	4
Rantau	Agency Nagari Community	4
West Sumatra Province	Head of Local Department	5
Regional People's Representative Council		
Andalas University	Center for Regional Autonomy Studies	3
An authoritative local political expert who focuses on	Local Political Expert	5
studying local government	Civil service	5
	Cultural Practitioner	5
Total Informants		43

Sources: Author's Document

Table 1 displays the range and number of participants. 43 informants were free to describe the answers to the questions asked in semi-structured interviews. The interviews occurred in stages with academics from the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Andalas University, the Minangkabau Cultural Study Center, provincial and regional authorities, figures, and local communities. All participants were selected on the basis of having the ability and experience to understand nagari history, practices, political dynamics, and local democracy in Nagari in West Sumatra.

To authenticate and validate the interview data from participants, field observations were also conducted by the research team in Minangkabau to observe the functioning of the nagari directly. These field observations were supplemented with secondary data in the form of hard or soft files such as books, reviews, scientific articles, e-journals, e-books, and ancient manuscripts related to the research topic.

Most interviews exhibited similarities and consistencies which testified to the method's reliability and the quality of the evidence from participants. A small portion conveyed different or anomalous perspectives based on the references they had. All answers from participants were collected and filtered according to the research concentration needed for analysis.

We grouped the findings based on the periods discussed in the interviews starting from the pre-colonial, colonial, Sukarno-era Old Order (*Orde Lama*), Suharto-era New Order (*Orde Baru*), and the post-Suharto Reform era (*Era Reformasi*). The goal is to help researchers see how the history of nagari is viewed by participants and how the stages of the consolidation of nagari democracy from 1979-2015 have been conceived,

as well as to build a general sense of the importance of the idea of democracy to the nagari tradition, and reflect on the nagari discourse's overall meaning for democratic consolidation.

The last part of the analysis used in this study were the customary nagari spread across the Minangkabau-West Sumatra region. Informants were selected purposively using snowball sampling; for those who satisfy the qualifications due to their expertise, experienced and documented understanding of nagari's history and political structure. The analysis was conducted based on the informant's perspective (emic), which was validated using the triangulation method. Triangulation was conducted by cross-checking primary data from in-depth interviews with secondary data through direct interaction with research informants. This was done to review the overall research findings to improve accuracy and competent analysis. The study's conclusion is linked to the combined data obtained from informants (emic) and the author's interpretation of field data (etic).

Results

The Process of Traditional Nagari Government

Informants were knowledgeable in nagari history and saw it in processual or progressive terms. Four areas form the Minangkabau cultural base, which is the most systematic pattern of government and politics (Graves, 2007). The historical narrative relates that the traditional nagari were gathered into a loose confederation called a *luhak* led by a king located in the core mountainous region, the *darek*, in present-day Batipuh subdistrict of Tanah Datar district. This confederation is dated to the beginning of 15th century during the period of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung. Based on the historical division of the area, it is essential to understand what happened with the social and political space in Minangkabau.

According to the discourse related by the informants, boundaries that strictly limit the domains of the state, politics, and culture become fluid when the political entity of history, depicted as a cultural power, penetrates the arena of state intervention in viewing the process of consolidating local democracy. This discourse comprised of four to five discrete periods of political history which answered the first question of our study:

First, the nagari-centered narrative begins with the rise of the first Hindu-Buddhist kingdom in the Minangkabau region, the Dharmasraya-centred 'Melayu' Kingdom, in the upper reaches of the Batang Hari River, in 1070. According to Jamal (1996) and Navis (2015) the kingdom represented a new age in the history of central Sumatra and constituted the pioneer of Indianized states in Sumatra from the beginning

of the 7th century until the early 14th century. It was the predecessor of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of the Minangkabau in Pagaruyung based upon the *luhak* of Tanah Datar, as well as the successive Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung in Luhak Tanah Datar in the 14th century, ending in the 19th century due to the Dutch colonialization of the Minangkabau.

Second, the narrative emphasized the government and political structure of nagari as a unit of the customary law community in the *luhak-darek* (inland-agrarian) region and *rantau* (coastal-maritime) region of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung, which claims that the kingdom's governmental and political structure is derived from that of Majapahit. According to Navis (2015) the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung was one of the colonies of the Majapahit Kingdom led by Hayam Wuruk. The death of Hayam Wuruk in 1389 AD was exploited by Aditiawarman in 1409 to free Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung from the Majapahit Kingdom.

