



Becoming a Cristian Minangkabau in Indonesia: The Struggle Between Identity and Religious in the Land of Migration

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the experiences of Minangkabau individuals who converted to Christianity and to analyze how they negotiate ethnic identity, social belonging, and family relationships after religious conversion. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight Minangkabau converts residing in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Medan, Ambon, and Makassar and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that conversion occurred through diverse pathways, including interfaith marriage, emotional attachment, personal conviction, and prolonged interaction within religiously diverse environments. Despite experiencing varying levels of family resistance and social exclusion, participants continued to maintain kinship ties, cultural attachments, and a strong sense of belonging to the Minangkabau community. The study demonstrated that religious conversion did not necessarily diminish ethnic identity but instead generated an ongoing process of identity negotiation and social adaptation. These findings contribute to the anthropology of religion and identity studies by showing that cultural belonging can persist despite significant religious transformation, giving rise to what this study conceptualizes as a "New Minangkabau" identity in increasingly plural social contexts.



A. Introduction

Despite being widely recognized as one of the ethnic groups most closely associated with Islam in Indonesia, reports from the Communion of Churches in Indonesia estimated that approximately 30,000 Minangkabau individuals had converted to Christianity by 2012 (Persecution, 2023). This phenomenon presents a profound sociocultural paradox because Minangkabau identity has historically been constructed through the integration of *adat* and Islam, embodied in the principle “*adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*”, which positions Islam not merely as a religion but as a defining marker of collective identity (Mina, 2023; Amri et al., 2021; Putra et al., 2021). Consequently, conversion from Islam to Christianity is often perceived not only as a change of faith but also as a symbolic challenge to the cultural foundations of Minangkabau society (Yahya et al., 2020; Ashadi & Shalihin, 2020). Yet historical and contemporary evidence indicates that many converts continue to maintain kinship ties, cultural attachments, and social belonging within Minangkabau communities despite their religious transformation (Aritonang, 2018; Naldo et al., 2023; Jubba et al., 2024). This contradiction raises a fundamental question that remains insufficiently explored in existing scholarship: can one cease to be Muslim without ceasing to be Minangkabau?

Religious conversion has emerged as one of the most contested phenomena in contemporary societies because it lies at the intersection of individual autonomy, collective identity, religious authority, and cultural continuity. While globalization, migration, urbanization, and digital communication have expanded opportunities for individuals to encounter alternative systems of belief, many communities continue to define social membership and cultural legitimacy through inherited religious identities (Cooling, 2020; Yaeger-Dror, 2015). This tension creates a profound paradox. On the one hand, modern societies increasingly recognize the right of individuals to choose and redefine their religious commitments; on the other hand, communal traditions often continue to regard religion as an inseparable component of collective belonging. Consequently, religious conversion is not merely a theological transition but also a social process that reshapes relationships, authority structures, and identity boundaries (Rizal et al., 2024; Rasyid et al., 2024). This issue is particularly significant in societies where religion is deeply intertwined with customary traditions and social institutions, making conversion a site of negotiation between personal agency and communal expectations (Sainun et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2024).



The growing complexity of religious life in contemporary Muslim societies demonstrates that religious norms increasingly interact with legal systems, local traditions, family institutions, and broader social transformations. Studies have shown that religious authority is continuously reinterpreted in response to changing social realities, including issues of family relations, inheritance, legal rights, and communal obligations (Mohsi et al., 2025; Fahimah et al., 2024; Sinaga et al., 2024; Yusnita et al., 2024). Rather than functioning as static systems, religious traditions are constantly negotiated through everyday practices and social interactions. Within this broader context, religious conversion represents one of the most visible manifestations of how individuals navigate competing claims of faith, culture, and identity.

The Minangkabau community of West Sumatra presents a particularly important case for examining this phenomenon. Unlike many other ethnic groups, Minangkabau identity has historically been constructed through a close integration between *adat* and Islam. The well-known principle *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* reflects the understanding that customary norms derive legitimacy from Islamic teachings and that Islam constitutes an integral component of Minangkabau identity (Mina, 2023). This integration is institutionalized through a social structure consisting of *Niniak Mamak*, *Cerdik Pandai*, and *Alim Ulama*, which collectively regulate social life, distribute authority, and preserve both customary and religious values (Amri et al., 2021; Ardieansyah et al., 2020; Erizal, 2010; Munir, 2019; Putra et al., 2021). Within such a framework, ethnicity and religion are commonly perceived not as separate categories but as mutually reinforcing elements of social existence.

