

Youth and Violent Extremism in Mindanao, Philippines

A mixed-methods design for testing
assumptions about drivers of extremism



August 2018

Contractor: DAI

Publication Date: August 24, 2018

Authors: Kevin Casey, Research Director, Center for Secure and Stable States, DAI, and David Pottebaum, Chief of Party, DAI

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Methodology	3
Implementation	5
Results	7
CASE STUDIES – PATHWAYS TO EXTREMISM	7
Southern Mindanao	7
Western Mindanao	7
Central Mindanao	8
SURVEY RESULTS – REGRESSION ANALYSIS	9
Support for Violence—Full Dataset	9
Support for Extremist Ideology—Full Dataset	10
Support for Violence and Extreme Ideology—Exploring Religion	10
Regression Summary	10
Key Factors and Vulnerabilities	12
Conclusion	13
Appendix	15

Executive Summary

Development responses to violent extremism are challenged by a lack of methods for rigorously testing assumptions about and determining the relative importance of different drivers of extremism. This paper presents a mixed-methods research methodology for addressing these challenges, and the results of its application in Mindanao, Philippines. Our analysis led to surprising empirical findings: less than half of the assumed drivers of extremism are significant predictors of support for violence and extremism, with some functioning in ways opposite to consensus understanding.

The Enhancing Governance, Accountability, and Engagement (ENGAGE) Project, funded in the Philippines by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and DAI's Center for Secure and Stable States partnered with five universities to implement this research activity to test assumptions about the drivers of extremism in Mindanao, focusing particularly on those factors that impact in-school youth. First, we compiled a list of the 18 assumed drivers of extremism based on a literature review, consultation with experts on extremism in the Philippines, and interviews with academics and local government representatives. To better understand how these drivers form pathways to extremism, detailed case studies of 25 members of armed and extremist groups in Mindanao were collected through semi-structured interviews with extremists themselves, members of their families, and close friends. Next, we designed an innovative quantitative survey questionnaire to test for correlations between the assumed drivers of extremism and support for violence and extreme ideologies. The research team collected a stratified random sample of more than 2,300 young people, including students at five universities and of high school students from 10 randomly selected local government units (LGUs) across ENGAGE's project area.

Regression analysis of the survey results shows that concerns among young people about corruption, human rights, lack of trust in government, poverty, and unemployment appear not to make them more likely to support violence or extreme ideas. Gender is also not a predictor of support for violence or extreme ideologies, contradicting the assumption that support for violence and extremism is more prevalent among men than women. High school respondents were more prone than university students to support violence and extreme ideas. Support for violence and extreme ideologies correlates with higher levels of community engagement, more acute perceptions of community marginalization and discrimination, lower levels of perceived self-efficacy, more acceptance of revenge seeking and acceptance of a 'gun culture,' where power and respect in communities is held by those with guns. Case studies confirmed that grievances based on poverty, poor prospects for employment, lack of trust in government, human rights, and corruption played a limited role in shaping radicalization and membership in extremist groups. One's family and community networks seem to play a larger role in guiding radicalization and membership in armed groups than any specific grievances or social and economic factors.

These findings carry significant implications for how youth and extremism should be addressed in Mindanao, particularly in the aftermath of the Marawi siege. Additionally, this research approach presents a methodology that can be modified and applied in other contexts to help development practitioners better evaluate assumptions regarding drivers of extremism and design more appropriate programming.

Introduction

Development responses to violent extremism are challenged by a lack of consensus on valid methods for exploring extremism's causal factors. While consensus has emerged on a conceptual framework for extremism's causal factors—the 'drivers of extremism' model—development practitioners have used a variety of methodological approaches for identifying and validating extremism's drivers in any given context. Common methods include literature reviews, qualitative interviews and focus groups, and public opinion surveys. Qualitative interviews, however, are rarely conducted with extremists themselves, and much qualitative and quantitative research on the drivers of extremism seeks only to assess the opinion of individual community members—some more informed than others—of extremism's drivers. The assumptions that underlie much of this research—that experts (national or international), members of communities impacted by extremism, and young people who themselves may be at risk of extremism have a clear understanding of what is causing extremism in their communities—often remain unexamined. While local communities are certainly better placed to provide context and informed opinion on extremism's causes, we should remember that these are only opinions, albeit informed ones. Just as in the West, where the causes of terrorism and crime are topics of debate and are colored by broader political affiliations, so too local communities' assessments of extremism's causes are colored by their opinions on a variety of social, political, and economic factors. While seeking the informed opinion of local communities is an essential first step in understanding extremism, it cannot be relied upon as the sole means for understanding extremism's causes in specific contexts.

