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# Neo-institutionalism perspective on local governance in Lombok: Reinstitutionalisation of Tuan Guru in the Indonesian decentralization era

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**Abstract:** This article delves into an examination and analysis of leadership models within local government institutions in Indonesia, employing the conceptual framework of new institutionalism. We contend that informal local institutions within communities not only influence the behavior and identity of leaders as actors but, within the context of decentralization, have also undergone a process of reinstitutionalization regarding roles and functions, employing distinct patterns of appropriation. Employing an interpretive approach, this article focuses on phenomena within the management of local governance in the West Nusa Tenggara province. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, literature studies on local history, and online news searches. Through a case study of local governance in West Nusa Tenggara province, particularly Lombok, the article reveals that the Tuan Guru, an informal local institution in Lombok society, has experienced reinstitutionalization through vertical and horizontal appropriation. The conclusion drawn is that decentralization has created opportunities for informal institutions to re-establish their roles within formal governance through appropriation patterns.

**Keywords:** neo-institutionalism; decentralization; local governance; Tuan Guru; Lombok

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## 1. Introduction

The decentralization policy in Indonesia was introduced in 1999 in response to the nationwide student uprising in May 1998, which led to the overthrow of the 32-year authoritarian regime of Soeharto. The student protests aimed at transforming Indonesia's political system and establishing new democratic institutions that would be open to citizens' aspirations. The decentralization policy, initiated in 1999, promised significant changes in governance arrangements and the overall political system of Indonesia. Decentralization, as a concept, is generally defined as "a structural change of governance through the transfer of power and authority from the national to subnational levels" (Talitha et al., 2019, p. 3). The primary goal of decentralization is to rejuvenate not only the management of city and regency governments but also to enhance village development. It aims to make existing community institutions more representative and accountable, improve the relationship between the state and its people, and enhance the delivery of public services (Antlov et al., 2016; Keating, 1998; Morgan, 2002). During the decentralization process, Indonesia witnessed the resurgence of traditional and cultural institutions, serving as a counterbalance to the formal institutions of local government. These traditional and

cultural institutions played a significant role in influencing the functioning of government and leadership in various ways.

Legally, the initiation of decentralization can be traced back to the enactment of Law No. 22 of 1999 on Regional Autonomy and Law No. 25 concerning Fiscal Regulations for Central and Regional Governments. The decision to implement power decentralization in Indonesia, as reflected in the process of transitioning authority, underscores the central government's democratic political commitment to safeguard public political liberties and redistribute political and economic resources to local governments. Over time, this regulation underwent several revisions, beginning with the issuance of Law No. 33 and Law No. 34 of 2004, followed by Law No. 23 of 2014, and culminating in Law No. 9 of 2015 concerning Regional Autonomy. The overarching objective of these regulations was to ensure the transfer of responsibilities for public service delivery, encompassing areas such as public works, land management, and investment, to sub-national governments. Meanwhile, critical domains like defense, security, judiciary, foreign relations, and monetary and fiscal policy remained under the purview of the central government.

Numerous efforts have been made to scrutinize and elucidate the impact of decentralization on local governance, often employing formal institutions through economic, political, bureaucratic, and legal lenses. However, a limited number of studies have been dedicated to understanding how informal institutions can influence the decision-making processes and political outcomes at the sub-national government level. Previous studies in Indonesia have shown that decentralization has led to the rise of significant social forces and local informal institutions (de Archellie et al., 2020; Waworuntu et al., 2023). These informal institutions played a crucial role in shaping the decision-making process, governance, and introducing new norms in the leadership model within local formal institutions. Outside the domain of decision-making process within the government bureaucracy, studies also reported the role of informal institutions affected the foreign investment attraction in Vietnam (Ngoc, 2020) or how they could stand as a substitute to formal institutions to enhance micro, small, and medium economies in Myanmar (Danguah and Sen, 2021). However, these studies did not elaborate the theoretical framework of logic of appropriateness to understand the interplay of the formal and informal institutions to adapt themselves within the complex social organization or inter-institutional complexes, whether using formal or informal that drive their behavior and action. Therefore, it would be particularly intriguing to delve into the assertion that decentralization's flexibility has led to the rise of social forces and informal institutions, exploring diverse loci and local settings within Indonesia by enhancing the theoretical framework of logic of appropriateness as an alternative explanation.

This article seeks to delve into and assess the leadership model in local governance within the province of West Nusa Tenggara, employing the new institutionalism conceptual framework, particularly from a sociological perspective, known as sociological institutionalism. The underlying assumptions of neo-institutionalism applied in this study encompass (1) acknowledging that political behavior is shaped not solely by formal rules and structures but is also impacted by informal conventions, (2) recognizing that political institutions are not merely surface-level entities but are outcomes arising from the interplay between values and power,

and (3) understanding that institutions both constrain individual behavior and are human constructs subject to change and evolution through the agency of actors (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, pp. 28–29). In the Indonesian decentralization context, informal institutions assert their rights and seek recognition to implement elements of adat or customary law in their respective territories, often manifesting as the adat revivalism movement (Henley and Davidson, 2007). Thus, this article posits that informal local institutions not only shape the behavior and identity of leaders as actors but, within the framework of decentralization, have undergone a reinstitutionalization of roles and functions, adopting specific patterns of appropriation.