Third, the narrative emphasized the entry of Islam into Pagaruyung, which thenceforward, developed into syncretic Islam. In traditional narratives, Islamic teachings are originally brought by the Umayyah Caliph (The Umayyah Caliphate represented the second caliphate formed following the Prophet Muhammad's passing, governed by the Umayyah Dynasty) to the Kingdom of Dharmasraya. According to this account, Maharaja Lokitawarman, the king of Dharmasraya in 699, was converted to Islam by the Umayyah Caliph and moved to Pariangan (*Nagari Pariangan Luhak Tanah Datar*) also in the present-day Tanah Datar regency. According to the narrative discourse, the development and influence of Islamic teachings on governmental and political patterns in the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung influenced the development of the democratic model and stratification of power in the government and politics of the Minangkabau nagari. This popular historical discourse is found in Navis (2015), who relates that when the first Muslim king of Pagaruyung, Sultan Alif (1560), came to power, there was a change in the composition of the government and politics of the nagari of Minangkabau. However, in this political development narrative, conflict results which further affects the development of the nagari.

The narrative resolves this by emphasizing the political concession between penghulu and ulama at the meeting at Marapalam Hill, at the end of the 19th century. This consensus is known as the Marapalam Agreement, which contains the well-known phrase: *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*, meaning that the *adat*, the indigenous aristocracy with their indigenous customs, and Islam are inseparable. However, Islamic leaders interpreted *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*, as meaning that the source of customary law is Islam, and the source of Islam is the Qur'an.

This allowed for the Islamization of customary law. The implicit comparison marking fundamental changes in the government and politics of traditional nagari in Minangkabau during the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung and the Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung contained in the narrative can be seen in the following (Table 2).

Table 2 Organizational Comparison of the Traditional Government of Pagaruyung of the Majapahit model and Government following the Subsequent Entry of Islam

The Division of Power	When Majapahit ruled in the Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung	When Islam entered the Pagaruyung Kingdom
First Level	<i>Mantri Katrini</i> (the three great ministers) namely: <i>Mahamentri Hino</i> , <i>Mahamentri Sirikan</i> and <i>Mahamentri Halu</i>	Rajo Tigo Selo (Tungku Tigo Sajarangan) Literally, the Three Rajahs or Kings on three separate thrones, namely: <i>Cati Bilang Pandai</i> , <i>Datuak Katamanggungan</i> , and <i>Datuak Perpatih Nan Sabatang</i> who constituted the three centers for government administration
Second Level	<i>Catur Rakian</i> (the four rulers) namely: <i>Rakrian Demung</i> , <i>Rakrian Kanurun</i> , <i>Rakrian Ranga</i> , and <i>Rakrian Tumenggung</i> . The five of them, together with mahapatih were called panca <i>ringwilwatika Darmajaksawho</i> were two consist	<i>Basa Ampek Balai</i> , a council of four senior ministers, namely <i>Bandaharoat Sungai Tarab</i> , <i>Andomoat Suraso</i> , <i>mang kudumat Sumanik</i> , and <i>Tuan Gadangat Batipuh</i> were extensions of the central government
Third Level	of Buddhist and Hindu religious leaders <i>Saptapapatri</i> (the seven upapati),	<i>Raja Duo Selo</i> , namely the customary King of <i>Buo</i> and King of <i>Ibadatat Sumpur Kudus</i>
Fourth Level	namely dignitaries performing legal and religious affairs	<i>Gadang Nan Batujuah</i> , namely seven dignitaries performing legal and religious duties

Source: Adopted from Navis (2015), Hamka (1984), Jamal (1996), Graves (2007), Zainudin (2008), Valentina (2009), Edison and Sungut (2016), and Hadler (2010)

The comparative perspective represented in table 2 and the scholarly narratives on Islamification in Indonesia by Schriek (1973), Hamka (1984), Hasbi (1990), Jamal

(1996), Reid (1974), Dobbin (2008), Hadler (2010), and Navis (2015) present the power relationship between government and politics in nagari and Islam as essentially two forms: the new religious affiliation (Syncretic Islam) and its incorporation into the local kinship and family system, and the relationship between Islam and the wider nagari community, which is considered to have helped maintain individual livelihoods and networks in addition to maintaining the role of the shaman because of the adjustment between prevailing Sharia and adat law (the transition from Hindu Buddhism to Syncretic Islam).