While Mindanao has been affected by violent extremism and insurgencies for decades, the region has witnessed an increase in jihadist activity over the past several years. Beginning in 2014, extremist groups with links to the Islamic State (IS) increased their recruitment efforts in local universities, high schools, and through social media. These groups included more established jihadist groups like Abu Sayyaf, as well as new groups such as the Maute Group (IS-Ranao), the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and Ansar al-Khalifa Philippines. In the first half of 2016, the region saw a significant increase in the number of violent incidents associated with IS-inspired groups. Calls by IS-affiliated groups for the establishment of a *wilayat* or province in Mindanao highlighted the increasing importance of the region to the larger international jihadi movement. These groups operate alongside groups traditionally more focused on armed insurgency, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the National People's Army (NPA). In many areas, social conflict, family/clan violence (*rido*), and criminality are also

ASSUMED DRIVERS OF EXTREMISM IN MINDANAO

Push Factors

- Individual Marginalization
- Lack of Self-Efficacy
- Social Isolation
- Community Marginalization and Discrimination
- Islam Under Attack
- Perceptions of Employment Prospects
- Human Rights Abuse
- Lack of Land Rights
- Low Satisfaction/Trust in Government

- Corruption
- Insecurity
- Satisfaction with Public Services
- Poverty
- Revenge
- Gun Culture
- Social Conflict
- Lack of living wage
- Lack of opportunity

Pull factors

- Education Opportunity
 - Income/Livelihood
 - Protect Religion/Community
 - Social Connection
 - Personal Status, Purpose and Respect
-

endemic, often making it difficult to distinguish between extremism and violence stemming from local conflicts.

The situation in Mindanao deteriorated significantly in May 2017 when IS-affiliated groups took control of the city of Marawi. Driven by the escalating violence, several groups undertook more substantial research to investigate the underlying factors giving rise to both conflict and extremism. Research conducted by The Asia Foundation and the Notre Dame University Institute for Autonomy and Governance were particularly noteworthy, adding much to the base of knowledge and provided a foundation for future studies, including the study presented here.

Consensus opinion began to emerge regarding the drivers of extremism that were feeding the expansion of violent extremism in Mindanao.¹ We compiled a list of 18 assumed drivers of extremism based on a literature review, consultation with experts on extremism in the Philippines, and interviews with academics and local government representatives in Mindanao. This led to several important questions. First, were these assumptions valid and did all of these factors play a role in fomenting extremism in Mindanao? Second, what were their relative levels of importance and how do we choose which are the most critical drivers to address through programming? Third, are these factors relevant for all groups, and specifically for ENGAGE’s target group, in-school youth?

Methodology

Like the broader field of terrorism research of which it is a part, development-based countering violent extremism (CVE) research has struggled with persistent methodological shortcomings. Meta-analysis of methods in terrorism research have shown both shortcomings in empirical methods, though also gradual improvement of methodological standards over time.² The overreliance on secondary sources, the scarcity of empirical data of any sort, the absence of statistical and inferential analysis, and the vanishingly small number of research efforts that were based on research with extremists themselves have all been highlighted as gaps. Improvement in addressing these issues has been accomplished over time due to researchers taking methodology seriously, building on past work, and academic journals and institutions developing higher standards for review and publishing.

The field of development-based CVE research continues to lag behind the wider field of terrorism research on several fronts. Like the field of development responses to extremism itself, development-based CVE research is still young. It is only within the last several years that groups such as Hedayah and USIP’s RESOLVE have turned a critical eye towards methodology in the field.³ The field exists mostly in the grey literature and as such lacks any kind of systematic peer review which has hindered the development and refinement of tested methods. As much of the research used to inform development interventions is government funded, the distribution and use of reports, data, and methodologies is often

¹ The Asia Foundation, “Understanding Violent Extremism in Mindanao: A Case Study” (Presentation Slides). Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, August 2017. Institute for Autonomy and Governance, Notre Dame University (Cotabato City, Philippines), “Research on Youth Vulnerability to Violent Extremism in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao,” June 2017. USAID, “Violent Extremism and Insurgency in the Philippines: A Risk Assessment,” January 17, 2013. Fermin Adriano and Thomas Parks, “The Contested Corners of Asia: Subnational Conflict and International Development Assistance, The Case of Mindanao, Philippines,” The Asia Foundation, 2013. Juliette Loesch, “The GPH-MILF Peace Process in the Philippines to Prevent and Transform Violent Extremism in Mindanao,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 12:2 (2017), 96-101.

² Andrew Silke, “Contemporary Terrorism Studies: Issues in Research,” in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, edited by Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (New York, Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). Bart Schuurman and Quirine Eijkman, “Moving Terrorism Research Forward: The Crucial Role of Primary Sources,” *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 3, no. 2 (2013), 1-13. Bart Schuurman, “Research on Terrorism, 2007-2016: A Review of Data, Methods and Authorship,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018), DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2018.1439023.

³ RESOLVE Network, “Building Consensus and Setting Priorities for Research on Violent Extremism: Working Paper on Findings from Expert Consultations,” United States Institute of Peace, September 2016. James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, “Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation,” RUSI Whitehall Report 2-16, Hune 2016.

limited for a variety of security and proprietary reasons. This limits the amount that researchers can learn from each other and discourages efforts at replicability. And while development-based CVE research efforts often collect primary data, insufficient focus on methodology hampers that data's effectiveness and applicability, often leaving significant untested assumptions, particularly around extremism's causal factors.

