RESPONDING TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM THROUGH PEACE, MEDIA, AND TECHNOLOGY

A Formative Research Report

MICHELLE BARSA
MARCELLE EMPEY
AVA AVILA
SALIC SHARIEF JR.
AHMED HARRIS PANGCOGA

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ACRONYM LIST

ALS	Alternative Learning Systems
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BASCOMNET	Basilan Communicators Network
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BBL	Bangsamoro Basic Law
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BOL	Bangsamoro Organic Law
BTA	Bangsamoro Transition Assembly
BTC	Bangsamoro Transition Commission
CDO	Cagayan de Oro City
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GT	Grounded Theory
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
ISIS/ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LGU	Local Government Unit
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MSU	Mindanao State University
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OSY	Out-of-School Youth
SAF	Special Action Forces
PNP	Philippine National Police
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
UMYO	Union of Muslim Youth Organization (UMYO)
VE	Violent Extremism
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization
VEI	Violent Extremism and Insurgency

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rapid rise of violent extremism (VE) has been a top concern for governments and vulnerable communities around the world. In recent years, there have been increasing reports of young Muslims joining VE groups in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao in Southern Philippines.

This research is composed of two parts: 1) a formative research component, which was conducted in during the third and fourth quarters of 2018, and 2) an extended survey, which used the participants of four training activities, two workshops and twenty community-based Listening Discussion and Action Groups. Both components aim to assess existing VE influencers and networks, define target audiences (to include demographics and their methods of communication), understand target audience desires and pathways toward radicalization and empowerment, and characterize vulnerable populations. Research focused on identifying target vulnerable populations in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and key urban areas (Cagayan de Oro City, Cotabato, Davao City, Iligan City, Marawi City, and Zamboanga City).

The research identified several recurring and intersecting themes relevant to countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts. This report analyzed and discussed those themes and their implications for CVE behavior change communication and radio programming.

Respondents affirmed the presence of recruiters of VE groups in their community and school. Many of the interviewees and focus group discussion participants from VE vulnerable communities explained

that active recruitment had occured in educational institutions in theri community. Even those who did not join the groups said that the recruiters were often charming and persuasive. The recruiters were generally treated with distrust by the community, as they had the potential to cause problems.

There is no singular profile of individuals targeted for recruitment. The conventional wisdom on extremism is that individuals alienated from society are particularly vulnerable to joining extremist groups. In contrast, respondents said that those young people were often pressured into joining extremist groups by their existing social links (e.g. family and clans). Recruiters targeted young people in secular education and religious schools and those not attending any educational institution. VE groups were said to focus not only on those considered traditionally vulnerable but also recruited very bright students or those with particularly useful skills such as engineers or those with medical knowledge. The family members of extremists, drug addicts, orphans, individuals living in remote barangays, and those exposed directly to conflict were all individuals likely to join extremist groups.

Education is key. Many of the key informants and FGD participants mentioned that education is an important component in CVE. Young people also suggested ending discrimination, concluding the peace processes with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), improving governance, and promoting youth activities could all reduce the risk of VE.

The findings presented in this report composes the first round of EAI's ongoing formative research on VE in Mindanao. Within a two-year period, which began on October 2018, two more research reports will be published, offering more substantive quantitative and qualitative data on this phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Violence has plagued Mindanao for decades, affecting hundreds of thousands of Filipinos through conflict between government forces and armed rebel groups, inter-communal tensions, and clan feuds. In recent years, the rapid rise of violent extremism (VE) in Mindanao has contributed to mounting concern over the island's instability. Composed of a group of relatively small, clustered islands, the southern part of the Philippines is easily accessible to VE organizations (VEOs). This has allowed members of foreign terrorist organizations, such as *Jemaah Islamiyah*, to travel in and out of the country undetected,

1 - Dawla Islamiyah (a.k.a Maute Group)
2 - Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)
3 - Ansar Khalifah Philippines (AKP)
4 & 5 - Abu Sayaff Group (ASG)

Map of Mindanao (developed by UNHCR)
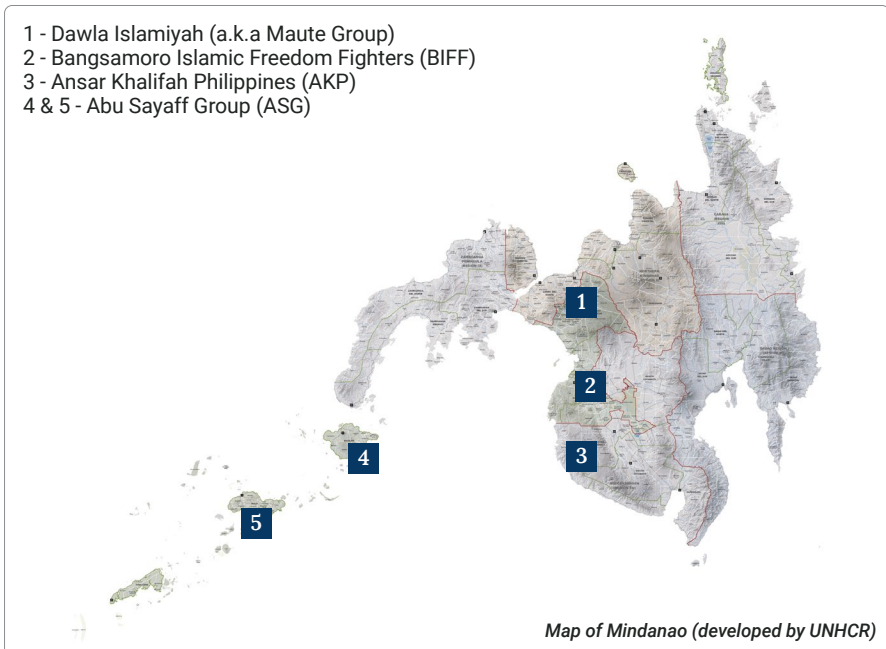
training members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and other armed factions. Increasing numbers of groups pledging allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS) have escalated the size and scope of the VE threat, best-evidenced by large-scale attacks like the 2017 Marawi Siege led by *Dawla Islamiyah* (a.k.a. Maute Group). The ambiguity of and delay in implementing peace agreements negotiated with insurgent groups Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) further contributed to unrest, until the 2019 passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

After decades of war, Mindanao is replete with locally-led civic campaigns--what it lacks is a common narrative that binds these initiatives in a way that maximizes the large scope of the movement and mobilizes the resources, ownership, and engagement to ensure the sustainability of that movement. To address this gap, EAI and its community partners established the #OURmindaNOW (OMN) Messaging Hub, which has five local hubs across Mindanao through which a network of community reporters and grassroots influencers are collectively mobilized. The OMN Hub is informed by extensive individual and group stakeholder consultations as well as formative research--a summary of which is outlined herein.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Objectives. The overarching objective of this study is to assess existing violent extremist influencers and networks, define target audiences (to include demographics and their methods of communication), understand target audience desires and pathways toward radicalization and empowerment, and characterize vulnerable populations.