The narrative discourse as related by informants highlights two relatively neglected themes in formal scholarly studies of ancient Sumatran manuscripts, namely, the stratification of government and politics in traditional nagari, which, according to the narrative discourse, occurs during the transition from the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung to the Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung illustrated in table 2:

(i) the division of power in the government and politics in traditional nagari. The territory of *rantau* (coastal-maritime) is led by minor kings as representatives of the King of the Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung, while the territory of inland/agrarian polities are led by *penghulu* or heads of the *adat* and are governed by either the aristocratic or egalitarian customs and cultures of each territory;

(ii) there is a model of government and politics in traditional nagari, referred to as the model of the government of *Lareh Nan Duo*, the two main systems of governance, aristocratic (*Lareh Koto Piliang*) and democratic (*Lareh Bodi Chaniago*), with *Tuah Sakato* or 'unanimous decision-making' democracy, as the underlining principle and regional motto. The aristocratic governmental and political system of *Koto Piliang* was initiated by Datuak Katamanggungan and the egalitarian administrative and political system of *Bodi Chaniago* started by Datuak Perpatih Nan Sabatang, as shown in the following figure 1.

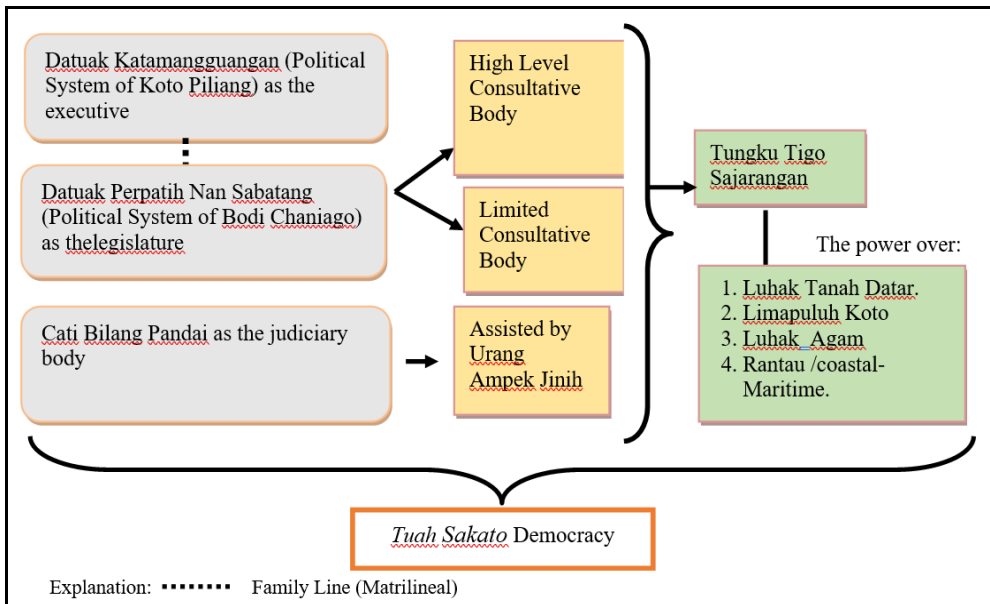


Figure 1 The Model of Movement of *Lareh Nan Duo* with *Tuah Sakato* Democracy

Source: Jamal, M. (1996).

As shown in Figure 1, the emergence of contemporary democratic elements in West Sumatra can be traced back to the political structures that developed as early as the 12th century. Historical manuscripts from the region describe the institutional division of power in traditional Nagari society through two significant systems of governance, known as *kelarasan*. A *kelarasan* refers to a customary political alliance or confederation of nagari that shares the same lineage of law, leadership model, and sociopolitical orientation.

There are two main *kelarasan* in Minangkabau: *Koto Piliang* and *Bodi Caniago*. The *Koto Piliang* system is associated with a hierarchical and centralized leadership style, often represented by *Lareh Koto Piliang*, functioning as the executive. In contrast, *Bodi Caniago* promotes a more egalitarian and deliberative structure, defined by *Lareh Bodi Caniago* as the legislative authority. The judiciary was managed by Cati Bilang Pandai and supported by four customary officers collectively known as *Orang Ampek Jinih Dubalang*, *Punggawa* (village coordinators), *Manti* (protocol officers), and *Malin* (religious leaders).

These leadership forms were geographically distributed across three traditional territories (*luhak*) and coastal regions (*rantau*). The historical narrative suggests that the two *Kelarasan* systems coexisted through political compromise, allowing each nagari to

choose whether to follow *Koto Piliang's* or *Bodi Caniago's* laws, thereby ensuring local autonomy within a broader shared cultural-political framework.