The authors' own experience working in the field of development-based CVE research has revealed two primary methodological gaps that have compromised the field's effectiveness. The first is the absence of qualitative research focusing on the experience of extremists themselves. Due to difficulty accessing respondents, development-based CVE research often lacks a clear understanding of processes of radicalization, or of the drivers of extremism as experienced by extremists themselves. This gap is often filled by researching with "at-risk" individuals, even though they may not have any direct experience with extremism. Also, our risk models are based on our assumptions about the drivers of extremism and we run the risk of selecting on the dependent variable and perpetuating our assumptions. Development practitioners need more efficient and effective methods for grounding their assessments in the experience of extremists themselves if the field hopes to better understand the dynamics that shape radicalization. The second gap is the general absence of inferential statistics in quantitative studies that could be used to answer more complex questions regarding how assumed drivers of extremism interact and correlate with a variety of social, political, and economic factors and opinions. Quantitative studies in development-based CVE research often take the form of public opinion polling, with little effort devoted to exploring underlying relationships that may be responsible for shaping opinions or risk factors.

Based on these gaps and to answer the research questions identified above, we developed a mixed-methods research design with both qualitative and quantitative components to test assumptions about the drivers of extremism in Mindanao. The qualitative component uses a comparative case studies methodology to explore common pathways to extremism for members of armed and extremist groups in Mindanao. The collection of case studies proceeded through a snowball sampling approach beginning with individuals identified within the social and professional networks of our university research partners. Twenty-five case studies of members of armed and extremist groups were developed through semi-structured interviews with extremists themselves, members of their families, and close friends. From these interviews, we constructed a narrative of the process the individual took through radicalization and into membership in armed or extremist groups. Cases studies were then coded thematically to identify drivers of extremism that may have played a role in the individual's radicalization. From the aggregation of individual case studies, generalizable patterns of vulnerability and radicalization emerged that were investigated more deeply using data from the second research component, the "Youth Perceptions of Extremism Survey (hereinafter "Youth Survey").

The second component of the research project was the Youth Survey, a quantitative survey of youth enrolled in public high school and university with ages ranging from 15 to 29. The survey gathered a random sample of 2,342 high school and university students in the project area and asked questions to explore perceptions of the assumed drivers of extremism. To test relationships between the assumed factors driving extremism and support for violent extremism, we designed a statistical test. For each of the assumed drivers of extremism, we developed questions that addressed different aspects of the underlying driver. For example, consider the factor "community marginalization." The concept of community marginalization, based on case study interviews and input from our university partners, was understood to involve aspects government neglect, historical marginalization, and feeling that one's community is threatened. We drafted the following survey questions, each addressing a different aspect of the larger concept of community marginalization:

Do you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree, or (4) strongly disagree with the following statements:

- Local government responds to the needs and priorities of my community.
- My community is under threat.

- My community has historically suffered more than most other communities in the Philippines.

After data were collected, we grouped responses by the various drivers of extremism to create index variables. Numeric values for the responses were standardized and combined to produce a compound variable for each driver. Continuing with our example, relevant questions were combined to create a compound variable to represent the abstract concept of community marginalization, and to provide a numeric value for the variable for each respondent. Low numeric variable values represent a higher risk for extremism per the assumed logic of that driver of extremism. Additionally, we constructed two proxy index variables for violent extremism—Support for Violence and Support for Extremist Ideology—following the same approach. The transformation of the ordinal survey data into continuous index variables that represented drivers of extremism enabled us to use a regression analysis to test our assumptions regarding relationships between these assumed drivers and support for violent extremism, as represented by our two proxy variables. This regression analysis allowed us to determine which of the compound variables were significant predictors of values for our proxy variables for violent extremism, and the relative strength of each variable against the others as a predictor.

Finally, we integrated the findings from the qualitative and quantitative components. The statistical results showing which factors were significant drivers of extremism were interpreted in the context of the specific pathways identified through the case studies. Based on the qualitative and quantitative results, we concluded that variables that did not emerge from the qualitative case studies and that did not have significant strength as predictors in our quantitative model could be discarded as important factors driving extremism among young people in ENGAGE’s project area. This methodology allowed us to present a holistic picture of radicalization in the project area based both on the specific experience of extremists, though also generalizable to the population of in-school youth.

Implementation

To implement this research, the ENGAGE program partnered with five regional universities in Mindanao. The partners were brought together in Davao City in July 2017 for a conference to develop and localize the research design and tools. In addition to providing input on the research design and analysis, each university managed the qualitative and quantitative data collection within their specific regions. Training and support was provided to the university teams in research design, violent extremism and CVE, conducting semi-structured interviewing, random sampling, and survey data collection. Each university used standard research tools developed by ENGAGE and CS3 and according to a detailed qualitative and quantitative sampling plan.