Building upon the aforementioned assumptions, this article posits a set of inquiries: how do informal local institutions shape the conduct and identity of local leaders, and under what circumstances can the influence, shaping, and dominance of local governance by informal institutions take place? To address these queries, this study will concentrate on the emergence of social forces and informal institutions within the community of the West Nusa Tenggara province. Notably, this phenomenon gained prominence under the leadership of individuals with an Islamic religious ideology, marking the decentralization period. This article contributes to the debates on the logic of appropriateness theoretical framework within the institutionalism approach as an alternative explanation to how informal institutions could shape and affect the formal institutions behavior and action.

## **2. Literature review**

This study employs a neo-institutionalist conceptual framework to investigate and analyze leadership models within the local government of West Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. In a broader sense, institutionalism delves into the examination of institutions, particularly within the realm of political science. Institutionalism approach defines institutions as encompassing “law, custom, or practice,” “the practices and customs of government,” “the forms of social organization,” “special procedures and practices,” “the patterned interactions that are predictable,” and “informal codes of conduct, written contracts, complex organizations” (Guy, 1999, p. 18; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 3). The varied definitions of institutions underscore their pervasive presence across almost every dimension of human life, be it social, economic, political, or cultural. Institutionalists posit that human behavior and identity are shaped and influenced by institutions that manifest during human interactions.

Within the tradition of institutionalism approach, scholars distinguish between “old” or “traditional” and “new” approaches. The old institutionalism, originating from the political science discipline, predominantly concentrates on formal institutions such as the state, government agencies, formal rules, and government structures (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 24). It treats these entities as independent actors, autonomous from external factors, that shape and influence the organization of political life (March and Olsen, 1984, p. 735). Furthermore, the old institutionalism is characterized as normative (concerned with “good governance”), structuralist (where structures determine political behavior), historicist (heavily influenced by history), legalist (emphasizing the role of law in governance), and holistic (describing and comparing the entire government system) (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, pp. 7–14).

New institutionalism emerged from the field of comparative politics as a response to the behaviorist approaches of the 1950s and 1960s. Behaviorist theories viewed politics and policies as outcomes of the actions and interests of individuals (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). In contrast, behaviorism was a reaction against what is now referred to as ‘old institutionalism,’ which focused on formal and legal descriptions of institutional structures and procedures without providing explanations. Old institutionalism largely ignored the actual political processes within these formal frameworks (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Saurugger, 2014).

On the contrary, certain scholars endeavoured to broaden the analytical framework of institutionalist theory to proactively address the evolving nature of global political behavior in the late 1980s (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; March and Olsen, 2004; Peters, 2019). This analytical expansion later took on the label of “new institutionalism” or neo-institutionalism. Neo-institutionalism represents an evolution of the old institutionalism approach, which excessively fixated on formal institutions and subsequently extended its scope to include informal institutions in its examination. The genesis of neo-institutionalism was prompted by both internal and external challenges. Institutionalists sought to refine the theory in response to entrenched criticisms of “old” institutionalism while concurrently adapting to the increasing complexity and fragmentation of global society. Consequently, political scientists found the need for more sophisticated theoretical and methodological tools (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 30).

Neo-institutionalism asserts that political outcomes are no longer exclusively determined by formal institutions and rules. It advocates for a more independent role for political institutions, highlighting that the state is not merely influenced by society but also wields influence over it. It contends that political democracy hinges not only on economic and social conditions but also on the design of political institutions. Furthermore, it posits that the formal structures of governance serve as arenas for conflicting social forces while concurrently functioning as collections of standard operating procedures and structures that both define and defend themselves (March and Olsen, 1984, p. 738). Neo-institutionalist approaches provide scholars with the tools to analyze and explain institutions both as outcomes of political processes and as influences on those processes. Essentially, new institutionalism enables us to examine institutions as either dependent variables—focusing on their creation, design, and evolution—or as independent variables—looking at how they shape actor behavior and broader political and administrative dynamics.

Amidst the various forms of neo-institutionalism that emerged in the early 1990s, three notably gained prominence: rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Schmidt, 2015). This article will specifically delve into the realm of sociological institutionalism, which primarily originated within the subfield of organization theory (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 946). The roots of the sociological institutionalism movement can be traced back to the late 1970s, marked by sociologists challenging the conventional perspective of the social world as a mere reflection of a formal means-end ‘rationality,’ closely associated with modern organizational forms and bureaucracy. Contrary to this notion, sociological institutionalists contended that many institutional forms and procedures adopted by modern organizations were not selected

solely for their efficiency in the given task. Instead, they argued that these practices should be viewed as culturally specific practices, akin to the myths and ceremonies crafted by various societies and assimilated into organizational structures (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 946). In essence, organizations, bureaucracies, and formal institutions at large should be regarded as outcomes of processes linked to the transmission of cultural practices on a broader scale.

Hall and Taylor (1996, pp. 947–949) delineate three key features that set sociological institutionalism apart within the realm of the ‘new institutionalism.’ Firstly, it adopts a broad definition of institutions that goes beyond the traditional boundaries set by political scientists. It encompasses not only formal rules, procedures, or norms but also includes symbol systems, cognitive scripts, and moral templates that serve as the frames of meaning guiding human action. This broad perspective implies that sociological institutionalists face the challenge of distinguishing between ‘institutional explanations’ rooted in organizational structures and ‘cultural explanations’ based on an understanding of culture as shared attitudes and values.