Design. The methodology was based in Grounded Theory, with data derived from a biographical narrative interview technique. Leveraging local partners and networks, the study employed qualitative methods to assess radicalization risk levels associated with the target populations, making use of appreciative inquiry toward the co-design of effective solutions. Particular focus was placed on behavioral factors, social influences in target areas, and other identified indicators. Efforts were then sought to analyze that collected data to inform alternative messaging in Mindanao.

Data Collection. In order to gather the most pertinent and recent information for this report and to inform the program design, the research team employed four methods of collecting data: formal interviews using open-ended questions, interactive focus group discussions (FGDs), a desk research on relevant literature, and a survey. EAI conducted the field research in Mindanao from July 15 to August 7, 2018. The research team was composed of two US-based Equal Access staff, one Filipina consultant (lead researcher), and two Mindanaoan researchers.

For the field research, the team traveled to Cagayan de Oro City, Iligan City, Marawi City, Cotabato City, Zamboanga City, Isabela City (Basilan),

and Davao City. A total of 175 people participated in this research – 41 interviewees and 134 FGD respondents. 67.4% of the respondents were men, while 32.6% were women.

For the survey, a total of 268 respondents were engaged. These were participants of four training activities, two workshops and twenty community-based Listening Discussion and Action Groups (LDAGs) who come from EAI's five strategic programming areas in Mindanao (Northern Mindanao, Lanao, Zambasulta, South Central Mindanao, and Davao-Caraga).

Participants included students, out-of-school youth, unemployed youth, young professionals, teachers and professors, government employees, scholars, NGO workers, politicians, former members of terrorist groups, and rebel group leaders.

RESULTS

Violent Extremism in Mindanao

Interviews and FGDs confirmed the active operation of VEOs in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu, and Zamboanga. Respondents identified the ASG and Maute Group as those actively recruiting in these areas.

Relative Deprivation. The Philippine Statistics Authority reports that 11 of the 20 poorest provinces in the country are located in Mindanao.[1] Poverty here is understood to mean that basic needs of the people are not met. It means not enough food on the table, limited opportunities for education, poor health services, and limited housing facilities. These conditions stand in contrast to a largely middle-class country and a capital that is economically flourishing and developing at a rapid pace.

In Iligan, Marawi, and Cotabato, respondents suggested that young recruits are offered between PHP15,000 and PHP50,000 (approximately $280-$900) to join the ASG and Maute Group. While the financial incentives may explain some recruitment, a majority of recruitment narratives revolve around government neglect. Recruiters use frustrations and grievances with the government as a tool for manipulation. While this is not new, the clear lack of progress in addressing these grievances and a perception that the MILF had comprised too much in their negotiations with the government, ensures that extremist ideologies will continue to have appeal amongst disaffected target groups.

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[1] Philippines Statistics Authority. 2016.

Table 1. Related VE narratives and alternative narratives observed
with regard to relative deprivation

Related VE Narratives	Alternative Narratives Observed
• The government does not care about you. • The IP communities will be better able to access basic social services in a classless society • Imperial Manila keeps all the resources for the non-Moro / IP and leaves us to starve. • Applicants from the mainstream majority are preferred by employers and livelihood creditors over Moro and IP applicants. • Mindanao, the homeland of the Moro and IP, is a milking cow of Imperial Manila. • A secular government will never meet our needs.	• The BARMM promises greater access to socio-economic services. • A democratic government is a government of the people, for the people and by the people.

Mistrust of Security Forces. The mistrust of security forces directly relates to very real protection concerns, particularly among Maranao IDPs. In the Evacuation Centers, for example, one respondent reported repeat instances of sexual harassment and abuse. Others referenced the now-frequent kidnappings, forced disappearances, and senseless murders by organized criminal groups, suggesting that these are more pressing issues than VEO recruitment. The majority of individuals kidnapped are women but the kidnappings of men were reportedly associated with ISIS recruitment and political rivalry. Rather than report these crimes or suspicious activities to the police, many instead post information and/or inquiries on Facebook. While people are likely well-intentioned in posting dangers and threats on Facebook, there is no way to verify the validity of the information which, some suggested, is sowing undue fear among the population. Unwillingness to report crimes to the police long predated the Marawi Siege and is attributable, in part, to a belief that the police will do nothing in response and, in larger part, to dominant social norms (e.g., reporting a crime of sexual abuse will bring shame to the family). The Maranao primarily resolve disputes of this sort

through direct negotiation among the affected parties. Stakeholders and duty holders try to strengthen "referral pathways" to report such cases, but these conflicts with perceived cultural norms of not reporting due to the belief that it will bring shame on the family or families addressing the issue directly (rido).

While perceptions of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) differ (with the latter seen as more trustworthy), respondents expressed low levels of confidence in the AFP to secure areas, even when using checkpoints. These checkpoints were seen as only for show purposes because they only function whenever a dignitary visits. In the FGD with Islamic education students, participants shared that they do not trust the police and military because of the abuses they heard and saw during the evacuation of Marawi and under Martial Law. Though one student said that the declaration of Martial Law in Marawi City made the people more disciplined and the city cleaner, suggesting positive effects.

Table 2. Related VE narratives and alternative narratives observed with regard to mistrust of security forces

Related VE Narratives	Alternative Narratives Observed
- The AFP is an occupying force & imposes militarization over Moro and IP communities. - The AFP soldiers habitually enter into private property in occupied territory without due process and loot personal belongings and are not prosecuted for it by the AFP. - The AFP soldiers intentionally disgrace our women. - The AFP is kidnapping Maranaos in order to sell their organs. - The PNP stereotype all Muslims as terrorists and exist to protect the Christians. - It is easier to join non-state armed groups because there is no educational or height requirements.	- The AFP has the mandate of serving and protecting the people, regardless of race, creed, or religion. - The AFP recognizes and upholds the primacy of the peace process and acts accordingly in Moro and IP communities. - The AFP is mandated to help the Filipino nation create an environment conducive for sustainable development ad just and lasting peace.

Identity-Based Discrimination. A majority of Muslim respondents in Iligan, Marawi, and Cotabato cited personal experiences of religion-based discrimination. One young person said, "*There are places in Cagayan de Oro where you cannot rent apartments if you are a Muslim. The application forms say 'Christians preferred' but it means Christians only.*" Many of the young people the research team spoke to cited blanket stereotyping of Muslims as "terrorists". During the Iligan FGD, young women who choose to wear the *niqab* as a reflection of their faith, expressed anger over the Maute Group having "co-opted" the garb; people assume all those who wear it are members.

*Table 3. Related VE narratives and alternative narratives
observed with regard to identity discrimination*

Related VE Narratives	*Alternative Narratives Observed*
• The BOL will do nothing to improve Muslim-Christian relations. • All Christians think Muslims are terrorists. • We do not associate ourselves as Filipinos, we were forced to accept citizenship.	• Maranaos highly value friendship, once you are a friend, you are a friend for life. • Mindanao is the home of the tri-people where Muslims, Christians and Lumads live peacefully and harmoniously together. • Stories of Muslim-Christian collaborations that profile peaceful co-existence.