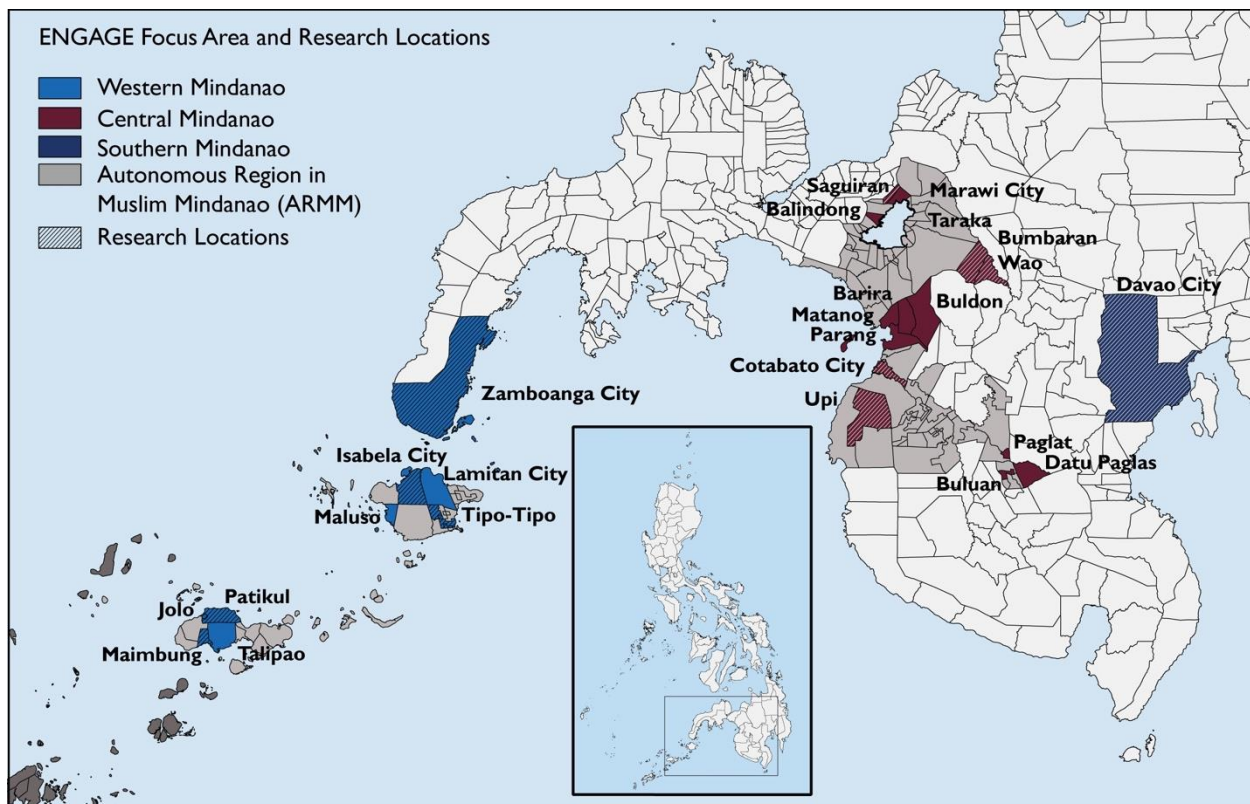
Youth Survey Respondent Profile

- Total: 2,342 students
 - Age: 15 to 29 years old
 - School Level: 63% High School, 37% University
 - Gender: 45% Male, 55% Female
 - Religion: 55% Islam, 42% Christianity, 3% Other
-

The university research teams were instrumental in identifying initial respondents for the pathways case studies. In many cases they were able to identify individuals within their networks—former students, local community members—who had direct experience with extremism. They conducted the interviews and wrote individual case studies in their locales. Two or more interviews were conducted for each case study to ensure diverse perspectives and to increase the validity of the results. Sampling began through the social and professional networks of the research team and expanded using a snowball sampling technique.

The Youth Survey was conducted using face-to-face interviews following a set of 105 questions. Interviews were conducted on the campuses of the five universities and at public high schools in 10 local government units. Each university team led the sampling and data collection tasks at their universities and the high schools within their area. Researchers used a stratified random sampling technique to select a representative sample of their student bodies. The number of students selected to participate in the study (sample size) was determined to provide a margin of error of +/- 7.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval for each university and each selected local government unit.

The research team selected high schools to survey using a stratified random sampling approach. First, the universities characterized each local government unit in the ENGAGE focus area by risk of extremism (low, medium, and high). Then, 10 local government units were randomly selected until quotas for each risk level were reached. High schools having senior-level students from within these units were then randomly selected for participation.



The research team selected respondents at high school and university locations by using a simple random sampling methodology and purposive intervention to ensure that the pool of respondents was representative in terms of gender and age. The research team recruited respondents and conducted the interviews face-to-face on university and high school campuses. Ten percent of the interviews were observed by a fieldwork supervisor. Survey forms were collected daily and forwarded to the ENGAGE office where all data entry was conducted. All interview data capture forms were checked by the ENGAGE data supervisor prior to data entry, confirming that all questions are complete and readable. A minimum of 10 percent of each data entry clerk's work was double entered and assessed to detect and minimize data entry errors.

Results

CASE STUDIES – PATHWAYS TO EXTREMISM

Twenty-five case studies were compiled from across Mindanao, providing a diverse array of individual histories of radicalization and membership in armed and extremist groups in central, western, and southern Mindanao.