Secondly, sociological institutionalism advocates for a unique understanding of the relationship between institutions and individual action, aligning with the ‘cultural approach.’ This perspective hinges on the ‘cognitive dimension’ of institutional impact, where institutions shape behavior by providing cognitive scripts, categories, and models crucial for action. These cognitive tools are instrumentally employed to interpret the world and guide behavior. Thirdly, sociological institutionalism asserts that organizations often adopt new institutional practices not necessarily for the sake of improving the means-ends efficiency of the organization but rather to enhance the social legitimacy of the organization or its participants. This underscores the importance of social legitimacy as a driving force behind organizational choices and adaptations.

The scholarship of neo-institutionalist has been expanding its discussion on investigation and examination of the interplay between the formal structures of governance and informal institutions to find the sufficient explanation of how the complex social and political organization fulfil their task as the agent that provide public goods for society. A study by de Archellie et al. (2020) that employed a neo-institutionalism approach and case study methodology in Gorontalo Province, Indonesia, observed that decentralization in Gorontalo had been seized upon by cultural leaders as an informal institution. These leaders utilized the appropriation to influence the trajectory of local governance and restrict the behaviour of formal leaders through the leverage of ideological power resources rooted in traditional values, teachings, and wisdom. Another study on informal institutions showed that at some point, the informal institutions could still hold equal positions and authority, comparing to formal institution, within the community in terms of carrying out people’s traditional aspirations in some public ceremonies and rituals (Waworuntu, 2023). Outside Indonesian case, studies revealed the role of informal institutions affected the foreign investment in Vietnam (Ngoc, 2020), how informal institutions could stand as a substitute to formal institutions in substituting the formal institutions to enhance micro, small, and medium economies in Myanmar (Danguah and Sen, 2021), the interaction of formal and informal institutions in transition countries in their domestic’s shadow economies (Gerxhani and Cichocki, 2023), the moderating effect

that informal institutions have on the relationship between organisational innovation and organisational learning (Escandon-Barbosa and Salas-Paramo, 2023) and how the performance of informal networks provide a social exclusion for women in Korea (Horak and Suseno, 2022).

For the purpose of the discussion here, informal institution is defined following Hall and Taylor (1996) as not only formal rules, procedures, or norms but also includes symbol systems, cognitive scripts, and moral templates that serve as the frames of meaning guiding human action. When discussing informal institutions, this paper seeks to incorporate a broader concept other than institutionalized pattern of behavior, expectations, regularities, and predictability as commonly present in formally structured organization. The article follows that informal institutions should encompass socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels (Peters, 2019, p. 205). Thus, within the Indonesian democratic transition context that saw the emergence of new informal actors, usually revoked historical, traditional, and cultural symbolism as their means to gain public legitimation (de Archellie et al., 2020; Waworuntu, 2023), informal institution is defined as an institutionalized patterns of behavior originating from traditional values, teachings, and wisdoms which are not only used to influence the course of local governance, but also to constraint the formal leaders' behavior.

In a nutshell, this article seeks to enrich the discourse on the institutionalist approach to informal institutions, delving into the position, role, and impact of local informal institutions on government operations, as well as the behaviour and identity of its leaders. The article contends that informal institutions not only shape the behavior and identity of leaders as an actor but, within the framework of decentralization, have undergone a reinstitutionalization of roles and functions, adopting specific patterns of appropriation. To accomplish this objective, the study adopts a formal governance model in West Nusa Tenggara province to investigate how informal institutions exert influence and how formal leaders in this region navigate their roles and express their identities within the constraints imposed by informal institutions.

### **3. Methodology**

This article relies on qualitative research employing interpretive methods. The selection of this approach is grounded in the initial research intent, framed within the context of neo-institutionalism with a cultural perspective. This conceptual framework mandates that researchers comprehend institutional phenomena through the experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of the involved actors (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, pp. 30–34). To achieve these objectives, the study systematically gathers, categorizes, analyzes, interprets, and concludes data, following a detailed set of stages outlined below.

Initially, data was gathered from diverse secondary resources, such as books, academic journals, newspaper, and reports, encompassing historical, social, and political aspects of West Nusa Tenggara province. This involved extracting information from documents, books, articles, notes, and demographic data related to the research topics. The collection process involved individual assistance,

collaboration with governmental institutions, and engagement with social organizations, print and internet media networks. Due to the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting access to archive centers and libraries, the research predominantly relied on digital sources. Subsequently, a comprehensive review was conducted to grasp concepts, case examples, symptoms, and dynamics extracted from the compiled literature. The outcomes of this review informed the development of a set of questions that would be posed to informants in the subsequent stage.

The third phase involves conducting interviews with key informants using the Zoom application's video interview feature. These informants hold significant roles, including former high-level officials, deputy governors, and former regents in the province of West Nusa Tenggara. Notably, one informant has held various positions, culminating in the role of Secretary of the Province of West Nusa Tenggara, making them a valuable source of information for this research. Their collective experience spans the transitional period from a centralized model (pre-1998) to a decentralized model (post-1998). Alongside these formal officials, a history professor, specializing in the history of the *tuan guru* and Lombok's society, was interviewed. Establishing contact with these key informants was facilitated by a local researcher with prior experience in researching Lombok's society and tourism.