However, this seemingly stable relationship becomes increasingly challenged when Minangkabau individuals migrate beyond their homeland and encounter more heterogeneous social environments. Urban spaces characterized by religious plurality, cultural diversity, and intensive social interaction expose individuals to alternative belief systems and different modes of social belonging (Yusnita et al., 2024; Amiruddin et al., 2024; Primov, 2024). In these circumstances, the long-standing assumption that being Minangkabau necessarily implies being Muslim becomes open to negotiation (Putra et al., 2021; Haris et al., 2025). One of the most striking manifestations of this transformation is the phenomenon of conversion from Islam to Christianity. This phenomenon is academically significant because it directly questions the cultural logic that has historically connected ethnicity, religion, and social legitimacy within Minangkabau society.

Historical evidence indicates that religious conversion among Minangkabau people is not a recent phenomenon. Records from the colonial period reveal that several prominent Minangkabau figures embraced Christianity despite originating from communities where Islam functioned as a central marker of ethnic identity (Aritonang, 2018; Sekarwati, 2025). Among them were I.F.M. Salim, Willy Amrul, Akmal Sani, and Yanwardi Koto, whose decisions reflected complex interactions between personal conviction, social environment, and family relationships (Yahya et al., 2020; Haris et al., 2025). In several cases, conversion was associated with interfaith marriage and prolonged social interaction, which subsequently encouraged some converts to actively participate in Christian missionary activities both in migration areas and in West Sumatra itself (Salim, 2022; Harun et al., 2025). Various mechanisms have historically facilitated Christian expansion among Minangkabau communities, including social assistance programs, Bible translation into the Minangkabau language, and interfaith marriages (De Vries, 2001; Gausset, 1999). These historical developments demonstrate that religious conversion has long formed part of the broader encounter between Minangkabau identity, migration, and religious pluralism.

Existing scholarship has provided valuable insights into the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and social change within Minangkabau society. Research on interfaith marriages has demonstrated how Muslim-Christian households negotiate religious differences and construct new forms of social interaction within both family and community settings (Tarigan et al., 2024). Other studies have examined resistance to the translation of the Bible into the Minangkabau language, highlighting the symbolic association between language, religion, and ethnic identity (Yahya et al., 2020). Scholars have also explored Muslim-Christian relations in post-autonomy West Sumatra and identified competing patterns of acceptance, accommodation, and resistance toward religious diversity (Ashadi & Shalihin, 2020).

Recent studies have highlighted the role of local wisdom traditions in fostering religious freedom through the integration of *adat* and Islam, indicating that Minangkabau society possesses endogenous cultural mechanisms for managing religious diversity (Ashadi et al., 2025). Beyond the Minangkabau context, studies on Acehnese converts have further demonstrated how digital platforms facilitate the reconstruction of religious identity after conversion by providing alternative spaces of belonging and self-expression (Ansor, 2024). Collectively, these studies have significantly advanced understanding of religious diversity, conversion, and interfaith relations in Muslim societies.

Despite these important contributions, existing studies have largely focused on conversion as a matter of religious change, public response, or interfaith relations. Far less attention has been given to how converts negotiate ethnic belonging after leaving the religion historically regarded as a defining component of Minangkabau identity. Although tensions between religion and ethnicity have been widely acknowledged, the question of how converts maintain kinship ties, customary obligations, and a sense of cultural belonging remains insufficiently explored. As a result, it remains unclear whether one can cease to be Muslim without ceasing to be Minangkabau.