SOUTHERN MINDANAO

The five case studies (four men and one woman) documented in southern Mindanao profiled members of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). These profiles highlighted several common patterns of recruitment into the NPA. Each of the persons interviewed came from very poor families and communities that survived by subsistence agriculture. Most had limited schooling and worked from a young age to help support their families. None reported being particularly politically engaged before joining the NPA, though one mentioned the issue of land rights as his family had been forced to sell its land due to extreme poverty.

The case studies indicate that NPA recruitment efforts tend to target the indigent poor with promises of financial support, with less emphasis (at least initially) on the political objectives of the group. Three of the five persons interviewed stated explicitly that the promise of financial support for their families was their main reason for joining the group. Individuals were indoctrinated into the group's ideology after joining, not before. Three of the five cited feelings of self-empowerment that went along with membership in the group, and in particular rising to positions of leadership, as an important component of why they chose to stay. Four of the five had since left the NPA, most due to unmet promises regarding financial support for their families.

WESTERN MINDANAO

While poverty characterized the case studies from southern Mindanao, the 10 case studies (all men) gathered from western Mindanao were dominated by a different social factor: communal conflict. Eight of the 10 individuals are or had been members of Abu Sayyaf, while the final two were members of local armed groups. Conflicts between communities and fighting between informal local armed groups and those perceived to be outsiders form the social background in which recruitment into extremist groups occurred in these cases. Six of the 10 profiles highlighted how the individuals' participation in local armed groups had accustomed them to violence and the culture of guns, where respect is given and power held by those in the community with guns. The profiles highlight how membership in these local armed groups is a function of one's family and social networks—people join because a family member or close friend was also in the group. Participation is encouraged and reinforced by a narrative of community protection.

These case studies also reveal the complex interrelationship between these informal local armed groups and extremist groups like Abu Sayyaf. For example, informal armed groups sometimes joined with Abu Sayyaf to fight against government forces that were viewed as outsiders, highlighting the fluid definition of membership in extremist groups. In three of the case studies, friends and family members stated that they were not aware the individual was a member of Abu Sayyaf until the individual was killed in clashes with government forces. Most case studies appear to show that individuals did not join Abu Sayyaf due to

the group's ideology. Instead, the individuals were recruited into the group, usually through involvement in local armed groups and local conflicts and were then radicalized to the ideology afterwards.

CENTRAL MINDANAO

The case studies collected in central Mindanao present the stories of 10 individuals (nine men and one woman) who became involved with extremist and jihadist groups, and in some cases, groups affiliated with IS. The radicalization pathways described here are distinct from those in the other geographic areas. For the most part, the individuals profiled here were better educated—most had at least some college education—and came from middle class and more privileged backgrounds. The common feature of most of these case studies is the central role of *madrasas*, Arabic language study, and informal Islamic study groups in shaping the ideas of the individuals and steering them towards extremism. Three had problems, or were suspected to be involved, with drugs before experiencing a religious conversion, after which they became very devout. In other cases, devout young people studied at *madrasas* or joined informal groups of neighborhood friends to discuss religion. Some became exposed to religious groups with extremist ideas while at university. At universities, extremist groups specifically targeted young people who were devout but also emotional in their faith (prone to weeping or other emotional expressions of faith) for recruitment.

For all individuals profiled, being part of a small group devoted to a cause was very important and provided a strong sense of community. While the majority of *madrasas* and Islamic study groups do not espouse extremism, a minority do. It appears that most individuals did not seek out extreme groups but happened to find themselves associating with them due to family and social networks. One family sent their son to a *madrasa* on the recommendation of a family member. The *madrasa* turned out to be preaching *jihad* to its students and helped to radicalize the young person. A young woman at university was invited by her cousin to an Islamic study group that espoused extremism. A young man arrived at university without a place to stay and with little money, only to be taken in and provided housing by an extremist group leader who led a group of students and encouraged them to obtain military training. Family also played an important role in helping individuals leave extremist groups. One case study describes how parents pleaded with their son to leave an extremist group after one of his acquaintances was killed, finally convincing him to leave and move to Manila. These case studies reveal a thriving ecosystem of conservative Islamic groups and institutions, particularly at universities in central Mindanao, a small minority of which espouse extremism and are known conduits for individuals joining ISIS-affiliated groups in the Philippines. In central Mindanao, ideological radicalization took place before or in tandem with recruitment into extremist groups, in contrast to western Mindanao.

While the case studies show a diversity of pathways to membership in armed and extremist groups in Mindanao, the common factor is the importance of family and social networks and community bonds in structuring radicalization and membership. That is, one's family and community networks seem to play a larger role in guiding radicalization and membership in armed groups than any specific grievances or social and economic factors. While poverty seems to be an important factor in recruitment to the NPA in southern Mindanao, economic factors appeared to play a more limited role in individual radicalization in other areas. Also absent were social or political grievances—few seemed motivated by corruption, human rights abuses, or resistance to the central government. In western Mindanao, the individuals profiled generally found their way to extremist groups through membership in other armed groups or involvement in local conflict, while in central Mindanao, case studies showed young people becoming radicalized through *madrasas* and Islamic study groups before being recruited to extremist groups. Finally, the case

studies highlight the important social foundation of radicalization and the key role that family and community networks play in determining trajectories into—and away from—extremism.