The interviews took place between 31 August and 6 September 2020, using the Zoom Meeting application. The decision to utilize Zoom was influenced by the limitations on field research imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating adherence to the pre-established schedule. However, employing video conferencing presented technical challenges. Some segments suffered from poor audio quality due to internet issues, requiring repeated recordings to ensure accurate articulation of the answers. Another technical concern was managing the dialogue flow to prevent overlapping and ensure high-quality audio recordings. Despite these technical limitations, the real-time video conferencing technique did not convey the informants' emotional responses to questions. This method not only presented technical drawbacks but, more crucially, failed to offer a natural depiction of the observed phenomena or their historical context. Consequently, researchers faced challenges in providing a detailed account of the phenomenon's processes to achieve a comprehensive understanding. To address these challenges, we consulted various literature sources, including works by Lobe et al. (2020), Irani (2019), Archibald et al. (2019), and Deakin and Wakefield (2014) to gain deeper insights into interview techniques using real-time video conferencing.

For the purpose of this research, we interviewed 5 informants representing bureaucrats (Former Vice Governor of West Nusa Tenggara Province, Former Secretary of West Nusa Tenggara Province, and Former Regent of West Sumbawa Regency), academia (professor of History), and professional-indigenous people (film director of Lombok History). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions that took place around 90 min zoom meeting for each interviewee. To substitute the information beyond the interviews, we were provided with much valuable data, such as unpublished reports, statistics, maps, photos, and videos, by one of informant that previously conducted and directed documentary film about Lombok history as well as short film for tourism promotion of West Nusa Tenggara Province. The additional data help us to catch the local nuance of Lombok people, sociologically,

politically, and demographically as well as the geographical description of research locus in the midst of travel-ban during the pandemic.

Fourthly, the interview outcomes were transcribed and utilized in the subsequent analysis and interpretation using neo-institutionalism approach. This section will present the interview results in two parts: firstly, examining how informal local institutions within the Lombok community influence the behavior and identity of leaders as actors; secondly, investigating how these informal institutions serve as alternatives to formal structures incapable of accommodating community interests in local government management during the decentralization era. The fifth section will provide the concluding remarks.

#### **4. West Nusa Tenggara overview**

The province of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) is situated in the western part of the Nusa Tenggara archipelago, encompassing the eastern portion of Bali. Comprising two main islands, Lombok and Sumbawa, NTB's administrative structure includes the capital city of Mataram, along with 10 regencies (kabupaten) and two additional cities. According to the 2020 population survey, NTB has a total population of 5.13 million people, with a concentration on the islands of Lombok (70 percent), Bima, and Sumbawa (BPS Nusa Tenggara Barat, 2020a). The predominant religion in NTB is Islam, followed by Hinduism, with the majority of the population belonging to the Sasak tribe (over 90 percent), alongside Bima and Sumbawa communities (Jamaluddin, 2018, p. 1; Salehudin, 2019). Determining the exact population size of each ethnic group is challenging due to limited access to valid statistical data.

According to the records of BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik/Central Agency on Statistics, also known as Statistics Indonesia) NTB, the province exhibits a moderate democratic performance with a score of 76.64, as per the Indonesian Democracy Index indicator (BPS Nusa Tenggara Barat, 2020b). This index indicates that while NTB's democracy index surpasses the national average, its performance in terms of political rights remains relatively low. This observation is closely tied to the historical and socio-political dynamics of the NTB populace since the onset of the Reformation era in 1998, marked by conflicts among ethnic or tribal groups, with embers of these conflicts persisting to the present day. Numerous studies have highlighted that one of the underlying causes of conflict in the NTB community during the decentralization era stems from tensions between ethnic groups (Kumbara, 2000), conflicts among local social groups (Hamdi, 2015; Tyson, 2013), and local political competitions (Hamdi and Smith, 2012; Kingsley, 2012).

The nexus between demographic factors, ethnicity, religion, and conflict in NTB during the decentralization era can be comprehended by delving into the history of the introduction and evolution of Islam on Lombok and Sumbawa Islands since the 17th century. The advent of Islam to Lombok Island can be retraced to the 16th century, when Sunan Prapen from Giri (eastern part of Java Island) was dispatched by Sunan Giri to propagate Islamic teachings on Lombok Island (Asnawi, 2005, p. 4; Hauser-Schäublin and Harnish, 2014, p. 10; Jamaluddin, 2018, p. 2). Describing the process as Islamization is more accurate, as Sunan Prapen's mission was a deliberate and organized campaign to disseminate Islamic teachings to the eastern part of the



archipelago in the 16th century (Asnawi, 2005, p. 4; Jamaluddin, 2018, pp. 15–34). Sunan Prapen's Islamization campaign successfully transformed the beliefs of the Sasak people, the predominant group on Lombok Island, from the Boda religion (an ancient belief from Majapahit [the Javanese Hindu-Buddhist empire in the 13th–16th century]) to Islam. This Islamization not only altered their religion but also shaped the identity of the Sasak people as the predominant group on Lombok Island (Wahyudin, 2018).