This article argues that religious conversion among the Minangkabau should not be understood merely as a process of religious departure but as a process of identity reconstruction. The novelty of this study lies in the development of the concept of the “*New Minangkabau*” to explain how converts continue to claim, negotiate, and reproduce Minangkabau identity despite no longer adhering to Islam. The concept refers to individuals who preserve kinship relations, maintain cultural values, participate in customary networks, and continue to identify themselves as Minangkabau after embracing Christianity. By foregrounding the experiences of converts themselves, this study extends existing scholarships beyond discussions of interfaith relations and religious conversion to examine the reconstruction of ethnic belonging in contexts of religious change.

Based on this argument, this study aims to examine the factors underlying religious conversion among Minangkabau individuals and to analyze how converts negotiate their ethnic identity after embracing Christianity. Specifically, the study explores how conversion affects relationships with family, customary institutions, and broader social networks, while also examining community responses to these transformations. Through this focus, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how ethnic belonging is negotiated and sustained in the context of religious change.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with an anthropological approach to religion to explore the factors underlying religious conversion among Minangkabau individuals and to understand how they negotiate their ethnic identity after embracing Christianity. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation involves personal experiences, subjective meanings, social relationships, and identity construction processes that cannot be adequately captured through

quantitative measurement. The study focused on understanding the lived experiences of converts within their socio-cultural contexts and the ways they interpret their changing religious and ethnic identities.

The research was conducted in several Indonesian cities characterized by religious diversity and significant Minangkabau migrant populations, namely Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Medan, Ambon, and Makassar. The primary data were obtained from eight key informants who had converted from Islam to Christianity and had maintained their new religious affiliation for periods ranging from five to twenty years. The informants were identified using initials to protect their identities: SR and IM (Yogyakarta), RK and BY (Medan), ZN and AH (Ambon), RZ and SY (Makassar), and PI (Jakarta). These participants were selected because they possessed direct experience with religious conversion and were able to provide information relevant to the objectives of the study. Access to participants was particularly important due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the relative difficulty of identifying individuals who often remain socially concealed from the broader Minangkabau community (Stokes, 2021). Consequently, the researcher's ability to establish trust and ensure participant protection became a crucial component of the fieldwork process (Riese, 2018).

Data were collected between April and June 2024 through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted individually in the respective research locations and began with broad questions regarding participants' understanding and experiences of religious conversion before progressing to more focused questions concerning motivations, risks, family relationships, customary values, and contemporary social life. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling strategy, whereby initial informants facilitated access to other individuals who met the research criteria.

The collected data were analyzed through an iterative thematic process. Interview transcripts and field notes were first organized and examined to identify recurring patterns and meaningful relationships across participants' narratives. The data were subsequently categorized according to similarities, differences, and thematic relevance to the research objectives. Through continuous comparison and interpretation, broader themes emerged that represented the central dimensions of religious conversion, identity negotiation, and social adaptation among Minangkabau converts. These themes formed the basis for understanding the social realities and meanings constructed by participants throughout their conversion experiences.

Given the sensitivity of the research topic, ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Prior to participation, all informants received a clear explanation

regarding the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the intended use of the data. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced. To ensure confidentiality and protect participants from potential social consequences, all personal identities were anonymized using initials, and the research data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings of the study concerning the experiences of Minangkabau individuals who converted from Islam to Christianity in several Indonesian cities. The findings are organized according to the major themes that emerged from the interview data and field observations. The presentation focuses on the factors underlying religious conversion, the processes through which converts negotiate their ethnic and religious identities, and the patterns of social relationships they maintain within their families, customary communities, and broader social environments. The findings are presented through participants' narratives and supporting empirical evidence to illustrate the diverse realities and experiences surrounding religious conversion among Minangkabau migrants in contemporary Indonesia.

1. Results

This section presents the empirical findings concerning the experiences of Minangkabau individuals who converted from Islam to Christianity in several Indonesian cities. The findings are organized according to the major patterns that emerged from the interview data. The results reveal that religious conversion among Minangkabau migrants is influenced by diverse personal and social factors, including interfaith relationships, family formation, social environment, and individual searches for meaning. Despite differences in their conversion experiences, most participants continued to maintain social and emotional connections with their families and cultural heritage as Minangkabau people.

a. Minangkabau converts in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Medan

The first stage of the study was conducted in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Medan, three cities characterized by high levels of mobility and interaction among people from diverse religious backgrounds. Interviews with five participants revealed that religious conversion occurred through various pathways, including interfaith marriage, emotional attachment, personal conviction, and prolonged exposure to Christian social environments.