SURVEY RESULTS – REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Using the results from the Youth Survey, two separate regressions were calculated using the full dataset: first, with Support for Violence as the dependent variable and each of our index variables for the drivers of extremism as independent variables; and, second, with Support for Extreme Ideology as the dependent variable and the index variables as independent variables. For the purpose of the regression, three dummy variables were used to control for gender, religious identity, and level of schooling.

Full results from both regressions can be found in the Appendix. The section below discusses the results from the regression analysis, explaining which index variables representing the drivers of extremism are significant predictors of our proxy variables for extremism. In addition to having a significant relationship as a predictor, each index variable can have a positive or negative correlation with the proxy variable. In a positive correlation, low values of one variable correlate with low values of the other. A negative correlation, however, low values from one variable correlate with high values from the other, and vice versa. A positive correlation confirms our assumption about how that driver of extremism operates. For example, a positive correlation between community marginalization and discrimination (our index variable) and acceptance of violence (our proxy variable) means that stronger feelings of marginalization and discrimination correlate with more acceptance of violence, which confirms our assumption about how discrimination and marginalization can drive extremism. A negative correlation, however, is the opposite. Using the example above, a negative correlation would mean that lower feelings of marginalization and discrimination correlate with more acceptance of violence, which would be contrary to our assumption about how that driver operates. The regression analysis showed both significant positive and negative correlations.

Examples of Positive and Negative Correlations:

Positive Correlation:



Negative Correlation:



SUPPORT FOR VIOLENCE—FULL DATASET

For a summary of the regression results, see Appendix 1. The regression using Support for Violence as the dependent variable shows that several index variables are not significant predictors of support for violence, including Low Satisfaction and Trust in Government, Individual Marginalization, Social Conflict, Satisfaction with Public Services, Poverty, Human Rights, and Corruption. This suggests that these factors do not have a significant relationship with attitudes about violence. Of the demographic variables, gender was not a significant predictor, while religion and high school/university were: Muslim respondents were more likely to support violence than Christians, and high school respondents were more likely to support the use of violence than university students.

Regression results show that eight variables are significant predictors of support for violence. Five of these had a positive correlation: Community Marginalization and Discrimination, Islam Under Attack,

Revenge, Lack of Self Efficacy, and Gun Culture. This confirmed our assumptions of these factors as drivers of violence in the region.

At the same time, the results show that three of the variables are significant predictors but have an inverse correlation with the variable Support for Violence: Perceptions of Employment Prospects, Social Isolation, and Insecurity. While their importance as drivers of support for violence was confirmed, our assumption regarding the direction of impact of this driver was inaccurate. Contrary to our assumptions, the findings suggest that higher levels of support for violence are associated with more optimism about one's job prospects, lower levels of reported social isolation, and higher levels of trust and satisfaction in security services.

SUPPORT FOR EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY—FULL DATASET

We calculated a similar regression using Support for Extreme Ideology as the dependent variable. For a summary of the regression results, see Appendix 2. Again, results show that several variables have no strength as predictors: Islam under Attack, Low Satisfaction and Trust in Government, Individual Marginalization, Social Conflict, Insecurity, Poverty, Human Rights, and Corruption. Of the demographic variables, religion was a strong predictor, with Muslims much more likely than Christians to support conservative ideologies.

Regression results show that four of the variables have a significant and positive correlation, confirming our assumptions regarding how these factors may influence support for extremist ideology. These are: Community Marginalization and Discrimination, Revenge, Lack of Self-Efficacy, and Gun Culture.

On the other hand, the results show that Perceptions of Employment Prospects, Social Isolation, and Satisfaction with Public Services have significant but negative correlations with support for extreme ideologies. This suggests that support for extreme ideologies correlates with more optimism about job prospects, lower levels of social isolation, and better perceptions of public services.

SUPPORT FOR VIOLENCE AND EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY—EXPLORING RELIGION

As religion was found to be a significant predictor of both support for violence and extreme ideology within the full dataset, and because core elements of the Support for Extreme Ideology variable addressed conservative Islamic beliefs, we conducted a second round of regressions using only data from Muslim respondents. For this regression, we also removed variables that showed no significant predictive power in regressions using the full dataset.

Results for the regression using Support for Violence as the dependent variable show that Community Marginalization and Discrimination, Perceptions of Employment Prospects, and Insecurity lost their predictive power, meaning that, for Muslim respondents, there was no correlation between these factors and support for violence. The variables Islam Under Attack, Revenge, Lack of Self-Efficacy, Social Isolation, and Gun Culture remained significant.

Results for the regression using Support for Extreme Ideology as the independent variable show that Community Marginalization and Discrimination lost its predictive power, while Islam under attack, Low Satisfaction and Trust in Government, and Insecurity became significant predictors.

For Support for Violence and Support for Extreme Ideology regressions, gender was not a significant predictor of responses, while high school students were more likely than university students to support violence and extreme ideologies.

REGRESSION SUMMARY

In summary, the regression results confirm several of our assumptions about the drivers of violent extremism, reject others, and question the prevailing logic of how certain factors lead to support for

violent extremism. What factors proved not to have a strong relationship with support for violence or extremism? Poverty, Human Rights, Corruption, Social Conflict, Individual Marginalization, and Satisfaction with Public Services were poor predictors, showing that assumptions around these factors as drivers of extremism is misplaced.