The influence of Islam on the Sasak people of Lombok was solidified as local Islamic religious leaders, commonly referred to as Tuan Guru, disseminated Islamic teachings upon returning from Mecca to deepen the understanding of Islam (Jamaluddin, 2018, pp. 123–142). Kingsley (2014, p. 665) notes that since the late 1800s, Tuan Guru has assumed the role of the socio-political leader of the Lombok Island community, supplanting the nobility. During the Dutch colonial era in Lombok, Tuan Guru led the community in opposition to Dutch rule and established a network of social institutions independent of colonial influence. The institutional networks and influences crafted by Tuan Guru since the 19th century persist to this day, a testament to Tuan Guru's adeptness in preserving his legitimacy as a religious and socio-political leader through the leverage of Islamic religious authority (Kingsley, 2014, pp. 666–669).

In the era of decentralization, marked by the increasing opportunities for political participation within the community, the people of Lombok, much like those in other regions of Indonesia, encountered socio-political dynamics characterized by overt or symbolic conflicts arising from competition among social groups (Hamdi, 2015; Kumbara, 2000). Notably, political competitions and various conflicts since the implementation of decentralization in Lombok almost always involve the Sasak community, which constitutes the majority. Employing a neo-institutionalism approach, this article seeks to comprehend the transformation and reinstitutionalization undergone by the Tuan Guru, the most significant and robust informal institution in Lombok society, during the decentralization era.

## **5. The brief history and the institutionalization of Tuan Guru**

Tuan Guru holds a prominent position as an informal institution within Lombok society, particularly among the Sasak tribe. Its historical, cultural, and symbolic significance has endured, with the term Tuan Guru rooted in religious authority locally associated with Islamic leaders in Lombok. The title, originating from Arabic (pl. ulama), conveys not only religious expertise but also embodies piety and commitment to moral and social values, making Tuan Guru influential as a moral exemplar (Fahrurrozi, 2018, p. 119).

Research by Jamaluddin (2018) reveals that Tuan Guru's role extends beyond the 19th and 20th centuries, tracing its presence in Lombok back to the 16th century. The decline of the Sasak nobility's influence in the 17th century paved the way for Tuan Guru to assume socio-political leadership, marking its institutionalization in religious, cultural, and social spheres. Religiously, Tuan Guru's institutionalization is evident through pilgrimage and the establishment of Islamic schools. Historical records indicate Lombok's engagement in hajj pilgrimages since the 18th century, with Tuan

Guru Haji, returning from Mecca, establishing pesantren (Islamic schools) in their areas (Jamaluddin, 2018). This laid the foundation for the transformation of informal Islamic schools, evolving into formal institutions like the Darul Mujahidin Islamic Boarding School in the 1930s (Fahrurrozi, 2015, p. 328).

Culturally, Tuan Guru's institutionalization is linked to the diminishing role of the nobility. The focus on socio-political influences overshadows its cultural impact. Islamization in the 16th century led to the emergence of two distinct interpretations, Islam wetu telu, and Islam wetu lima, shaping the Sasak tribe's worldview (Zuhdi, 2018). Tuan Guru played a pivotal role in this cultural shift by blending indigenous values with Islamic principles, influencing religious rituals and sociological aspects (Muliadi and Komarudin, 2020).

Socially, Tuan Guru's institutionalization is observed in its role as a community protector. During the Dutch colonial era, Tuan Guru mobilized Lombok against colonialism, and their social roles as teachers, guardians of cultural values, preachers, and mediators evolved in response to community needs (Fahrurrozi, 2018, pp. 123–126). However, during the authoritarian Orde Baru regime (1966–1998), Tuan Guru's role underwent deinstitutionalization due to centralized governance, with official roles assumed by government appointees (Fahrurrozi, 2018, pp. 131–132).

The Orde Baru era saw Tuan Guru becoming promoters of development, disseminating government programs and aligning with political parties (Anwar, 2017). TGH Abdul Madjid, a key figure, played a crucial role in supporting Golkar and managing Nahdlatul Wathan (NW), the largest mass organization in Lombok (Fogg, 2019). The demise of TGH Abdul Madjid led to internal conflicts within NW, marking the beginning of Tuan Guru's reevaluation during decentralization. The era post-1999 witnessed a surge in self-proclaimed Tuan Guru figures, utilizing the status for social, political, and economic gains. Political decentralization provided opportunities for Tuan Guru to engage as formal leaders in elections, reflecting a shift in people's perception of Tuan Guru as socio-religious leaders advocating political interests (Hamdi, 2015; Putrawan, 2017).

The internal conflict within NW ignited a series of violent clashes between rival militias, indicating a reevaluation of Tuan Guru's role during decentralization. The power struggle between Abdul Madjid's daughters dismantled male domination in religious leadership and opened space for opportunistic claims of Tuan Guru status (Hamdi, 2019). This period also witnessed the involvement of Tuan Guru in politics, running for various positions in national and local elections (Putrawan, 2019).

To put in brief, the journey of Tuan Guru in Lombok reflects its historical, cultural, and social evolution. From its religious roots in the 16th century to its contemporary role as a political actor during decentralization, Tuan Guru's institutionalization has been dynamic. The current trend of self-proclaimed Tuan Guru figures and their involvement in politics marks a new phase, presenting both challenges and opportunities for this influential institution in Lombok's ever-changing landscape. The reinstitutionalization of Tuan Guru's role during decentralization can be attributed to the absence of alternative informal institutions and Tuan Guru's adaptability to social and political changes. Despite challenges, Tuan Guru remains a critical socio-religious institution in Lombok, with its leaders acting as respected mediators during communal conflicts or social discontent (Kingsley, 2012).