Corruption and Poor Governance. Irregularities in the implementation of government programs and delivery of public services reflect a lack of social accountability and poor adherence to the rule of law. People see elected leaders not being good stewards of public resources, which reduces trust in the government. According to university students interviewed in Marawi, vote buying is rampant in the city. Since many live in poverty, people opt to sell their vote for a few thousands of pesos. Likewise, election monitoring is weak. Respondents cited use of the names of deceased individuals for voter fraud. One student said, "*This happens all over the country but it's worse in Lanao del Sur. If you come here during elections, you will get rich.*"

*Table 4. Related VE narratives and alternative narratives observed
with regard to corruption and poor governance*

Related VE Narratives	Alternative Narratives Observed
• The government exploits the natural resources of minority/cultural communities. • There is weak implementation of laws and policies by the government favoring the • Government development programs that introduce western influences destroy the cultural heritage of IPs. • Development projects that are intended for impoverished communities are diverted into the pockets of government officials. • Government is insincere in implementing genuine agrarian reform. • We are forced to get civil documentation to access basic social services even though it is not our practice as Moro/IP.	• Active civic engagement is essential to promote responsive governance. • Governance is a shared responsibility between the duty bearers and the right holders.

Alienation and Exclusion. Decades of instability and insurgency in Mindanao has created a large pool of young, disenfranchised, and idle youth who are susceptible to the seductive ideological appeals of groups like ISIS. Recruits are looking for a sense of belonging and identity. There is also an allure to joining a group that wields authority over the community. While in Cagayan de Oro, the research team was able to interview a former Maute Group member who left the group before the siege erupted and surrendered to the military. He came from a well-to-do family and was a graduating student when he was recruited. Although he grew up in Saudi Arabia and studied in a Philippines school there, he admitted that he was ignorant of his own religion and was attracted to the sense of adventure of living in Butig, Lanao del Sur.

Absence of concrete programs for the youth. For example, the proliferation of alcohol and drugs in Marawi City triggers a feeling of disgust towards the government. On top of that, lack of opportunities for young people makes them an easy prey for recruiters.

Table 5. Related VE narratives and alternative narratives observed
with regard to alienation and exclusion

Related VE Narratives	Alternative Narratives Observed
• Muslims re being oppressed and slaughtered around the world, we must do our part to defend the Ummah. • This armed struggle is a legitimate form of jihad. • We will always be treated as second-class citizens of the Philippines. • Members of IP communities are always presumed as members/ sympathizers of leftist groups.	• Peace, unity and solidarity can be built in a multi-cultural society like Mindanao. • All religions in the world adhere to peace.

Peace Process. The research team was in Mindanao the day President Rodrigo Duterte signed the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). Delays in the signing of the peace deal has prompted some militants to break off from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). During the interviews, the research team was told that the delayed finalization of the Bangsamoro contributed to the narrative of violent extremists claiming the "we were right" narrative.

The BOL is the latest significant attempt by the government to negotiate an end to nearly 50 years of on-and-off Muslim fighting that has left more than 120,000 people dead and hampered development in the country's poorest regions. The law seeks to replace an existing poverty- and conflict-wracked ARMM with a potentially larger, and better-funded Bangsamoro. The MILF is the second group to have demanded for a separate Muslim state in exchange for autonomy. In 1996, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) signed a peace agreement with the

government, which led to the current five-province ARMM that has largely been regarded as a failure.

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers in Cotabato City, who handle the Out-of-School Youth (OSY) programs, told the research team that they were hesitant to discuss the newly signed BOL because they had limited understanding of its content. They do not want to be accused of being biased or politically-motivated. Similarly, the MSU Marawi students said they had not attended any consultations on the BOL, even though university-based organizations have organized related fora. Some of the students think that the people in the ARMM are not ready for BOL. Their main concern is the uncertainty in leadership and governance. In their words, *"we can't even manage our own solid waste, how can we manage our own government?"*

Table 6. Related VE narratives and alternative narratives
observed regarding the peace process

Related VE Narratives	Alternative Narratives Observed
• The The MILF are a group of aging fighters willing to make any concession just to retire and stop fighting. • The MNLF failed in attaining for the Bangsamoro people its right to self determination. • In all peace tracks, there is no full devolution of powers and genuine fiscal autonomy negotiated. • Whether with the MNLF or the MILF, the government has always been insincere in its negotiations. • Transitional justice has never been given. What is happening now is only a token gesture.	• The BARMM is the new beginning for the Bangsamoro people. • The BARMM represents all of the Bangsamoro people.

Recruitment Patterns

Youth vulnerability to recruitment by VEOs is marked by intertwining motivations and influences.

Family or clan ties. Family is the first circle of allegiance in Mindanao, and many individuals are related by either blood or marriage. It is common to see people providing "support" to a VEO, because s/he counts relatives among its members. In the Marawi interviews and Zamboanga FGD, respondents shared that extremism starts at home, where parents do not teach their children the value of diversity and tolerance. An intelligence officer the research team interviewed said that, in Central Mindanao, kids as young as 9 years old (of age to fire a weapon) are encouraged by their parents to join groups such as BIFF. Joining the BIFF also serves as a protection of the family against their enemies. Some recruiters are relatives of the new recruits, hence difficult to refuse and debate with their ideology.

*Table 7. Recruitment VE narratives and alternative narratives observed
with regard to family or clan ties in relation to recruitment patterns*

Recruitment VE Narratives	Alternative Narratives Observed
• You must play a role in defending the family against its enemies. • Let us fight to preserve the culture and heritage of the Moro and IPs. • Your family was massacred by the military/wife (daughters) raped/land and property taken away from you, it is time for vengeance.	• Forgiveness is one of the greatest traits of a Muslim. • Inner peace is the key to healing and reconciliation.

Schools and universities. Interview and FGD participants noted that many of the Maute-recruited youth who fought during the Marawi siege were college-educated. These young people were primarily recruited from universities where they were living apart from their families. Islamic education students shared in FGDs that they were aware of the

presence of VEOs in Marawi prior to the siege and that recruiters were going school-to-school promulgating extremist ideologies. Though once parents and school administrators were made aware of the issue, they intervened. Recruitment in Zamboanga City targets teenagers and young professionals (15-30 years old). According to police intelligence, the Muslim Student Affairs of Ateneo de Zamboanga is an example of a target population.

Table 8.1 Recruitment VE narratives and alternative narratives observed with regard to schools and universities in relation to recruitment patterns

Recruitment VE Narratives	Alternative Narratives Observed
• Completing an education is not a guarantee of employment or a better life. • You will be discriminated as a Muslim/IP even if you have a degree. • What you learn in the classroom cannot be used in practical life or in your job. • You will be Christianized/westernized if your go to a secular or Christian sectarian school.	• Education is key to a better life. • Learning is a continuous process.

While in Iligan, the research team spoke to two young people who study in a registered *madrasa* day school in Lanao del Sur, where recruitment had occurred. They shared that the recruiters were fellow classmates and that discussions were held outside of classroom hours. The indoctrination happened without the consent of the school administration and was secretly conducted. They mentioned that the recruiters do not coerce, but if the recruit is unwilling, the recruiters touch on the ego and make you feel guilty that you are not doing enough to spread Islam.