For several participants, interfaith relationships constituted the primary factor leading to conversion. One participant from Yogyakarta explained:

"I've known my husband since college. We were in the same class, and I only found out that he was Christian after we started dating. I initially limited myself to just being in a relationship. But along the way, I became more sympathetic because, during our studies, I was always helped in completing assignments. Additionally, I was often taken to his hometown in Magelang and introduced to his father and mother." (Interview with "S", Yogyakarta, 2024)

The participant described how a long-term relationship gradually developed into marriage and eventually led to conversion. Although she experienced strong opposition from her extended family, she maintained her Christian identity while continuing to preserve connections with her Minangkabau relatives.

A similar experience was reported by a participant from Jakarta:

"I converted to another religion to follow my partner. My husband comes from a family that practices Christianity, and we decided to get married after several years of being in a relationship." (Interview with "I", Jakarta, 2024)

The participant explained that her decision initially generated family resistance. However, relationships gradually improved, even though some changes in family interactions remained.

The findings further show that conversion may affect an individual's position within customary and family structures. Participant "S" reported experiencing exclusion from parts of her extended family and losing certain customary privileges. Nevertheless, both participants emphasized that conversion did not diminish their attachment to Minangkabau identity, family heritage, or cultural traditions.

A different pattern emerged among participants from Medan. Unlike those whose conversions were closely associated with marriage negotiations, these participants described religion as having a relatively limited influence on their personal lives.

Participant "R" stated:

"For me, converting to Christianity is not just following my wife's religion, but a form of proof of my love for her. Until now, I am just the same, even though I have become a Christian. In the past, when I practiced Islam, I continued to perform religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and others – similar to most Muslims. Now that I practice Christianity, I also carry out religious practices according to the Christian faith. So, in my opinion, it is this sense of love that prevents me from being too constrained by religion." (Interview with "R", Medan, 2024)



This account indicates that conversion was viewed primarily as part of maintaining a marital relationship rather than as a complete transformation of social identity.

A similar perspective was expressed by participant "B":

"I am a native Minangkabau and my wife is Christian. For me, religion does not have a significant impact on life. When I was a Muslim, I didn't even pray, fast, or do anything else – I wasn't even good at reading the Quran. This might be because since I was a child, I have been living away from home and never learned religion in my village. Now, after starting a family and becoming a Christian, I rarely go to church and only passively listen to the Gospel when my wife reads it. What will happen in the future, I also don't know, whether I will continue to adhere to Christianity or return to Islam." (Interview with "B", Medan, 2024)

The statement reflects a relatively low level of religious attachment both before and after conversion. Despite this, the participant continued to identify as Minangkabau and maintained relationships with relatives in his place of origin.

In contrast, participant "E" from Jakarta described conversion as a personal decision shaped by long-term interaction with Christian peers:

"Converting to Christianity is my own intention and desire. Because since childhood, my friends have been Christians, and I see that their families are very happy. Therefore, after graduating from Senior High School (SMA), I resolved to be baptized in a Church. The decision I made was indeed strongly opposed by my mother's family." (Interview with "E", Jakarta, 2024)

For this participant, conversion was associated with a personal search for emotional security and fulfillment rather than marriage. Although her family opposed the decision, she continued practicing Christianity while maintaining respect for her previous religious background.

Overall, the findings from Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Medan indicate that religious conversion occurred through diverse pathways, including interfaith marriage, emotional attachment, personal conviction, and long-term exposure to alternative religious environments. Despite varying levels of resistance from family members and customary communities, all participants continued to maintain social ties with relatives and consistently identified themselves as Minangkabau.

b. Minangkabau converts in Ambon and Makassar

The second phase of the study was conducted in Ambon and Makassar, two cities characterized by religious diversity and intensive interaction among different ethnic and religious communities. The findings indicate that conversion in these settings occurred within plural social environments where interfaith interaction formed a normal part of

everyday life. Unlike several participants in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Medan whose conversions were closely associated with marriage and family relationships, participants in Ambon and Makassar frequently emphasized the influence of social environments marked by tolerance and close interreligious contact.