## **6. The impact of Tuan Guru's reinstitutionalization on the political landscape and bureaucracy in Lombok**

The decentralization period in Indonesia, marked by a shift from centralized-authoritarian rule to decentralized-liberal democratic structures, prompted the reinstitutionalization of Tuan Guru's role in Lombok. This article operates on the premise that informal local institutions not only influence the behavior and identity of leaders but, within the context of decentralization, undergo a reinstitutionalization of roles and functions through specific appropriation patterns. The reintroduction of informal institutions into local governance during decentralization is feasible when the community acknowledges, legitimizes, and allows informal institutions to assume a regulatory role. This reinstitutionalization is exemplified by Tuan Guru's substitutive role as a formal leader in Lombok's local governance and the socio-historical functions adopted by local leaders. To substantiate this claim, we conducted interviews with key informants, former high-level officials in West Nusa Tenggara province, including former deputy governors and regents. One informant had held various positions, eventually becoming the Secretary of the Province of West Nusa Tenggara, providing valuable insights into the significant shifts in government patterns from a centralized model (pre-1998) to a decentralized model (post-1998).

The outcomes of interviews with key informants consistently highlight Tuan Guru's substitutive role as an informal institution, particularly evident during local elections for governor, mayor, and regent. This substitution is a logical choice stemming from the direct election mechanism introduced by democratization and decentralization. Prior to decentralization, as noted by Zulkifli Muhadli (Regent of West Sumbawa from 2005 to 2015) during the interview, the Regent position was typically occupied by the District Military Commander (Dandim):

“So, before 1999, we almost never dared to dream of having a local leader, because the Regent was always a former Dandim (District Military Commander), so that was 1999, way back. Now the birth of regional autonomy which was strengthened by Law no. 22 of 1999 really changed the paradigm so that there was euphoria as you said earlier, and I personally immediately welcomed it and the encouragement of the community in 2000 I immediately became a Regent Candidate but lost, because at that time it was still elected by the DPRD, so the first regional autonomy was our administration, our politics were still very strong, The euphoria of reform, so the people were given extraordinary sovereignty so that the DPRD, which became the representative of the people, had extraordinary authority, at that time it began with the opening of the tap for non-green clothes to become local leaders but still soldiers or former soldiers who got many regional head positions.”

Following the implementation of decentralization in 1999, candidates for regents, mayors, and governors emerged from non-military backgrounds, competing in local elections. Fatigued by centralized control since the New Order era (1968–1998), people sought alternative leaders in the early days of decentralization. Tuan Guru emerged as the most logical informal figure, trusted by the broader community and maintaining its social roles even during the political repression of the New Order. According to Rosiady Husnaeni Sayuti (Secretary of the Province 2016–2018), people

expressed a desire for Lombok to be led by an ulama or guru during the 2008 gubernatorial election campaign.

The preeminent enduring informal institution in Lombok's society since the 18th century is the Tuan Guru. As discussed in the preceding section, the emergence of Tuan Guru in Lombok followed the successful mission of Islamization from East Java in the 16th century, gradually evolving into a prominent social and political leader during the 19th-century Dutch colonial period. In the 20th century, Tuan Guru's role as a social leader was solidified, notably with the establishment of Nahdlatul Wathan (NW), now the largest Islamic social organization in Lombok. As the 2000s ushered in the decentralization era, Tuan Guru became increasingly essential as an alternative identity commodified in direct local elections. The transformation of Tuan Guru's role as the paramount informal institution in the Lombok community is characterized by its relative superiority in historical, social, and cultural aspects, shaping perspectives and mobilizing the masses. This relative advantage affords Tuan Guru greater space and opportunity compared to other social actors to assume formal leadership roles in the decentralization era.

The interviews also revealed that Tuan Guru, as an informal institution, tends to prominently surface as an identity during local elections, spanning the positions of governors, mayors, and regents in Lombok. Subsequent to the electoral periods, the identity of Tuan Guru is not extensively recognized as an alternative profile in local governance. However, our interviews brought to light that Tuan Guru does not solely manifest as a distinct personal figure but can also be perceived through the attitude, viewpoints, and decision-making approaches of officials. As stated by Rosiady:

“Back to the beginning, Tuan Guru Bajang is actually an extraordinary figure, can a new incumbent, his popularity beats other candidates even though there are not many, but being able to beat the incumbent is rare. Now this is what happened at the beginning, and it became the study of many people, whether the community will witness the presence of a cleric figure as a leader to become governor. Is that what happened? And the people always say yes and the people of NTB in various surveys from the beginning, apparently the answer is that the figure of a religious teacher becoming a teacher is a new phenomenon that is expected that we want.”

