



Prevention from Below: Civil society efforts to prevent violent extremism in Southeast Asia

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This report reflects the views of its authors rather than those of the Australian government, The Asia Foundation, its partners, or the civil society organizations featured.

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Glossary of Key Terms¹

Violent extremism

Although it is a term widely used by policymakers, there is no standard definition of *violent extremism*. The UN secretary-general has made defining violent extremism the prerogative of member states. Generally, violent extremism denotes terrorism and a range of other political violence. For example, the Australian government defines it as “a willingness to use unlawful violence or support the use of violence by others to promote a political ideology or religious goal.”² While violent extremism often refers solely to Islamist jihadist terrorism, this report uses violent extremism more broadly.

Countering violent extremism

Most policymakers use this term to refer to efforts focused on stopping all forms of ideologically based extremist violence, including recruitment into terrorist groups or associated violent action. It is typically distinct from disruptive actions that focus on directly stopping acts of violence. Like *violent extremism*, there is no widely accepted definition of *countering violent extremism*.

Preventing violent extremism

This term is used extensively in this report. Many specialists and civil society organizations prefer to define their work as preventing rather than countering violent extremism. This term emphasizes long-term interventions to address grievances, background conditions, institutional deficiencies, or problems experienced by individuals, and it distances these initiatives from more security-led approaches.

Radicalization

Another contested concept, radicalization seeks to explain the process through which individuals embrace the use of violence in the pursuit of a given goal. Extensive conceptual and practical debate considers the many dimensions of radicalization and how it can be addressed.

Push and pull factors

Push factors and *pull factors* distinguish between underlying conditions that are conducive to violent extremism (push factors) and the triggers of participation or direct support for violence (pull factors). Push factors are typically structural or societal and often include socioeconomic marginalization, poor governance (especially in areas experiencing protracted conflict), corruption, and human rights abuses. Pull factors are specific to individuals and have a bearing on recruitment and radicalization. Examples might include such things as the search for identity and the desire to belong. Push and pull factors can also simply be called *drivers* of violent extremism.

Summary of Recommendations

The findings of this report indicate that efforts to address violent extremism and to tackle broader aspects of conflict or violence in Southeast Asia need to encompass security dimensions while also addressing the underlying political, social, and economic conditions that create an enabling environment for violent extremism. The following recommendations identify key opportunities when working with civil society organizations on preventing violent extremism. Based on the report's findings, they are directed towards international and domestic supporters or funders of civil society initiatives unless otherwise stated.



The following recommendations identify key opportunities when working with civil society organizations on preventing violent extremism.

A more comprehensive and grounded analytical approach to understanding local contexts

Civil society initiatives to address violent extremism in Southeast Asia take place in varied and complex environments, whether concentrating on a specific sector or focusing on a locale. Civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in preventing violent extremism (PVE) have diverse fields of expertise and apply a wide range of approaches, making it hard to offer universally applicable guidelines.

Existing guidance already suggests the essential components of sound analysis in the sector.³ It can be difficult, however, to turn the results of such analyses into effective programming, partly because they can easily miss important contextual nuances and sensitivities. The following steps should be integrated into assessments of the scope for supporting CSOs:

- Understand the policy and legal frameworks shaping the enabling environment for addressing violent extremism. It is important to understand legal factors that may contribute to ambiguity, and barriers that may impede civil society responses. These frameworks usually define the parameters of civil society engagement and the space for CSOs to operate. They also inform government counterterrorism approaches and guide the definition of which organizations may be considered to be violent or extremist, or at least to be on the fringes of such definitions.
- Identify context-specific sensitivities and their implications for navigating the political environment safely. For instance, terminology on radicalization, terrorism, extremism, and related risk factors varies greatly across Southeast Asia. Consider risks and their mitigation, such as the possibility that collaboration with government may instrumentalize civil society for security purposes, or that governments may use language and ambiguous definitions to suppress groups as “enemies of the state” simply for opposing their policies or approaches.
- Avoid assessments that assign monocausal explanations to violent extremism. Grasping the combined effect of multiple factors and recognizing differences across a population by gender, status, class, and identity are critical elements of appropriate responses. Nuanced analysis should guide the focus of interventions. In cases, for instance, where violent actors are drawn from middle-class communities or are primarily recruited online, traditional rural community-development projects are unlikely to offer an effective solution.
- Explicitly canvass the views of local CSOs and community leaders as to what drives violent extremism. Their proximity to their communities and their knowledge of local grievances provide valuable insights. Be sure to get the views of women leaders and CSOs working with women.

- Identify and take into account existing government and civil society initiatives, and consider the relationships between them (e.g., the tensions, gaps, and potential clashes between government and civil society actions). Identify successful collaborations that are complementary and can be further developed.