Participant "Z" from Ambon explained:

"For me, it's just normal if I convert to Christianity and join the life of my wife's extended family. Because in context, for me, Christianity is also a religion revealed by God, as I understand from the Quran that Christianity is a religion before Islam. Regarding the issue of Minangkabau customary rules, in my opinion, it does not need to be a problem. Even though my family does not accept this reality and I am ostracized and cast out from the extended family." (Interview with "Z", Ambon, 2024)

The participant viewed conversion as a personal decision influenced by his understanding of religious diversity and his integration into his spouse's family environment. Although he experienced rejection from some family members, he continued to maintain communication with relatives in both Ambon and West Sumatra.

The findings further suggest that concerns about social exclusion remain an important aspect of the conversion experience. Several participants indicated that conversion was often perceived as incompatible with prevailing customary expectations. Nevertheless, most participants continued to maintain social relationships with relatives and fellow Minangkabau migrants despite religious differences.

Additional perspectives regarding interreligious relations in Ambon were provided by a local religious leader:

"The level of interfaith tolerance among the people in the city of Ambon is very high; it is common for Muslims to live next to churches – and vice versa, for Christians to live next to mosques. These communities, both Muslim and Christian, often convert to different religions, especially from Islam to Christianity." (Interview with "A", Ambon, 2024)

This statement highlights how everyday interaction between Muslims and Christians has become a common feature of social life in Ambon, creating opportunities for relationships that transcend religious boundaries.

A similar pattern emerged in Makassar. Participant "R" described a relative who converted to Christianity after marriage:

"I have a cousin from my hometown who has converted to Christianity in this city of Makassar. He converted to his wife's religion because he thought he would benefit more by marrying a Christian woman. From his confession, he was given a very large business capital by his wife's family. Regarding his relationship with his siblings in West Sumatra, as far as I know, it is still going well even though there are still disagreements." (Interview with "R", Makassar, 2024)

The account indicates that conversion may also be associated with practical considerations related to marriage, economic opportunities, and family support. Despite disagreements, family relationships were generally maintained.

Field observations in Ambon further revealed close interaction between Muslim and Christian communities. The presence of churches within predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods and routine cooperation in social and economic activities reflected a relatively inclusive social environment.

Participant “Z” further emphasized:

“In the early days of my conversion to Christianity, I indeed faced heavy challenges, especially from the Minangkabau people here and my family in the village. However, over time, they eventually came to understand and respect my decision to choose and convert to Christianity.” (Interview with “Z”, Ambon, 2024)

This statement suggests that initial resistance gradually diminished as family members adapted to the participant’s new religious identity.

A similar experience was reported by participant “S” in Makassar:

“The people of Makassar city are very tolerant and highly value the social status of each individual. When I decided to embrace Christianity, at first I felt worried and guilty toward my family back in the village and here. But I had to convert to Christianity to follow my partner’s religion. Now it’s become routine, and I still maintain communication with the Minangkabau people here and in the village.” (Interview with “S”, Makassar, 2024)

The participant emphasized that concerns about family acceptance coexisted with efforts to preserve social relationships after conversion. Despite changing religion, communication with relatives and fellow Minangkabau community members remained intact.

Overall, the findings from Ambon and Makassar indicate that religious conversion occurred within contexts of religious diversity, interfaith interaction, and social mobility. Although participants experienced varying degrees of resistance from family members and customary communities, they generally adapted to their new religious environments while maintaining relationships with relatives, preserving ethnic attachment, and sustaining their connections with the broader Minangkabau community.

c. Cross-Case findings: Conversion pathways, family responses, and the persistence of Minangkabau identity

The findings from Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Medan, Ambon, and Makassar reveal several recurring patterns regarding the experiences of Minangkabau individuals who

converted from Islam to Christianity. Although participants differed in terms of age, gender, personal background, and geographical location, their narratives demonstrate common experiences related to the causes of conversion, family responses, social adaptation, and the maintenance of ethnic identity. To facilitate comparison across cases, the major findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of religious conversion experiences among Minangkabau converts