A noteworthy illustration is Muhammad Zainul Majdi, widely known as Tuanku Guru Bajang (TGB), who served as the Governor of West Nusa Tenggara from 2008 to 2018. TGB exemplifies the ideal Tuan Guru who successfully transitioned into a formal leadership role at the provincial level. One of TGB's achievements as governor was the substantial reduction of poverty in Lombok from 24% in 2008 to 15% in 2010. Additionally, TGB showcased success through health and education initiatives, contributing to the Province of NTB achieving the highest increase in the Human Development Index between 2010 and 2014, a remarkable 3.15 points, marking the highest improvement in Indonesia. This accomplishment garnered the Province of NTB the accolade for the best achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in advancing regional development in Lombok (Bappeda NTB, 2015). This fact also by Rosiady as stated:

“Moreover, then he, Alhamdulillah succeeded with various awards and so on, it should not be inferior to bureaucrats from the former army officers. In fact, in his first period he already received the Bintang Putra Award so something that is not

much, so in this context maybe I would say maybe not I can't say this is a phenomenon of *tuan guru* in general, This is the peculiarity of their knowledge, he is a religious expert in interpretation but if from the biographical sequence, his father is a bureaucrat so he has bureaucratic blood so it is not surprising that then he has not succeeded in leading NTB for 2 periods and my most achievement is to reduce the poverty rate, which was NTB's poverty rate even though it was only 24% in 2008, when he stopped being governor in 2018 it was already below around 15%, almost 10% in 2 years, that's what made him get an award so that 2018 was invited to the UN to represent regions in Indonesia for a presentation."

Despite the commendable achievements during *Tuan Guru Bajang's* governance in NTB from 2008 to 2018, documented evidence reveals some public critiques regarding the role of *Tuan Guru* as a formal leader. In an interview, *Zulkifli Muhadli* highlighted the challenge of managing local government in Lombok during the decentralization period, emphasizing the importance of a governor's ability to foster communication, integration, and cohesion among regents and mayors. Despite *Tuan Guru Bajang's* recognized communication skills, *Zulkifli* still perceives a policy gap between provincial and local administrations, particularly concerning budgetary matters.

Furthermore, during the interview, *Rosiady* pointed out development disparities between the two major islands, Lombok and Sumbawa:

"Then, every year the issue of 'Disparity' arises between the 2 big islands in NTB. Lombok Island and Sumbawa Island. There is a feeling that some people on the island of Sumbawa feel that infrastructure development in NTB is unfair, at the beginning of the government in NTB. Most of the physical development is in Lombok while in Sumbawa the indicator that is often expressed is the main transportation road for the community. Indeed, the conditions at that time at the beginning of *Tuan Guru Bajang's* administration in early 2008–2009 and until 2010. The condition of the road across Sumbawa at that time was indeed very bad even though it was a state road, and it was a national responsibility, actually it is not a problem, I don't want to know whether it is a provincial or district state. What was clear was that our roads were worse than the roads on the island of Lombok. That sentimental feeling is what I'm dealing with, what we often discuss, and officially in the DPRD we always express that."

Many residents on Sumbawa Island feel that infrastructure development in the NTB province is inequitable, with a perceived focus on Lombok during *Tuan Guru Bajang's* early leadership. This sentiment is exacerbated by the visible discrepancy in physical and infrastructure development, notably the significantly better condition of roads on Lombok compared to those on Sumbawa. Such disparities contribute to a sense of discontent within the community.

## **7. Discussion**

In addressing the challenges of development disparities and communication gaps mentioned earlier, regents and mayors appear to adapt their leadership roles. Firstly, on a horizontal level, regional leaders tend to emphasize their roles as formal leaders. Their actions and communications predominantly adhere to a formal code of conduct

among officials. This inclination is evident in the insights provided by three key informants, who consistently discuss the resolution of policy issues between government offices in a formal manner. For example, in resolving the problem of damaged roads, there is a dispute between the Sumbawa Regency government and the West Nusa Tenggara Provincial government. Which authority should be responsible for repairing damaged roads. After tracing and identifying that the damaged road was the responsibility of the provincial government, the Regent of West Sumbawa formally asked the Governor to provide a budget from the provincial APBD to finance road repairs. The Regent did not use informal communication channels, for example using a cultural approach based on religious teachings, even though he knew that the Governor was a person who understood the value of Islamic teachings.

Secondly, on a vertical level, particularly in interactions between local leaders and the community, leaders predominantly adopt the roles of facilitators and servants. When addressing the needs of the people in their respective areas, leaders leverage local wisdom to assess, analyze, and resolve problems. This is exemplified by the policy model based on the characteristics of the local community, as disclosed in key informant interviews. For instance, the *Pembangunan Berbasis Rukun Tetangga/PBRT* program, a development initiative based on the lowest administrative division of the community, was implemented by Zulkifli Muhadli during his tenure as the Regent of Sumbawa Besar. PBRT is designed as a local mechanism to monitor community activities and welfare in the smallest administrative unit of Rukun Tetangga/RT. This mechanism, for example, is used by the Regent to look at the alleviation of poverty and how to address it. In the short term, the Regent usually opts for direct social assistance mechanisms and in the long term, the Regent proposes scholarships for students up to university. To convey this program and in an effort to achieve success, the Regent usually takes an informal approach through dialogues with community leaders in some religious forums and often positions himself as the ‘father’ in charge of protecting and prospering the community. In that sense, ‘father’ means a figure who fulfils his role as protector of his community and also embodies piety and commitment to moral and social values as supposedly exemplify by the Tuan Guru figure. In other words, by implementing his program, the Regent has shown the social and cultural role of ‘Tuan Guru’ of protecting and prospering the community by reinstitutionalize the previously traditional role of Tuan Guru into a formal mechanism of the office of the Regent.