Which factors did show a strong relationship with support for violence and extremism? Confirming our assumptions, feelings of discrimination and marginalization of one's community, belief that Islam is under attack, support for revenge, lack of self-efficacy, and the culture of guns were significant predictors of our proxy variables for violent extremism.

Interestingly, our analysis revealed that several factors act in a way that is the opposite of prevailing assumptions. Increased optimism about employment prospects, feelings of security and lower levels of social isolation correlated with more support for violence and extreme ideologies.

Finally, while gender showed no predictive power—implying that women are as susceptible to the factors as men—both religion and school level were strong predictors of extremism, with high school students and Muslim respondents much more likely to support violence.

Key Factors and Vulnerabilities

This research provides a strong case for re-evaluating key assumptions about the drivers of extremism in Mindanao as they pertain to high school and university students. Overall, the findings give little support to theories of extremism that focus on grievances based on the issues of corruption, human rights abuses, lack of trust in government, poverty, or unemployment. Index variables representing corruption, human rights, and trust and satisfaction with government showed little to no strength as predictors of support for violence or extreme ideologies. The finding that those who expressed more optimism in their employment prospects were more likely to accept violence or support extreme ideologies shows that anxieties about unemployment are not a major grievance driving extremism. It was the same with poverty, with those expressing more concerns about poverty not any more likely to support violence or extremism. This is reinforced by evidence from the case studies, where few of the 25 individuals profiled reported being motivated by these grievances. The case studies where poverty did seem to play a critical role in recruitment were clustered in the NPA regions, where it seems the NPA specifically targets the poor for recruitment with a message of economic liberation and promises of financial support. In these cases, poverty created a distinct vulnerability for recruitment, but not necessarily a vulnerability to radicalization in terms of supporting violence or extreme ideologies. In other areas, the individuals profiled came from a wide spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds and few seemed motivated by financial inducements.

The six drivers that showed strong and consistent strength as predictors of support for violence and extremist ideas—feelings of community marginalization and discrimination, belief that Islam is under attack, support for revenge-seeking, lack of self-efficacy, the culture of guns, and sense of personal social isolation and insecurity—present a different picture of radicalization. The finding that lower feelings of social isolation (i.e., feeling included and engaged in one’s community) correlate with more support for violence and extreme ideologies shows that radicalization and extremism is not primarily a problem of isolated individuals who are poorly integrated in their communities. Instead it seems that being strongly socially connected to one’s community—and conscious of the marginalization and discrimination that one’s community faces—makes one more likely to support using violence in defense of one’s community. The high levels of trust expressed in family and community members and the suspicion expressed towards outsiders further highlights the strong emphasis placed on family and community. Thus, the great importance of acceptance of revenge, as it stands at the intersection of the individual, community, and violence.

The fact that community marginalization cedes its significance to the perception that Islam is under attack amongst Muslim respondents highlights that, within the Muslim community, support for violence is stronger among those who interpret discrimination as being directed specifically at their religious community. Muslim respondents were also more likely to express lower levels of self-efficacy and more support for revenge, further highlighting how these risk factors overlap in the Muslim community.

This focus on the community and the importance of social integration resonates strongly with the case studies. The pathways to extremism for many of the individuals profiled in western Mindanao began through family and social networks. Often, individuals became members of local armed groups focused on protecting their family and community from outsiders only to find themselves, knowingly or not, pulled into the orbit of more extreme groups. This finding also bears out in central Mindanao where social and family networks are key in guiding individuals toward extremism, and where being part of a small group of like-minded individuals provides a strong sense of community, particularly in the region’s universities.

Support of violence and extreme ideology share many similar predictors in our regression model, and indeed the two variables show a strong positive correlation with one another. This suggests that while

more conservative Islamic values do not in themselves make one more prone to extremism, they do correlate with greater willingness to support violence.

As for demographic predictors, two findings are significant for our understanding of and response to youth and extremism in Mindanao. First, gender showed no strength as a predictor of support for violence or extreme ideologies, disproving the assumption that support for violence and extremism is more prevalent among men than women. This is not the same as saying that both men and women are equally targeted for recruitment by extremists or vulnerable to this recruitment. While women play an active role in extremist groups in Mindanao, most recruits are still men. However, a significant shift seems to be happening around gender and extremism in the region. Women were some of the early and vocal advocates of ISIS at MSU-Marawi. A group of young women who adopted full *niqab*, a rarity in the Philippines, took the lead in promoting the IS cause in 2014—partly because their dress assured them less scrutiny and more anonymity. There are reports of women playing important roles in extremist groups during the Marawi siege, performing the work of medics and even combatants, though these reports have been very difficult to confirm. Our research group was able to interview one woman for their case studies, and she distanced herself from extremists over her rejection of violence before the Marawi siege. The changing role that women are playing in extremism in Mindanao is worthy of additional research.