Informant	City	Main Factor of Conversion	Family Response	Relationship with Minangkabau Identity
S	Yogyakarta	Interfaith relationship and marriage	Strong rejection and loss of customary privileges	Continues to identify as Minangkabau and maintains family contact
I	Jakarta	Interfaith marriage	Initial resistance, later partial acceptance	Maintains family relationships and cultural attachment
R	Medan	Marriage and emotional attachment	Limited opposition	Continues engagement with family and customary networks
B	Medan	Weak religious commitment and personal preference	Minimal resistance	Retains Minangkabau identity and kinship ties
E	Jakarta	Personal conviction and social environment	Strong opposition from relatives	Continues cultural attachment despite conversion
Z	Ambon	Marriage and plural social environment	Social exclusion and rejection	Maintains communication with family and Minangkabau community
AH	Ambon	Social interaction and adaptation to religious diversity	Moderate resistance	Preserves kinship relations and ethnic belonging
SY	Makassar	Marriage and family formation	Initial concern, followed by gradual adaptation	Continues interaction with Minangkabau relatives and community

Table 1 shows that religious conversion among Minangkabau participants occurred through diverse pathways, including interfaith marriage, personal conviction, emotional attachment, and prolonged interaction within religiously diverse environments. Although participants experienced different conversion trajectories, interfaith relationships emerged as the most frequently reported factor across the cases examined in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Medan, Ambon, and Makassar.

The findings further indicate that family and customary responses ranged from acceptance to social exclusion. Nevertheless, all participants continued to maintain relationships with their families and places of origin and consistently identified themselves as Minangkabau. These findings suggest that religious conversion does not necessarily eliminate ethnic attachment, as participants continued to preserve kinship



ties, cultural connections, and a sense of belonging to the Minangkabau community despite changes in religious affiliation.

2. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that conversion from Islam to Christianity among Minangkabau migrants does not necessarily result in the loss of Minangkabau identity. This finding provides the empirical foundation for what this study conceptualizes as the 'New Minangkabau', a form of ethnic belonging that persists despite religious transformation. Despite adopting a different religion, participants continued to maintain kinship relations, cultural attachments, and emotional connections with their communities of origin. This finding challenges the long-standing assumption that Minangkabau identity is inseparable from Islam and suggests that ethnic belonging may persist beyond formal religious boundaries. Rather than representing a complete rupture, conversion became a process through which individuals renegotiated their position within family, community, and cultural structures. In this respect, identity appears as a dynamic and socially constructed phenomenon reproduced through interaction, memory, and participation rather than inherited as a fixed and immutable status (Khojir et al., 2025; Mina, 2023; Naldo et al., 2023; Yangsen et al., 2021).

This finding is particularly significant within the Minangkabau context because Minangkabau social life has historically been organized around the principle of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*, which integrates Islamic values into customary institutions and collective identity (Amri et al., 2021; Ardiansyah et al., 2020; Putra et al., 2021; Aziz et al., 2020). Consequently, conversion is frequently interpreted as a departure from both religion and ethnicity. However, the experiences documented in this study reveal a more complex reality. Participants continued to identify themselves as Minangkabau, maintained communication with relatives, and preserved attachment to family networks despite religious transformation. These experiences indicate that kinship, lineage, and cultural memory continue to function as powerful foundations of belonging. Ethnic identity therefore possesses a degree of flexibility that enables individuals to preserve cultural continuity even when religious affiliation changes, extending previous discussions that often portray religion and ethnicity as inseparable social categories (Aritonang, 2018; Yahya et al., 2020; Ansor, 2024).

The findings further show that conversion emerged through diverse pathways rather than a single causal mechanism. Interfaith marriage constituted the most common pathway, but emotional attachment, friendship networks, personal conviction, and

prolonged exposure to religiously diverse environments also played important roles. These patterns support previous studies emphasizing the significance of interpersonal relationships and social interaction in shaping religious transformation (Tarigan et al., 2024; Dunlop et al., 2019; Gausset, 1999). However, the present study moves beyond these explanations by demonstrating that conversion is not simply the outcome of social influence. After conversion, participants were required to negotiate family acceptance, customary expectations, and community relationships while preserving important elements of their previous cultural identity. Conversion therefore functioned simultaneously as a religious, social, and cultural process through which individuals reconstructed belonging in response to changing personal and social circumstances (Amiruddin et al., 2024; Primov, 2024; Arifin et al., 2025). These findings suggest that conversion was less the product of doctrinal persuasion than of sustained social interaction and emotional proximity, through which alternative religious commitments gradually became socially meaningful.