From the perspective of contemporary democracy, "the method of democracy" in the traditional nagari closely intersects with political control. According to Agustino (2009), political control is especially potent if it is implemented not only by people within the structure of power, but also by people outside the structure of government, similar to the concept of checks and balances. However, in each nagari in the territories of *Luhak* and *Rantau*, political control is not carried out in the sense of national and state management, but more in the management of public life at the local level.

According to AS (a cultural expert from *Luhak Limapuluh Koto*, interviewed on July 31, 2016), BD (head of KAN, and LKAAM Kubuang XII/rantau/coastal-maritime, interviewed on October 12, 2016 in Solok), Dt.S (Chairman of KAN *Nagari Pariangan*, *Luhak Tanah Datar*, interviewed on July 23, 2016, in Batusangkar), Dt.B (head of KAN *Nagari Sungai Puar*, *Luhak Agam*, interviewed on August 4, 2016, at Puar River), the membership of *Cerdik Pandai* in traditional nagari before the Dutch intervention in influencing the governmental and political structure of nagari performed two roles found in modern political systems, namely a Limited Consultative Body (particularly for elected members), and an "opposition" for unelected *Cerdik Pandai* or those choosing to be outside the limited consultative body.

This part of the narrative discourse is noteworthy, as the institutionalization of local politics in nagari Minangkabau presents a unique model that integrates two distinct groups into a cohesive unit. They engage in discussions within a framework termed "political compromise" as a strategic approach to honor the modern principles of diversity. According to the narrative, the Minangkabau customary nagari historically established "deliberation" as the foundation for facilitating extensive and autonomous participation for each individual member of society. The adherents of the narrative discourse recognize this forum for its foresight in addressing division, outside intervention, anti-democratic actions, and physical conflict, and in pursuing equal rights and public engagement grounded in communal democracy.

Political Movement and Social Disorder

How does the narrative draw upon and frame the political movement and social disorder of the Padri War (1803-1838) to show that it changed the political and governmental structure of the traditional nagari of Minangkabau? (i) The narrative begins with the Padri challenge to the matrilineal system in Minangkabau contained in *Tuah Sakato* democracy. According to Hadler (2010), external observers find this form of

family structure in Minangkabau strange, atavistic and even immoral, and thus worth studying; (ii) when syncretic Islam entered the community of traditional nagari it became the cause of the Padri political challenge to the nagari from 1803 to 1838 in Minangkabau.

There are two reasons why Islam is not openly accepted by the Minangkabau community in the narrative: (i) Islam was a religion deeply bound to the city, because Islam required a city to realize its social and religious ideals; and (ii) in Minangkabau, the religious system of the communities of traditional *Nagari* developed well because they also had their religious experts, the shaman. The Padri War (1803-1838) is represented as a combination of invasive foreign ideas and local reformist response. Hamka (1984), Hadler (2010) and Navis (2015) represent the violence of the Padri in Minangkabau with a political movement in the form of a jihad against the traditional matrilineal elite in Minangkabau upholding *adat* rather than obeying religious orders and Wahhabist-like influences. According to Schriek (1973), Navis (2015) and Hamka (1984), the Wahhabist group of Muslims who followed the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703-1777) with the Hanbali madhab school of jurisprudence had influence beyond their heartlands in Arabia.

Dobbin (2008) describes the Padri as a movement in Minangkabau that emerged from the prosperity of trade which allowed more people from the Minangkabau community to leave for hajj to Mecca. Therefore, they became more sensitive to developments in Mecca according to Schrieke (1973), Navis (2015) and Hamka (1984). This movement is seen as the beginning of the rise of modern Islam and anticolonial politics ranged against the Dutch.

The Padri War is painted as a series of prolonged conflicts between the Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung and the puritanical Padri which influences the spirit of the tradition of decentralization and democracy in the politics of Minangkabau (Hadler, 2010). According to Hasbi (1990), even though the Padri did not succeed in creating an administrative unity of nagari, the survival of the nagari testifies to the system's resilience in tumultuous times in which nagari were able to maintain stability and success in a volatile political situation and unstable political circumstances. The Padri challenge had succeeded in instilling the political supremacy of the autonomous local nagari in Minangkabau. However, the Padri challenge had not succeeded in creating a concentrated region-wide power with a centralized administration from the nagari and could not diminish the authority of *penghulu adat* over the community of the nagari. Ties between the nagari and supra-states were only religious and ideological and occurred during the era of the Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung. The narrative

suggests a learning from the experience of the political challenge of the Padri (1803-1838), in that the nagari's essence and the basis for its ties with other polities is not only primordial and consanguineous (blood ties or *adat* kinship) but also a functional structure in the sense of effective territorial government.