The other significant finding related to demographics—that high school students were more likely to support violence than college students—is noteworthy for the questions it raises. Do the higher levels of support for violence in high schools represent a rising cadre of young people who are more prone to violence? Alternatively, does this reflect the fact that only better educated, wealthier students tend to go to college? Is there perhaps a moderating influence of the university? This finding raises important questions about the vast majority of high school students who do not go to college and their vulnerability to extremism as they leave the classroom.

The picture of risk and vulnerability to extremism that emerges here is complex. Nonetheless, this research does allow us to deprioritize certain assumed drivers—notably grievances based on corruption, human rights abuses, lack of trust in government, poverty, and unemployment—while prioritizing others, such as community marginalization, the social factors of revenge, and the gun culture that underlie persistent conflict in the region, and the lack of self-efficacy amongst certain young people. More broadly, this research describes radicalization as a deeply social process that is embedded in social relations, in feelings towards and connections with one’s family and community.

Conclusion

This research investigated factors driving violent extremism in Mindanao and their impact on young people. The results are surprising and tell us to be cautious in our assumptions. CVE interventions cannot be effective unless they are based on a firm understanding of the local social, cultural, and political context and the drivers of extremism that are most salient for the target population. As such, it is important to remember that the findings and implications we present are valid only for the population studied—high school and university students, ages 15 to 29. That said, given that a majority of high school students will not go to college, the results may have some relevance for out-of-school youth as well. The questions answered by this research give rise to additional questions that are best explored by future research. How do these drivers differ from those impacting other populations, such as *madrasah* student, out of school youth, or adult men and women?

While the findings presented in this paper are critical, the research method and model for investigating drivers of violent extremism are also important. For example, the survey instrument and variables have applications in efforts to monitor CVE activity outcomes and impact. Data can be collected over time on perceptions and opinion of a focus group, which can be used to create values for variables representing

known drivers. Comparison of values from one period to the next can give insight into a program's progress in reducing the vulnerability of the focus population to recruitment by extremist groups.

Finally, this study learned from past efforts and applied new techniques to deepen our understanding of violent extremism in Mindanao. The same tools, appropriately adapted, can be used to investigate key drivers for other population groups at risk of recruitment.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Summary of Regression Analyses Predicting Support for Violence

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
Constant	.312	.049		6.344	0
Community Marginalization	.102	.026	.086	3.948	.000
Islam Under Attack	.057	.023	.051	2.531	.011
Revenge	.490	.016	.569	29.745	.000
Lack of Employment Opportunities	-.057	.021	-.053	-2.707	.007
Low Trust in Government	.021	.058	.015	0.366	.715
Individual Marginalization	-.040	.032	-.026	-1.252	.211
Lack of Self Efficacy	.195	.031	.118	6.248	.000
Social Isolation	-.166	.035	-.101	-4.748	.000
Social Conflict	-.034	.020	-.035	-1.744	.081
Gun Culture	.082	.026	.059	3.166	.002
Poor Services	-.073	.040	-.062	-1.834	.067
No Trust in Security Providers	-.114	.042	-.079	-2.727	.006
Poverty	-.040	.020	-.037	-1.947	.052
Human Rights	.012	.023	.011	0.541	.589
Corruption	.011	.021	.011	0.500	.617
Gender	.004	.009	.009	0.468	.640
Religion	-.029	.010	-.059	-2.983	.003
HS/University	.048	.010	.095	4.684	.000

Note: $R^2 = .499$; B = raw regression coefficient; SE = standard error; Beta = standardized regression coefficient; Sig. = p value. Gender coded 0 = Male, 1 = Female; Religion coded 0 = Muslims, 1 = non-Muslim. HS/University coded 0 = High school, 1 = University.

Appendix 2: Summary of Regression Analyses Predicting Support for Extreme Ideology

Variables	Unstandardized		Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
Constant	.610	.049		12.563	.000
Community Marginalization	.117	.025	.120	4.611	.000
Islam Under Attack	.013	.023	.014	0.590	.555
Revenge	.135	.016	.189	8.267	.000
Lack of Employment Opportunities	-.057	.021	-.064	-2.764	.006
Low Trust in Government	-.063	.058	-.052	-1.084	.279
Individual Marginalization	-.056	.032	-.043	-1.761	.078
Lack of Self Efficacy	.096	.031	.071	3.120	.002
Social Isolation	-.175	.035	-.129	-5.071	.000
Social Conflict	.022	.019	.028	1.155	.248
Gun Culture	.079	.026	.068	3.074	.002
Poor Services	-.081	.039	-.083	-2.065	.039
No Trust in Security Providers	.067	.042	.056	1.613	.107
Poverty	.007	.020	.008	0.331	.741
Human Rights	.033	.022	.036	1.462	.144
Corruption	-.004	.021	-.005	-0.196	.845
Gender	.009	.009	.023	1.035	.301
Religion	-.142	.010	-.348	-14.789	.000
HS/University	.020	.010	.047	1.914	.056

Note: $R^2 = .314$; B = raw regression coefficient; SE = standard error; Beta = standardized regression coefficient; Sig. = *p* value.
 Gender coded 0 = Male, 1 = Female; Religion coded 0 = Muslims, 1 = non-Muslim. HS/University coded 0 = High school, 1 = University.