The transformation in the appropriation of the role of local formal leaders in Lombok signifies the redefined function of the Tuan Guru as an informal institution for the people of Lombok, marked by a process of reinstitutionalization. Regents and mayors demonstrate a tendency to employ specific positioning strategies when conceptualizing, implementing, and assessing policy programs. This strategic use becomes apparent when local leaders tailor their approaches based on the characteristics of their audience. When engaging with the community, which is predominantly Muslim given Lombok’s demographic profile, leaders adopt a communication style akin to that of the Tuan Guru. This involves employing a more religious approach to ensure the community readily accepts policy communications and programs. Conversely, when dealing with formal officials, local leaders adhere to a formal code of conduct. Consequently, the pivotal role of the Tuan Guru as a socio-

cultural figure may not universally apply in every context while executing formal leadership functions.

## **8. Conclusion**

The examination of leadership patterns in the local governance of West Nusa Tenggara province through the neo-institutionalism approach has revealed that local informal institutions are adaptable to contextual situations. The Tuan Guru, functioning as an informal institution with social, historical, and cultural significance in Lombok society, has undergone changes in its roles and functions since its establishment in the 16th century until the present day. According to Fahrurrozi (2018, pp. 123–126), the Tuan Guru has fulfilled various social roles since the 19th century and continues to do so, serving as educators (in public schools and Islamic boarding schools), custodians of traditional cultural values, preachers/proselytizers, and social mediators. However, during the Orde Baru era (1966–1998), the essential role of the Tuan Guru as a religious leader, social mediator, and informal community leader shifted to a more formal sense due to the centralized governance system imposed by the Indonesian central government. With the onset of decentralization (post-1998, or Reformasi era), the role and function of the Tuan Guru experienced reinstitutionalization, transitioning toward politics. This is evidenced by the emergence of several Tuan Guru as formal leaders, such as Tuan Guru Bajang/TGB serving as the Governor of NTB from 2008 to 2018.

Our findings align with those of Fahrurrozi (2018), indicating a shift in the institutional roles and responsibilities of Tuan Guru from its traditional roles as a religious leader, social mediator, and political actor toward a more formal role associated with government institutions. Employing a sociological institutionalist framework, we observe that the traditional attributes linked to Tuan Guru have undergone reinstitutionalization through a process of cultural appropriation, notably evident in the candidacies of individuals in local elections in Lombok since the advent of direct elections in 1999. The manifestation of cultural appropriation is frequently observed in the adoption of the “tuan guru” title by self-proclaimed candidates without the requisite spiritual, community, and cultural experience, and notably lacking legitimate social recognition and acceptance of their capabilities and competencies as socio-cultural-religious leaders. This underscores that the moral authority of Tuan Guru in Lombok society’s ‘cognitive dimension’ is instrumentally reinstitutionalized under political stimuli, such as local direct elections. This observation supports the neo-institutionalist argument that formal institutions should be regarded as outcomes of processes associated with the transmission of cultural practices more broadly.

The conventional trajectory to attain the status of Tuan Guru no longer adheres to traditional patterns, wherein individuals undergo an extensive transformative journey as religious educators, engage in teaching within schools or Islamic boarding institutions, establish educational institutions, and actively participate in addressing community issues. Institutionally, Tuan Guru has evolved into a metaphorical figure. In this metaphorical context, anyone can self-designate as a Tuan Guru, granted they embody the characteristics and behaviors associated with Tuan Guru. Consequently, in the processes of reinstitutionalization and transformation of the Tuan Guru, we

discern a social and cultural appropriation undertaken by individuals. The success of this appropriation is contingent upon community acceptance of the person's actions and benevolence as the Tuan Guru. This phenomenon of guru's appropriation is also evident when formal leaders leverage local wisdom to assess, analyze, and resolve community issues. This concept, referred to as vertical appropriation, manifests in instances of local leadership in Lombok, where formal leaders adopt a religious approach to enhance the community's acceptance of policies and programs. Conversely, horizontal appropriation transpires when local formal leaders engage with fellow government officials in the planning, execution, and evaluation of policy programs.

## 9. Recommendations

Based on the analysis and findings outlined above, this research proposes two recommendations. The first recommendation pertains to the methodological aspect of the institutionalism framework. Future research endeavors should explore the comparison between narratives surrounding Tuan Guru's popularity in community public spaces and those found on the internet realm. This aims to conduct a comprehensive examination to determine which narratives wield greater influence in altering people's behavior to accept Tuan Guru's authority and to identify the social contexts in which Tuan Guru should position themselves as spiritual, social, and political figures.

The second recommendation addresses policy considerations, particularly in light of the increasing number of Tuan Guru claiming local government chairmanships and parliamentary memberships in recent elections. Tuan Guru has emerged as a significant political actor in Lombok society, wielding considerable influence in the policy-making process. To address this, the role of Tuan Guru should be formalized within Lombok's local governance, designating them as the primary body for policy consultation for the local government. This approach aligns with the practice observed in the government of Gorontalo province, as highlighted in our previous study (de Archellie, 2020). The Gorontalo Cultural Council (Dewan Adat Provinsi Gorontalo) not only serves as a consultative body in the policy-making process but also utilizes its ideological power resources, rooted in traditional values and wisdom, to constrain the behavior of formal leaders in the governance process.

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