The narrative stresses that the Padri War was a defining historical boundary for the Minangkabau people. According to Hadler (2010), this historical episode can be used as a boundary between "before" and "after" when this political history is about to reopen. After the Padri challenge ended, Minangkabau had defined its fundamental political philosophy and ideological foundation "*sakali aia gadang sakali tapian barubah*" (political history will determine the next civilization) and "*adat bersendikan syarak, syarak bersendikan Kitabullah, adat mamakai, syarak mangato*" (adat is governed by Islam, Islam is governed by the Qur'an, adat is still implemented, yet Islamic law rules). This phrase ended the validity of the Padri doctrine. The aftermath of the Padri War also led to institutionalizing a tripartite leadership model in Minangkabau society known as *tigo tungku sajarangan*, literally "three pillars in one cauldron." This traditional governance structure consists of: (1) *ninik mamak*, the clan elders who uphold customary norms and values; (2) *alim ulama*, the religious scholars who provide Islamic legal and spiritual guidance; and (3) *cerdik pandai*, the intellectuals or educated elites who contribute strategic knowledge and modern administrative insight. These three leadership components became the formal pillars of the nagari, and together, they continue to shape the structure of local governance and democracy in West Sumatra to the present day.

Discussion

The Contestant Between the Authority and traditional Nagari

One of the impacts of the Padri War was the entry of religious officials into a formal (governance) custom leadership structure; priests and preachers became part of the formal customary office. In spite of this, the Padri War also produced a "political myth," which related that the colonial Dutch only came to trade and help maintain wars between the nagari. This representation is in accordance with the content of the *Plakat Panjang* issued in 1833. *Plakat Panjang*, an historical record, has been transformed into a "political myth" which suggests that Minangkabau was treated as if it were an independent territory, through the decision that there was no obligation in paying taxes (*Belasting*), and they were still governed by the *penghulu adat*, and nagari remains allowed to unite and be led towards progress.

The narrative discourse relates that the Dutch colonial intervention in reorganizing the political and governmental structure of the traditional nagari of Minangkabau was implemented by the Dutch colonists by appointing *Tuanku Laras* (*Tuanku Lareh*) as the customary chief and government head for a nagari federation. At that time, after the democracy of the traditional nagari had been undermined, *Tuah Sakato* was abandoned; the Minangkabau lived under three legal systems: customary, Islamic, and European (Dutch) (Hadler, 2010). For two decades, Dutch social and bureaucratic interference transformed the nagari, and in 1914, the Nagari Ordinance officially organized itself as a local authority. The Dutch-acclaimed *penghulu* administered the tax through the new council of nagari; no one acknowledged the superficial recognition of tradition and its restoration.

The narrative discourse suggests that the political conflicts and social disorder of the Padri War and the conflicts and interactions between matriarchy, Islam, reformists, and the Dutch tarnished the essential elements of *Tuah Sakato* democracy (consultation and consensus between institutions in nagari as seen in the division of power in Table 1). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, West Sumatra became a breeding ground for new ideas or ideological breeding. Although under Dutch colonialism the Minangkabau polity suffered, matriarchal endurance was a witness to the resilience of local traditions, the flexibility of reformist Islam, and the fundamental weakness of Dutch colonialism.

From the perspective of contemporary democracy, "the method of democracy" in traditional nagari in Minangkabau closely intersects with social control. The position of the state in the democracy of traditional nagari in Minangkabau lies in nagari with the model of *Kelasaran Koto Piliang* or *Bodi Chaniago* and the society of *Cerdik Pandai*. However, control is not carried out in the sense of national or state management, it is exerted in pursuit of the management of local public life in each nagari in the territories of *Luhak* and *Rantau*. The model of institutionalization is expressed in narrative terms as "political compromise." Adherents of the narrative discourse argue that traditional nagari in Minangkabau provides extensive and autonomous participation for each individual, an anti-authoritarian climate, egalitarian public engagement, and communal democracy.

In the discourse on democracy among the Minangkabau, utilization of history answers questions as to how a suprabate intervention process (Dutch Colonial) could finally create an embryo of regionally-specific democratic consolidation in the traditional nagari in Minangkabau. In the discourse, although *Tuah Sakato* democracy deteriorates, Dutch intervention in nagari government ultimately contributes to democratic consolidation process through the responsive revitalization of the nagari in Minangkabau.