From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, these findings contribute to ongoing debates regarding the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and belonging. Existing scholarship has largely examined conversion through the lenses of interfaith relations, missionary activity, religious freedom, or public responses to religious change (Ansor, 2024; Ashadi & Shalihin, 2020; Tarigan et al., 2024). While these perspectives remain important, they often pay less attention to how converts reconstruct their identities after conversion. The experiences documented in this study indicate that individuals do not simply replace one identity with another. Instead, they actively negotiate multiple identities and create new forms of belonging that allow religious transformation and ethnic attachment to coexist. This observation reinforces contemporary understandings of identity as fluid, negotiated, and socially produced rather than fixed and inherited (Deman, 2021; Cooling, 2020; Yaeger-Dror, 2015).

The most important contribution of this study lies in the development of the concept of the 'New Minangkabau'. This concept does not refer to a new ethnic category but rather to a transformed mode of belonging through which individuals continue to identify as Minangkabau despite no longer adhering to Islam. Across all cases, participants consistently maintained kinship ties, cultural attachments, family obligations, and emotional connections to their communities of origin. These patterns indicate that ethnic identity is not reproduced solely through religious affiliation but also through kinship obligations, collective memory, lineage, and continuing participation in cultural life (Ansor, 2024; Jubba et al., 2024; Ashadi & Shalihin, 2020).

In this sense, the 'New Minangkabau' represents not a departure from Minangkabau identity but a reconfiguration of the foundations through which that identity is maintained. The concept of the "*New Minangkabau*" therefore provides a new perspective for understanding how ethnic continuity may persist despite significant religious transformation. In doing so, it extends previous discussions on conversion, identity reconstruction, and cultural resilience by demonstrating that belonging is not determined exclusively by religion but also by lineage, memory, social relationships, and cultural participation (Ansor, 2024; Ashadi & Shalihin, 2020; Ashadi et al., 2025; Naldo et al., 2023).

Another important finding concerns the resilience of family relationships after conversion. Although several participants reported rejection, social exclusion, or the loss of customary privileges, such responses were rarely permanent. Over time, many family relationships were gradually renegotiated and restored. This suggests that kinship obligations continue to exert a powerful influence even when religious differences emerge (Junara et al., 2019; Chanifah et al., 2021; Dodi & Abitolkha, 2022). Rather than producing complete social fragmentation, conversion often initiates a process of accommodation through which families attempt to balance religious diversity with continuing social responsibilities. Similar dynamics have been identified in studies examining interfaith families and plural religious communities in Indonesia (Mohsi et al., 2025; Fahimah et al., 2024; Rajab et al., 2022; Tarigan et al., 2024). These findings challenge assumptions that conversion inevitably leads to the dissolution of family ties and instead demonstrates the enduring capacity of kinship structures to adapt to social change.

The urban contexts in which participants resided also help explain these dynamics. Cities such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Medan, Ambon, and Makassar are characterized by mobility, diversity, and frequent interaction among individuals from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Such environments provide opportunities for encounters that transcend traditional communal boundaries and facilitate the development of more flexible understandings of identity. Previous studies have shown that urban settings often encourage multicultural interaction, religious moderation, and openness toward difference (Ratna et al., 2021; Idris et al., 2022; Husni et al., 2023). Government initiatives, religious organizations, and public institutions further contribute to promoting social harmony and managing diversity (Asmorojati et al., 2022; Niam, 2023; Akhmadi, 2019). The findings of this study reinforce these observations by showing that conversion frequently occurs within broader processes of social adaptation in increasingly plural social environments.