Table 8.2 Recruitment VE narratives and alternative narratives observed
with regard to schools and universities in relation to recruitment patterns

Recruitment VE Narrative	Alternative Narrative Observed
• The *ustadz* are not doing enough to promote Islam.	• The ulama community, as a whole, interpret and preach Islam according to universally accepted standards.

Foreign influence. Many noted the impact of foreign influence, including the presence of foreign fighters and the after-affect of some Islamic scholars studying abroad in countries like Afghanistan, Saudi, Pakistan, and Libya. The social infrastructure exists for returning scholars to network with one another. Through seminars and small-group discussions in Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, ideas are formed and shared. The Maute brothers were *ustadzs* trained abroad. They claimed to be waging a war in the name of injustice against Islam. Around the world, Muslims are rising up against their oppressors and they feel they have to do their part.

Table 9. Recruitment VE narratives and alternative narratives observed
with regard to foreign influence in relation to recruitment patterns

Recruitment VE Narrative	Alternative Narrative Observed
• You will receive training abroad if you join us. • You will belong to a global brotherhood of mujahideen if you join us. • You will join the heroes of revolutions in the world, a Filipino Che Guevara (left). • You will be featured and immortalized on our "black sites"	• All Muslims regardless of race are all equal in the eyes of Allah.

Survey on Violent Extremism

A survey was conducted in 2019 to reinforce the findings on violent extremism of the formative research conducted during the second half of 2018. This survey utilized participants from four training activities, two workshops and twenty fixed community-based focus groups as survey respondents. The four training activities and two workshops were attended by participants coming from the five strategic programming areas of EAI Philippines, while the twenty fixed community, based focus groups are equally distributed among the five areas.
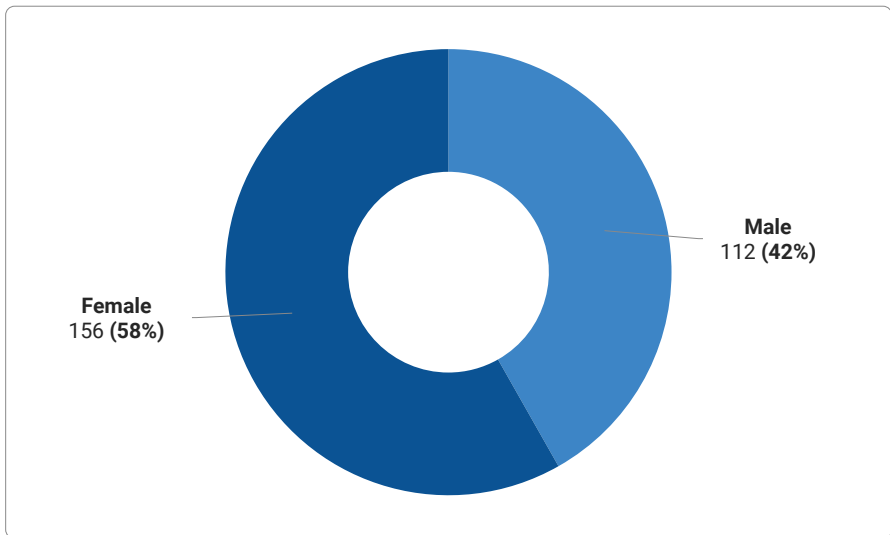

Figure 1. Respondents' distribution by gender

Survey respondents were asked key questions that would cull insights on VE influences, understand target audience desires and pathways toward radicalization and empowerment, and characterize vulnerable populations.

Of the 268 respondents of this survey, majority (58%) are female, while 42% are male.

Influences that make a person reject a VEO. Survey respondents were asked what influences inside and outside their community could help make a person reject the influences of a VE organization.

High level of awareness
90 (34%)

Strong Family Ties
53 (20%)

Education
40 (15%)

Religious and Cultural Beliefs
36 (13%)

Ensured Tenure/Income
11 (4%)

Civic Engagement
16 (6%)

Others
22 (8%)
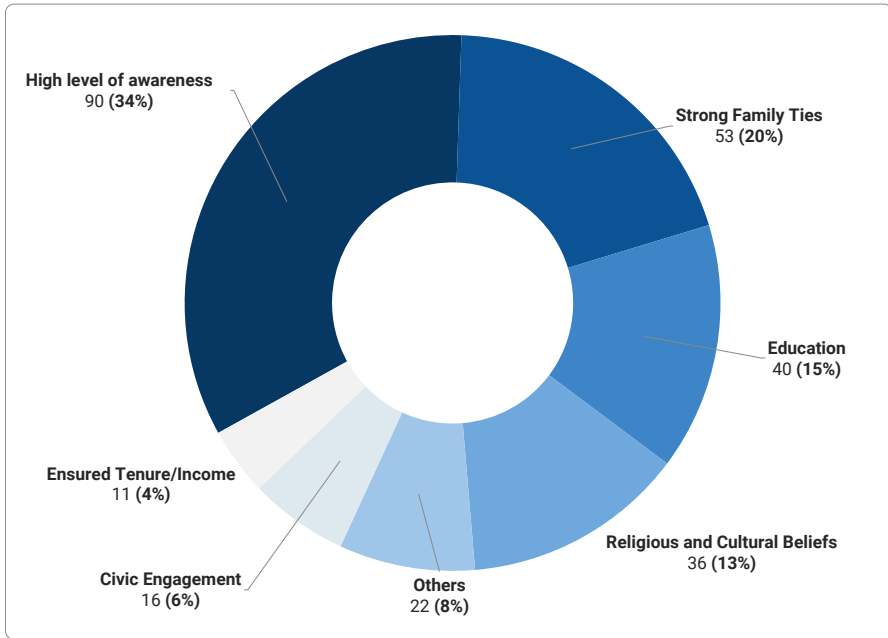
Figure 2. Distribution of responses: Influences that make a person reject a VE organization

Figure 2 shows that, out of the total respondents, 90 individuals (34%) stated that a high level of awareness of what violent extremism is and how it could impact on their lives and the lives of those in their community can influence a person to reject a VE organization. Another 53 individuals (20%) stated that having strong family ties can help a person reject a VE organization.

Role of the community in a person's decision-making to reject a VEO. Respondents were also asked what role communities could have in helping a person's decision-making to reject a VE organization.