Under the Dutch, the nagari institution began to experience a shift in function, when the Dutch strove to paralyze the power of *Ninik Mamak Urang Ampek Jinih* (*Dubalang, Punggawa, Manti, Malin*) in the nagari government by granting the Ordinance of *Organsche Gemeente Ordinantie voor Sumatera Westkust* (IGOSWEK), Staatblad 1918 no 677 and to enforce the regulation, they issued *Besluit vanDenResident van Sumatera Westkust*, ddo.1 Januari 1918 no 1A, jo.15 in March 1919 no 175 (*Tuah Sakato*, 190th edition, April 2001), namely a special ordinance regarding nagari government in Minangkabau.

After the Dutch reneged on the Plakat Panjang agreement and eliminated the meaning and roles of *Tali Tigo Sapilin* (*ninik mamak* the chief, *cerdik pandai* the pandit or intellectual authority, and *alim ulama*, the clerics), they created an alternative "artificial aristocracy", that is to say, a new class that could function as an extension of Dutch control to coordinate their policy implementation. One method for doing so was to revive the regency system as had been introduced in the Padri period. A regent would be appointed by the Dutch colonial government to coordinate and simultaneously supervise several nagari. Since the term *Regen* was foreign to the Minangkabau community, the Dutch replaced it in 1860 with *Laras* (read: *Lareh*), and the head of the *Lareh* was given the title, *Tuanku Lareh*.

The concepts of *Tali Tigo Sapilin* and *Tungku Tigo Sajaringan* were later abolished by the Dutch and replaced by "the administrative phase of nagari administration" according to the narrative discourse, by forming the People's Council which was later named a formal juridical village and headed by a nagari Chief (Hasbi, 1990). The *Kerapatan Nagari* was then given the power to choose the nagari chief by using the voting system.

Dutch colonial intervention in imposing a new aristocratic government on Minangkabau was similar to the Dutch model of intervention in rural Java. The similarity was also included in the narrative discourse of the nagari as democratic models as related by several of the informants which served to stress the region's solidarity with the wider Indonesian democratic struggle while emphasizing the region's unique contribution (MK, interviewed on September 22, 2016, and AF, interviewed on October 24, 2016).

In the narrative discourse the method of Dutch colonial colonization is characterized by the exploitation of a perennial clash of religious perspectives, between local beliefs and Islam. This dynamic led to conflicts among various groups and tribes, positioning the colonizers as arbiters while simultaneously exacerbating tensions. This method is disguised in Dutch narratives that foreground the need for efficient trade, which serves as a primary rationale and mechanism for exerting control over colonial

regions. In contrast, in democracy consolidation narrative discourse, the social influence of "nagari" customs and culture instructed indigenous populations to engage in conflict reduction. Consequently, the principles of communal democracy or consolidation democracy are consistently foregrounded in the narrative to prevent democratic backsliding.

The trade exploitation discourse can be found in scholarly works such as a thesis by Mestika Zet (1983) titled 'Melayu Kopidaun: Colonial Exploitation in Forced Cultivation System of Coffee in Minangkabau, West Sumatra (1847-1908)' explaining how Dutch colonials utilized the Forced Cultivation of Coffee in Minangkabau through the manipulation of traditional elites in nagari government. A study by P. Hefner (1998) and Hefner (2002) explained how Dutch colonials applied interventions through forced cultivation and taxes to the community. In Minangkabau, although the Dutch colonial government selected the people to sit on the *Kerapatan Nagari* or *Kerapatan adat nagari* (KAN, the nagari-based judiciary body), the KAN had no freedom to take care of the nagari household. In these circumstances, it was no longer possible to develop and improve nagari politically, culturally, and economically. With the unity of the customary law community, nagari held only strategic functions relevant to Dutch suprapstate governance. This policy was based on the fact that, in daily life, nagari was the spearhead of the colonial government in West Sumatra, closest to the community. Therefore, various messages and political policies (as well as economic policies) were successfully conveyed and implemented when delivered through nagari.

The Process Toward Local Democratic Consolidation of Nagari

In the democratic consolidation discourse prevalent in Minangkabau, in general, democratization includes several historical processes or stages, namely liberalization, transition, installation, and consolidation, with the extension of the meaning of democracy leading the topic of analysis to democratic consolidation. In the democratic nagari narrative discourse, the process of consolidation towards local democracy in traditional nagari is a transition from order to disorder and changing continuities in the political history of the elite of conventional nagari. Even though there was decentralization in the form of intervention in the four periods of the democratic nagari narrative, it does not automatically generate the end goal of democratic consolidation. Following Nordholt, H & Klinken (2007), nagari-based democratic consolidation will give birth to the sustainability of a nagari past in the present that can be drawn upon to reinforce democratic norms. However, the author also finds a different understanding of central or suprapstate

intervention by combining multiple empirical records when related to democratic consolidation discourse.