The significance of these findings extends beyond the Minangkabau context. The phenomenon documented in this study reflects a broader global challenge in which ethnicity, religion, and mobility increasingly intersect in ways that complicate conventional assumptions about collective identity. Across many parts of the world, societies are increasingly confronted with issues related to migration, religious pluralism, interfaith marriage, and overlapping identities. Similar challenges emerge among diaspora communities, minority religious groups, and multicultural societies where individuals continuously negotiate multiple forms of belonging (Chanifah et al., 2021; Dodi & Abitolkha, 2022; Sekarwati, 2025). The Minangkabau experience therefore offers valuable insight into how cultural continuity may be maintained while accommodating religious diversity.

These findings also contribute to broader discussions concerning religious governance, legal pluralism, and the management of diversity in contemporary societies (Hamdi et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2024; Yusnita et al., 2024). More broadly, the study supports growing recognition that religious traditions are dynamic social formations continually interpreted and reinterpreted in response to changing realities (Hefner, 2020; Sainun et al., 2024; Rizal et al., 2024). Similar processes are evident in contemporary debates concerning inheritance, family law, gender relations, religious authority, and community life in Muslim societies (Mohsi et al., 2025; Fahimah et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2024). Viewed from this perspective, the experience of Minangkabau converts illustrate how religious transformation can coexist with cultural continuity, offering a valuable lens through which to understand the evolving relationship between ethnicity and religion in contemporary plural societies.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research involved a relatively small number of participants located in selected Indonesian cities and therefore may not fully represent the diversity of conversion experiences among Minangkabau communities in different geographical and socio-cultural contexts. Second, the study focused primarily on the perspectives of converts themselves and did not systematically capture the views of family members, customary leaders, religious authorities, or community organizations. Third, as a qualitative study, the research prioritizes depth and contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization. These limitations do not diminish the significance of the findings but rather define the contextual boundaries within which the concept of the 'New Minangkabau' should be understood.



D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religious conversion among Minangkabau migrants is a multidimensional process that extends beyond changes in religious affiliation. The findings reveal that conversion to Christianity does not necessarily result in the abandonment of Minangkabau identity. Although participants experienced varying forms of social pressure, family resistance, and challenges related to customary norms, they continued to maintain kinship ties, cultural attachments, collective memories, and a sense of belonging to the Minangkabau community. The study therefore shows that religious transformation and ethnic identity are not always mutually exclusive. Rather, individuals actively negotiate and reconstruct their identities in ways that allow religious change and cultural continuity to coexist.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its expansion of existing understandings of religious conversion by shifting attention from conversion as a purely theological event to conversion as an ongoing process of identity negotiation and social adaptation. The findings challenge essentialist assumptions that equate ethnic belonging exclusively with religious affiliation and suggest that cultural identity may remain resilient even when religious commitments change. In this regard, the study contributes to broader discussions in the anthropology of religion, identity studies, and the sociology of multicultural societies by illustrating how individuals preserve social belonging while navigating significant religious transitions. The concept of a "New Minangkabau," emerging from the findings, offers a useful lens for understanding how ethnic identity can be rearticulated and sustained under conditions of religious diversity and social change.

Beyond its academic significance, the study also carries broader social implications. The findings suggest that social cohesion in plural societies may be strengthened when communities emphasize kinship, shared cultural heritage, and mutual social responsibilities rather than defining membership solely through religious boundaries. As issues of migration, interfaith marriage, religious pluralism, and identity negotiation continue to shape societies across the world, the Minangkabau experience provides insights that are relevant not only to Indonesia but also to other multicultural contexts facing similar challenges.

Given the limitations acknowledged in this study, future research should involve a broader range of participants across different regions and socio-cultural settings to capture greater diversity in conversion experiences. Further studies should also incorporate the perspectives of family members, customary leaders, religious authorities, and community

organizations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how religious conversion is negotiated within wider social structures and cultural institutions.

Taken together, the findings suggest that religious conversion should not be understood solely as a process of separation from a previous identity. Rather, it represents an ongoing process of adaptation, continuity, and identity negotiation through which individuals preserve meaningful connections to their cultural heritage while embracing new religious commitments. The Minangkabau experience demonstrates that identity is neither static nor singular but is continuously reconstructed through the interplay of religion, culture, kinship, and social belonging.

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