Figure 3 shows that, out of the total number of respondents, 107 individuals (40%) shared that IEC and awareness campaigns on violent extremism and/or peacebuilding is a role that the community can have in influencing a person to reject a VE organization.
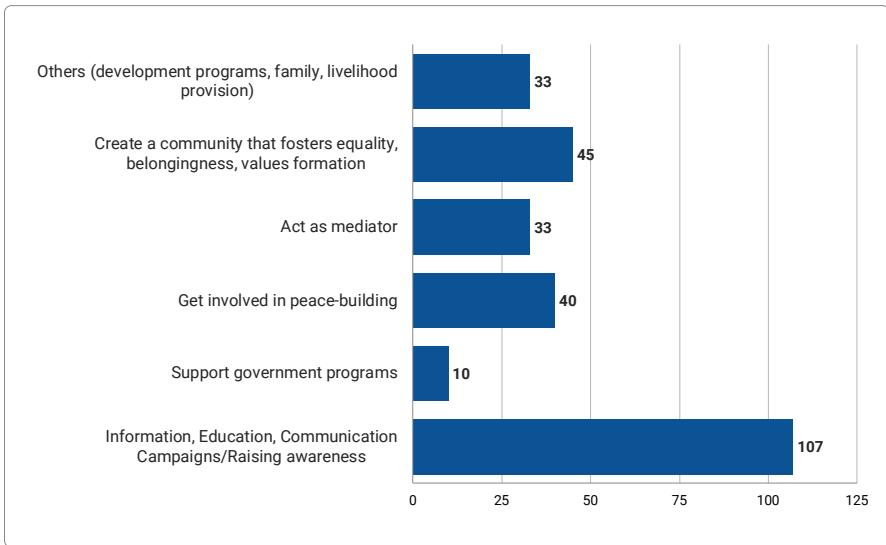
Figure 3. Distribution of responses: Influences that make a person reject a VE organization

Whether the reasons to reject VEOs are different for males and females. Respondents were also asked if the reasons to reject VE organizations were different between males and females.

Figure 4 shows that, out of the total number of respondents, a majority of 162 individuals (60%) say that the reasons to reject VE organizations is different between males and females. On the other hand, 79 individuals (30%) say the reasons to reject VE organizations are the same for males and females.

No
65 **(24%)**

Depends on the
situation
166 **(62%)**

Yes
20 **(8%)**

Maybe
17 **(6%)**
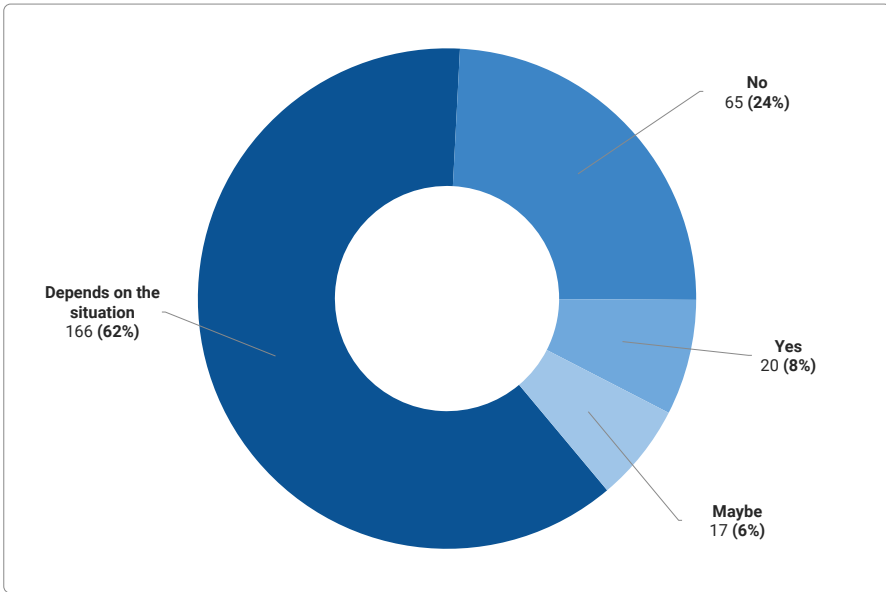
*Figure 4. Distribution of responses: Whether the reasons to reject
VEOs are different for males and females*

Influences that make a person support, join or act on behalf of a VEO.
Respondents were also asked of the various possible influences that
make a person support, join or act on behalf of a VE organization.

Figure 5 shows that, out of the total number of respondents, 87 individuals
(32.5%) say that having no permanent source of income or being in a state
of poverty is an influence that can make a person support, join or act on
behalf of a VEO. 42 individuals (16%) say that VEO active recruitments,
false promises, revenge, and wrong/poor mindset are influences that
can make a person support, join or act on behalf of a VEO.
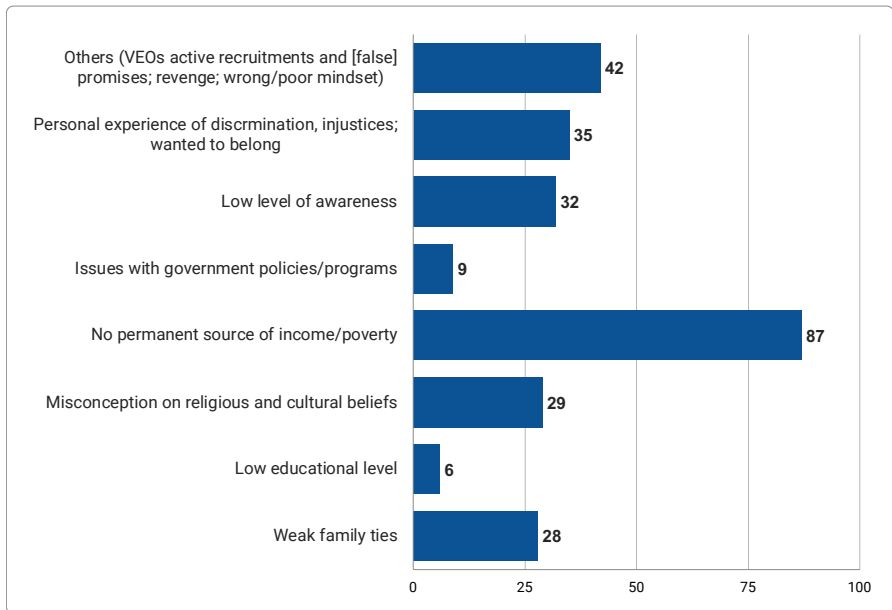
Figure 5. Distribution of responses: Influences that make a person support, join or act on behalf of a VEO

Role of the community in a person's decision-making to support, join or act in behalf of a VEO. Respondents were also asked what role can a community have in a person's decision-making to support, join or act in behalf of a VE organization.

Figure 6 shows that, out of the total number of respondents, 129 individuals (48.1%) state that a lack or having no awareness raising mechanism, no counseling, and no initiative on the part of the community to prevent VE can be factors that can influence a person to decide to support, join or act in behalf of a VE organization.
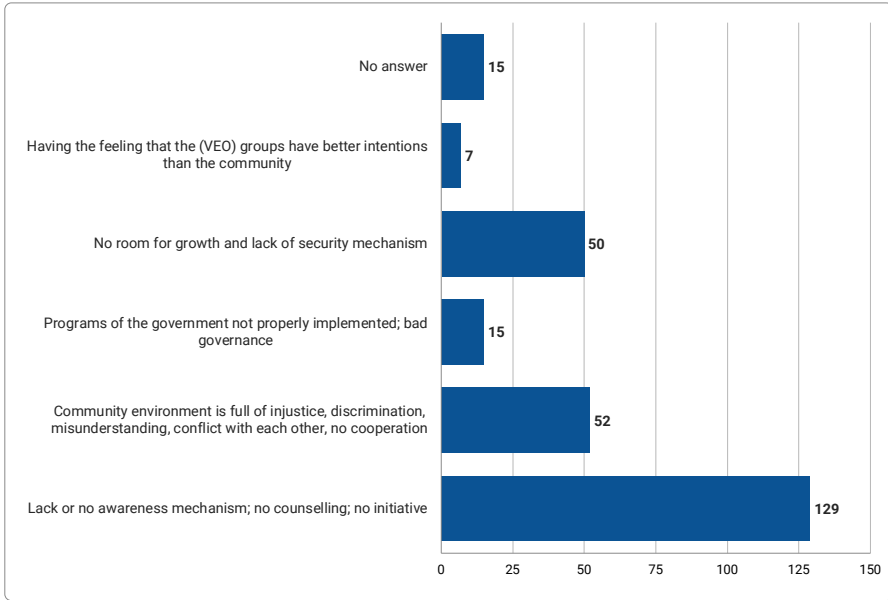
Figure 6. Distribution of responses: Role of the community in a person's decision-making to support, join, or act in behalf of a VEO

Whether the reasons to support VEOs are different for male and female. Respondents were asked if the reasons to support, join or act in behalf of a VE organization are different for males and females.