Top-down external intervention that stimulates a process towards democratic consolidation becomes a central theme of the nagari democratic model discourse when considering the role it gives to the intervention of pre-modern traditional states (Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung, Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung, and the Dutch colonial) in the traditional nagari of Minangkabau. Despite the negative criticism implicit in the accounts of intervention in nagari government and politics, the discourse affirms that the nagari were actually strengthened during these times. A mapping of the structure of local democracy in nagari in West Sumatra during the Dutch Colonial is characterized by (i) *Plakat Panjang* agreement (later reneged on by the Dutch); and (ii) the Dutch creation of three forms of local government, namely the *Tuanku lareh* (*Nagarihoof*), *Penghulu suku Rodi*, and Head of the Nagari. The first two forms of government were the heads of the territorial government unit and became the supra-Nagari government. The idea was that this supra-nagari state was the head of nagari based on smaller unified groups (kinship groups). This discourse serves as a tool in the process towards local democratic consolidation on the basis of the nagari tradition in West Sumatra.

Conclusion

The narrative discourse of local democratic consolidation foregrounds the history of the institutional struggle between traditional states (Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung, Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung, as well as the Dutch colonial state) and the local political institutions of nagari. Although there were instances of intervention in local government and politics, the strength of local democracy in traditional nagari in West Sumatra during the Dutch Colonial period and in the independence era, that allowed it to survive the autocratic period of Guided Democracy and the New Order, was the result of the actions of a succession of states which provided three patterns of government: the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom of Pagaruyung, the Syncretic Islamic Kingdom of Pagaruyung, and the Dutch colonial period and forced the nagari to respond and adapt.

Studies of political narrative discourse are beneficial for the study of local Indonesian politics and provide significant contributions to the understanding of how democracy is perceived locally and may be further developed and consolidated,

especially in this case, at the practical level regarding the dynamics and model of democracy in the local political space of Indonesia

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the reviewers and editors for their constructive comments and suggestions.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as potential conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions

All authors listed have made substantial, direct, and intellectual contributions to the work and approved it for publication.

Funding

This research was funded by “Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat, Universitas Andalas.”. Research contract number 78/UN.16.17/PP.PGB/LPPM/2018

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/ supplementary material, and further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

References

- Agustino, L. (2009). *Pilkada dan Dinamika Politik Lokal ([Regional election and the dynamic of local politics]*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Asrinaldi, A. (2014). *Kekuatan-kekuatan politik di Indonesia (Political powers in Indonesia)*. Tiara Wacana.
- Azwar, W., Yunus, Y., Muliono, M., & Permatasari, Y. (2018). Nagari minangkabau: the study of indigenous institutions in west sumatra, indonesia. *Jurnal Bina Praja: Journal of Home Affairs Governance*, 10(2), 231–239. <https://doi.org/10.21787/jbp.10.2018.231-239>
- Beckmann, F. V. B., & Beckmann, K. V. B. (2013). *Political and Legal Transformations of*

- an Indonesian Polity: The Nagari from Colonisation to Decentralisation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Denzin, N. ., & Lincoln, Y. . (2009). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Dinata, Y. (2013). *Integrating Religion Within Conservation: Islamic Beliefs and Sumatran Forest Management-Chapter II The History of the Minangkabau* (J. McKay (ed.)). DICE: University of Kent.
- Dobbin, C. (2008). *Gejolak ekonomi kebangkitan Islam, dan gerakan paderi Minangkabau 1784-1847 (Translated from Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy, Central Sumatra 1784-1847)*. Komunitas Bambu.
- Edison, E., & Sungut, N. D. M. (2016). *Tambo Minangkabau: Budaya dan hukum adat Minangkabau (Tambo Minangkabau: Culture and customary law of Minangkabau)*. Kristal Media.
- Fajria, R., Putera, R. E., & Ariany, R. (2023). An evaluation of the implementation of the disaster resilient village program in Padang Pariaman regency. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 464, 10001. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202346410001>
- Freedman, A. L. (2006). *Political change and consolidation democracy's: Rocky road in Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, and Malaysia*. Palgrave McMillan.
- Graves, E. E. (2007). *Asal-usul elite Minangkabau modern: Respon terhadap kolonial Belanda abad XIX/XX (Translated from The Minangkabau response to Dutch colonial rule in the nineteenth century)*. Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- Hadler, J. (2010). *Sengketa tiada putus: Matriarkat, reformis Islam, dan kolonialisme di Minangkabau (Translated from Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural resilience in Indonesia through jihad and colonialism)*. Freedom Institute.
- Hamka, H. (1984). *Islam dan adat Minangkabau (Islam and Minangkabau tradition)*. Pustaka Panjimas.
- Hasbi, M. (1990). *Nagari, desa dan pembangunan pedesaan di Sumatera Barat (Nagari, village, and rural development in West Sumatera)*. Yayasan Genta Budaya.
- Hefner, P. (1998). The History and Cross-Cultural Possibility of a Modern Political Ideal. *Zygon*, 33(1), 3–4. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.1998.00122.x>
- Hefner, R. W. (2002). Global Violence and Indonesian Muslim Politics. *American Anthropologist*, 104(3), 754–765. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.3.754>
- Jamal, M. (1996). *Manyingi tambo alam Minangkabau (See The Beginning of Minangkabau)*. Tropik.
- Jepsen, E. M. (2011). *Processes of democratization*. SAGE.
- Junus, U. (1964). Some Remarks on Minangkabau Social Structure: Introduction. *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde*, 120(3), 293–326.