Figure 7 shows that, out of the total number of respondents, 166 individuals (62%) say that the reasons for deciding to support, join or act on behalf of a VE organization are different for males and females.

Whether a mechanism is in place in respondent's community that help prevent VE. Respondents were asked whether a mechanism has been observed as in place in their communities that help prevent violent extremism.

Figure 8 shows that an overwhelming majority of the total respondents (213 individuals, or 80%) stated in the affirmative that there is a mechanism in place in their communities that help prevent violent extremism.

Figure 7. Distribution of responses: Whether the reasons to support VEOs are different for male and female
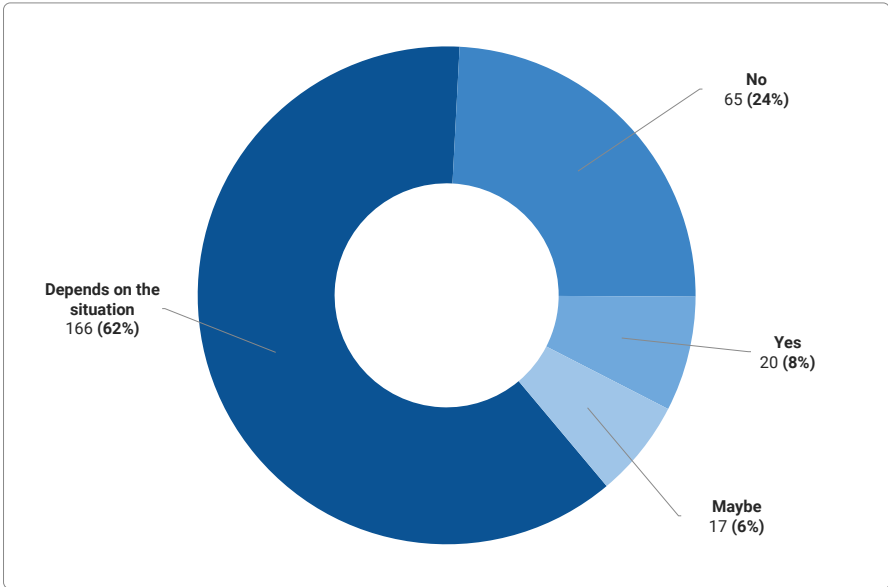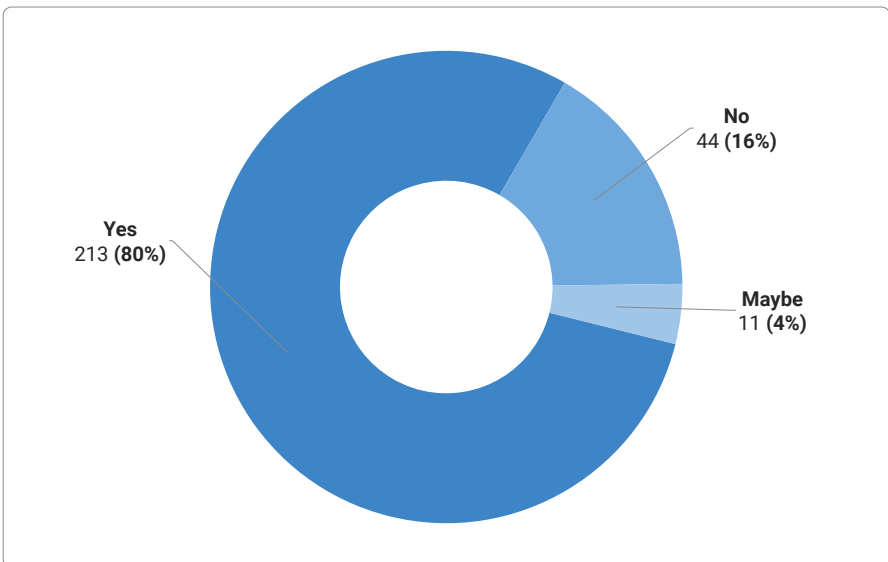

Figure 8. Distribution of responses: Whether a mechanism is in place in respondent's community that help prevent VE

Factors that make certain communities resilient to VE. Respondents were asked what for them was the top factor that would make certain communities resilient to violent extremism.

Figure 9 shows that, out of the total number of respondents, 83 individuals (31%) say that conducting awareness raising/advocacy campaigns on peace promotion and/or dialogue is the top factor that can make certain communities resilient to VE. Another 54 individuals (20.2%) say that strong coordination with security forces and government officials is the top factor that can make certain communities resilient to VE. It is worthy to note that more respondents point to having awareness raising/advocacy campaigns on peace promotion and/or dialogue than having strong coordination with security forces and government officials as the top factor for making a community resilient to VE.
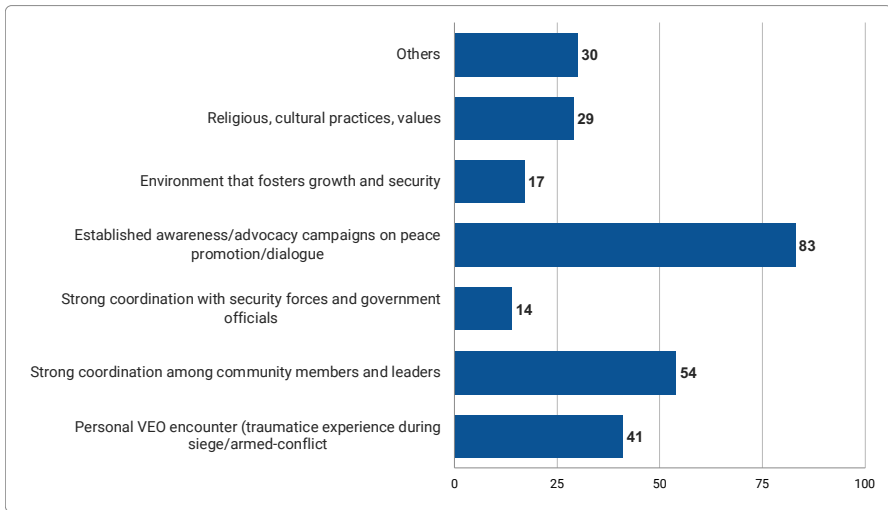
Figure 9. Distribution of responses: Factors that make certain communities resilient to VE

Factors that make a person already associated with a VEO disengage from it. Respondents were asked what is the top factor that could make an individual who is already associated with a VE organization decide to disengage from it.

Figure 10 shows that, out of the total number of respondents, 84 individuals (31%) say that having an awareness of the ramifications of his/her engagement with the VE organizations – the groups purposes, the kind of activities it conducts, how its activities affect communities, etc., as the top that could make a person already associated with a VEO disengage from it. This implies that a good portion of the general population believe that individuals who join VE organizations are not fully aware of the situation they are entering into.
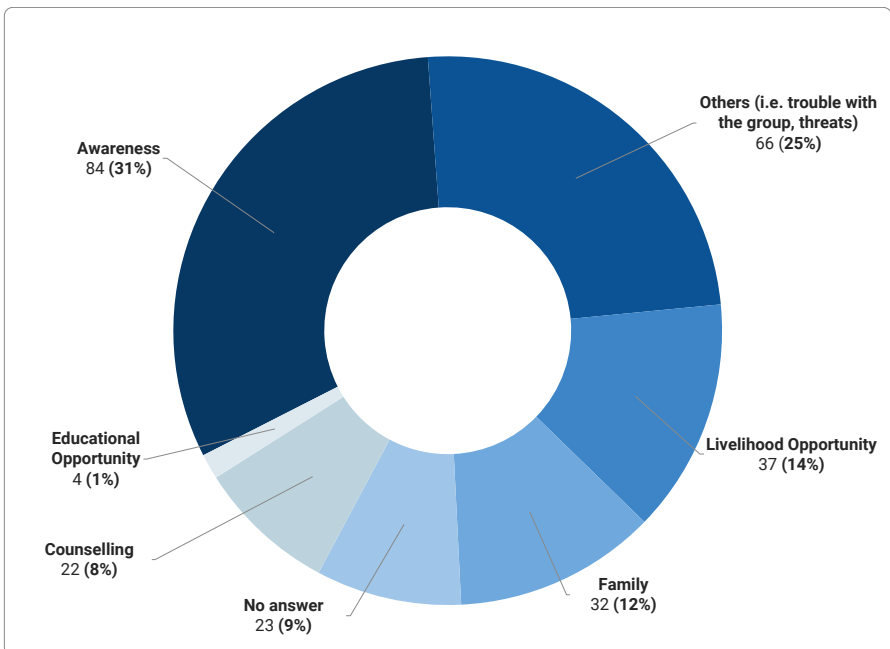
Figure 10. Distribution of responses: Factors that make a person already associated with a VEO disengage from it

Meanwhile, 66 individuals (25%) say that trouble with group, or threats from inside the group can be the top factor that could make a person already associated with a VEO disengage from it.

Examples of messaging that would induce an openness to prevention from joining or disengaging from a VEO. Respondents were asked to give one example of a messaging that can induce a person from joining a VEO, or a person already associated with a VEO from disengaging from it.

Figure 11 shows that, out of the total number of respondents, 137 individuals (51.1%) have as top messaging the call of "taking the opportunity to be informed/aware (of the situation) by attending seminars, religious and cultural dialogues, or IEC campaigns." On the other hand, 44 individuals (16.4%) could not provide an example.

Figure 11. Distribution of responses: Examples of messaging that would induce an openness to prevention from joining or disengagement from a VEO

Addressing Violent Extremism

Catalyzed by the Marawi Siege, the Republic of the Philippines has taken more decisive action on VE. There is a draft National Action Plan (NAP) on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), though it is yet to be finalized, l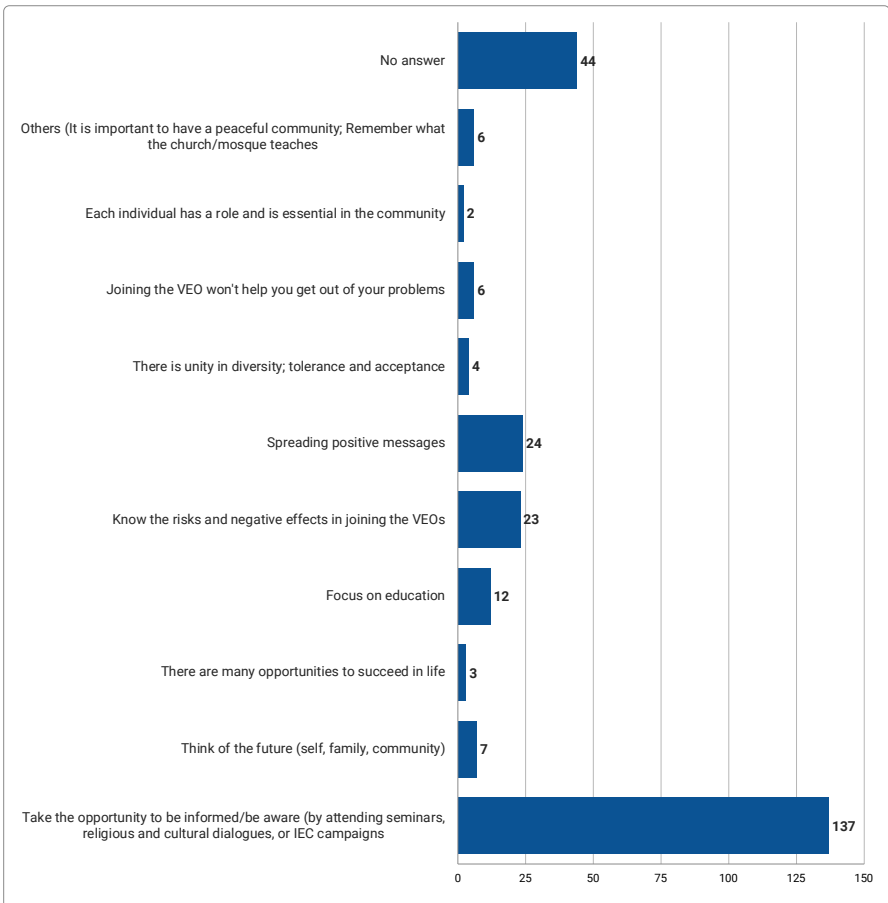eaving the Anti-Terrorism Council of the Philippines (ATCP) without the mandate to orchestrate systematic CVE efforts. Various government agencies continue to attempt individual CVE initiatives, but without inter-agency coordination. The Philippines National Police (PNP), for example, runs the Community Anti-Terrorism Awareness (CATA) program, built from the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Enhanced Module on the Prevention of Violent Extremism. This is in collaboration with Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) but, due to the absence of a NAP, there are no clear collaborative programs between the security sector, local government units (LGUs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

While LGUs have control over budgeting that could fund CVE-relevant programming, the majority are not actively apportioning resources or tracking relevant indicators. Most initiatives are limited to awareness-raising and education campaigns, with a select few addressing livelihoods. Meanwhile, no specific referral pathways exist to facilitate early intervention and low levels of public trust in the PNP greatly impede crime prevention. Although VE recruitment is occurring in various localities both inside and outside of Mindanao, threats posed by the ASG and BIFF in Basilan, Zamboanga, and Maguindanao are priority areas of concern.