- Kahn, J. S. (2020). *Constituting the Minangkabau*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003085027>
- Linz, L., & Stepan, A. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-communist Europe*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Navis, A. . (2015). *Alam takambang jadi guru: Adat dan kebudayaan Minangkabau (Open Nature to be a Teacher: Minangkabau custom and culture)*. Grafika Jaya Sumbar.
- Nordholt, H. S., & Klinken, V. (2007). *Renegotiating Boundaries Local Politics In Post-Soeharto Indonesia*. KITLV Press.
- Peel, J. D. Y. (1968). Syncretism and Religious Change. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 10(2), 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500004771>
- Reid, A. (1974). *Indonesian national revolution, 1945-1950: Studies in contemporary Southeast Asia*. Longman.
- Robert, K. . (1998). *Deepening democracy? The modernleft and social movements in Chile and Peru*. Stanford University Press.
- Saputra, N., Putera, R. E., Zetra, A., Azwar, Valentina, T. R., & Mulia, R. A. (2024). Capacity building for organizational performance: a systematic review, conceptual framework, and future research directions. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2434966>
- Schedler, A. (1998). What is democratic consolidation? *Journal of Democracy*, 9(2), 91–107.
- Schriek, B. J. . (1973). *Pergolakan Agama di Sumatera Barat (Religious unrest in West Sumatera)*. Bhratara.
- Sebastian, A. (2022). Matrilineal practices among muslims: An ethnographic study of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra. *Ethnography*, 14661381221147136.
- Stewart, C. (1999). *Syncretism and Its Synonyms: Reflections on Cultural Mixture*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Stoddard, L. (1979). *Dunia baru Islam (The New World of Islam)*. Pembangunan.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2003). *Dasar-Dasar Penelitian Kualitatif* (M. terj. Shodiq (ed.)). Pustaka Pelajar.
- Suryadi, S. (2006). Vernacular Intelligence: Colonial Pedagogy and the Language Question in Minangkabau. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 34(100), 315–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639810601130184>
- Valentina, T. R. (2009). *Demokrasi lokal tiga nagari di Kabupaten Solok Sumatera Barat (Local democracy in Solok District, West Sumatera)*. Universitas Gadjah Mada.

- Valentina, T, R. (2017). *Proses konsolidasi demokrasi pada nagari di Sumatera Barat (The Process of democratic consolidation at nagari in West Sumatera)*. Padjajaran University.
- Valentina, T, R., Putera, R, E., & Kusdarini, K. (2011). The state versus local elite conflict in a transitional phase of democracy. *International Journal of Administrative Sciences and Organization*, 18(3), 210–218.
- Valentina, T. R., Putera, R. E., & Irawati, I. (2019). Reversing Democracy: Examining the Nagari Institution in West Sumatra, Indonesia. *Bisnis & Birokrasi Journal*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.20476/jbb.v26i1.10084>
- Zainudin, M. (2008). *Implementasi pemerintahan berdasarkan asal usul adat Minangkabau (Government implementation based on the customary origin of Minangkabau)*. Ombak.
- Zulchairiyah, S. (2008). *Nagari Minangkabau dan desa di Sumatera Barat: Dampak penerapan UU No 5 tahun 1979 tentang sistem pemerintahan desa (Nagari Minangkabau and villages in West Sumatera: The impact of the implementation of Law No. 5 Year 1979 concerning village government sy*. Kaukus Perempuan Penyelenggara Pemilu Sumatera Barat (KP3SB).