Across Mindanao, civil society is leading initiatives to address the issue of violent extremism. Some initiatives to address the violent extremism shared during the interviews and FGDs were:

- *S'bang Ka Marawi* – radio program
- *Program Against Violent Extremism* (PAVE) in Basilan
- *Bitialia* – peace conversations organized by the Al Qalam Institute

- *World Hijab Day* – non-Muslim students in MSU Marawi were requested to wear a hijab for a day
- *Peacekwela* – making peace activities fun for the youth by I am Mindanao

A holistic response to violent extremism is the call of various stakeholders; a military response is hardly the only solution. There is a need to listen to the voices of diverse groups, starting from those directly affected – the youth – the target for recruitment extending to the adult groups, who exert influence on the youth groups. This chapter showcases the initiatives of youth and adult respondents of this formative research in addressing the issues. It also includes the on-going efforts of the different sectors, ulama, Local Government Units (LGUs), the security sector, and civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as the unique approach that Equal Access International through its Philippine Country Office can do to complement and enhance these initiatives.

Media Landscape

Most young people in cities get their news from television and social media. According to a research conducted by one of the research team's key informants, children spend an average of 4 hours each day browsing through Facebook. Meanwhile, the out-of-school youth participants in the Cotabato FGD and their teachers said that they spend at least one hour a day in social media. In the FGD with students studying Islam, they shared that they rely on social media for information more than in any other source. These scenarios are consistent with 2018 Digital Report of We Are Social, where data compiled showed that Filipinos spend an average of 3 hours and 57 minutes a day on social media sites.[2] In the Philippines, usage of Facebook Lite is very common because it offers free data. Users can only see the headlines but are not allowed to click the links, otherwise they will be charged. This has not stopped people from sharing the links, even though they haven't read the article. They share based on the headlines. This is one of the ways fake news spreads fast

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[2] 'PH is world leader in social media usage.' Philippine Daily Inquirer. February 15, 2018.
http://business.inquirer.net/246015/ph-world-leader-social-media-usage

and wide in the country. Interestingly, the Cotabato *madrasa* educator the research team interviewed thinks that too much exposure to social media lessens religious faith.

In rural areas, however, Wi-Fi signal is weak or almost non-existent. Therefore, they rely on radio (including two-way) and television, which are cheaper options for communication and entertainment.

When asked if they would listen to radio programs, the FGD participants from Cotabato and Marawi unanimously said they prefer social media and that only 'old' people listen to dramas. However not all young people living in the urban areas spoken to reject the use of radio as source for information and entertainment. The city of Isabela in Basilan, with a population of more than 110,000, has its own radio network. Every Sunday afternoon, one of the radio programs is hosted by a youth leader, who the research team met at the FGD in Zamboanga. In the radio program, they talk about issues pertaining to early marriage and the needs of young people. They are welcome to make this a CVE platform as well. Also, in Basilan, there is a network of communicators – composed of the local government unit, NGOs, security sector and religious sector – who form the Basilan Communicators Network (BASCOMNET). According to the convener, whom the research team interviewed, BASCOMNET aims to provide space for different views and release of any information is a consensus by all the members.

In Cotabato, the Bangsamoro Multimedia Network by the Union of Muslim Youth Organizations (UMYO) produces documentary videos on the grievances of the community.

It is interesting to note that online recruitment is not prevalent in Mindanao. An interviewee in Cagayan de Oro mentioned that the use of internet is mostly for the spread of propaganda rather than recruitment to take up arms.

CONCLUSION

There is no panacea for violent extremism.

The national government should put forward a multi-faceted, proactive, all-inclusive, and sustainable policy framework to prevent and counter violent extremism upon which government branches, agencies, bureaucracy, and regional and local government units develop and coordinate long-term prevention programs and short-term rehabilitation, integration, and mitigation programs. Likewise, implement all peace agreements. This is to respond to the Moro people's clamor for the resolution of historical injustices and for enjoying long-awaited peace dividends.

1. The donor community can rally around the government's policy framework by supporting program development and implementation, specializing on issues and interventions.
2. Deepen Islamic grounding of informal and non-formal educative processes for Muslim children, youth, and adults. Current platforms such as khutbah (Friday sermon), nasihah (group counsels), seminars in masjid (mosques), Muslim student and youth organizations and federations, and the community must be used for developing and propagating moderate and tolerant Islam.
3. Institute programs to expand the professional opportunities for young ulama, imam, and ustadz teaching in traditional schools (madaris) and mosques (masjid).
4. The academe and research institutes should provide leadership in research, educational programs, and curricula towards

a culture of peace, character formation, and competency development of both the in-school and out-school youth to insulate them from VE.

From an interview in Cagayan de Oro, the key informants shared that they "*learned that young students are not apathetic with what is going on around them. They just saw peacebuilding as boring and serious. It is important to generate that interest by making activities on peace fun.*"

The respondents also recognize the importance of engaging the religious leaders. "*The students from an FGD in Iligan said that is important to work with the religious leaders in understanding Islam. They don't think the elders are totally against technology. It just needs to be presented in a way that will make them understand the value.*" In addition, working with the *ustadz* is also important to lessen chances of different interpretations of Islamic doctrine.

The importance of content in CVE messaging has also been highlighted in several interviews and FGDs saying that the narrative must be localized in order to be effective. According to a *madrasa* educator based in Cotabato City, "*the radio drama content must consider Bangsamoro script and language and must be relevant to the lessons being taught in school.*"

Also, widely recognized by the youth respondents was the need to focus on the ideological response in forms such as information, education, and communication (IEC) on Islamic values.

Gender issues also came out from the conversations. A woman leader the research team spoke to in Cotabato suggested a women-only Tech Camp and, if possible, conduct a media campaign to raise awareness on women, peace, and security.

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ABSTRACT

The rapid rise of violent extremism (VE) has been a top concern for governments and vulnerable communities around the world. In recent years, there have been increasing reports of young Muslims joining VE groups in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao in Southern Philippines.

This research is composed of two parts: 1) a formative research component, which was conducted during the third and fourth quarters of 2018, and 2) an extended survey, which used the participants of four training activities, two workshops, and 20 community-based Listening Discussion and Action Groups (LDAGs), conducted in 2019. Both components aim to assess existing VE influencers and networks, define target audiences including their demographics and methods of communication, understand target audience desires and pathways toward radicalization and empowerment, and characterize vulnerable populations. Research focused on identifying target vulnerable populations in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and key urban areas (Cagayan de Oro City, Cotabato, Davao City, Iligan City, Marawi City, and Zamboanga City).

The research identified several recurring and intersecting themes relevant to countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts. This analyzed those themes and their implications for CVE behavior change communication and radio programming. The research found out that there is a presence of recruiters of VE groups in their communities and schools, and there is no singular profile of individuals targeted for recruitment. In addition, key informants and FGD participants considered education an important component in CVE. The respondents also wanted to put an end to discrimination, see the conclusion of the peace processes with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), improve governance, and promote youth activities that could all reduce the risk of violent extremism.

Keywords: *countering violent extremism, Mindanao, behavioral change, peace, media, technology*

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