For more detail, go to Lesson 3

Taking a broader view: linking prevention approaches with development and peacebuilding approaches

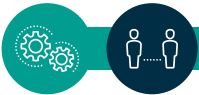
Many nongovernmental organizations in this field approach the issue of violent extremism indirectly. Sometimes such an approach enables them to avoid being associated with security services or other government bodies, and other times it enables them to maintain a core, long-term development approach rather than following more specific, donor-led funding demands. More significantly, a broad perspective enables CSOs to address local root causes or drivers of extremism rather than concentrating on downstream symptoms. Examples of indirect approaches include support for prison reform in Indonesia, efforts to build a strong local identity around pluralism and tolerance in Malaysia, and development initiatives to tackle entrenched rural poverty in The Philippines.

In addition to “zooming in” and identifying specific characteristics of a country or local context, it is important to “zoom out” and consider violent extremism holistically, from a perspective that looks at the *relative importance* of structural drivers and their influence in any one place. This finding draws on and confirms global research that shows how violent extremism is driven by multiple causes that may be operating at three levels simultaneously: first, the macro, or structural level; second, the meso, or social/community level; and third, the individual level. It is also important to take into account existing development and peacebuilding interventions as part of the appraisal process. It is recommended that PVE stakeholders:

- ***Adopt a “strategic portfolio” approach***, assessing the extent to which the existing range of counterterrorism, peacebuilding, development, and PVE initiatives are proportionate to the relative importance of the various drivers and grievances in identified geographic locations. This approach requires functional coordination between and within donors across sectors, as well as with national governments.
- ***Invest in additional support to improve governance and reduce conflict***. Based on the reported significance of misgovernance, conflict, and other structural drivers of violent extremism, consider supporting initiatives to bring multiple stakeholders together to constructively address them, or at least to exchange grassroots experiences of nonviolent responses to grievances. One option is local, multistakeholder programs (i.e., those involving joint, government and civil society trainings and workshops) that normalize peacebuilding concepts and approaches and establish a common vocabulary for discussing violent extremism in the local context.
- ***Explore a comprehensive approach to high-risk sectors known to cause or contribute to violent extremism***. First, develop relationships of sufficient depth and breadth across the ecosystem of organizations working in the identified sector. Second, develop a range of initiatives that complement each other within the sector and can incrementally build a critical mass of effort (for instance, initiatives that address the prison environment, male and female prisoners who have been convicted on terrorist charges, returning jihadist fighters, and their rehabilitation and reintegration into society). This approach may benefit from simultaneous investment at different levels: upstream policy reform, individual case-management work, downstream community-level work, and follow-up support to individuals through livelihood assistance or economic opportunities to prevent recidivism.
- ***Recognize that legislation alone is a limited tool to prevent violent extremism***. In all countries, the grievances that drive violent extremism are rooted in entrenched structural problems. Focusing on

understanding these problems and seeking ways to address them makes more sense than relying on narrow or isolated legal approaches.

- **Mainstream prevention.** In addition to focusing on specific threats, and given the importance of broader structural grievances, PVE should be mainstreamed into ongoing governance and other broad-sector interventions in areas where additional vulnerabilities and push/pull factors are evident—for example, in areas affected by conflict. This approach may help to address pertinent issues without focusing undue attention on specific initiatives or labeling them in counterproductive ways.
- **Proportionality, balance, and targeting considerations.** Consider the relative balance of initiatives and investment in PVE at each of the three levels—macro, meso, and individual. Doing so should help to fill gaps and prioritize the areas most in need of investment, whether building new initiatives, scaling up existing work, or extending support for ongoing programs.
- **Sector funding decisions.** If a donor or government has a budget specifically for tackling extremism, ensure that it is focused mainly at the meso level, addressing clearly identified and context-specific drivers of violent extremism within at-risk groups or localities. Support for individual-level assistance targeting identified at-risk cases may also be covered. But macro or structural issues such as economic livelihoods, improving governance, and conflict reduction should be funded through development, peacebuilding, or other fund allocations whenever possible.



For more detail, go to Lessons 1 and 2

Building civil society capacity: an ongoing need

CSOs in remote and conflict-affected or marginalized areas have often developed valuable local relationships and earned trust at the community level, yet they may face constraints in terms of experience, contacts, recruitment, and their relationships with government actors. Opportunities for capacity development can be hard to find for such groups, and carefully designed programs of support can add great value. This may mean, for instance, translating existing resources or adapting them to local conditions, developing new material, or building the technical skills of both government and nongovernment stakeholders.

Local authorities in these regions can also benefit from support, especially where suspicion and gaps in understanding or communication exist between pillars of society (e.g., government, civil society actors, the media, and religious institutions). Given the sensitive nature of the issues at hand and the power dynamics among these institutions, it is important to find neutral convenors and venues that allow for considered discussion. These findings lead to the following recommendations:

- **Support targeted capacity building for CSOs and government stakeholders in marginalized areas** (as described above).
- **Support efforts to improve understanding between civil society and government actors (including security agencies), and avoid reinforcing the typical divides between them.** Donors should bring together diverse stakeholders and practitioners to discuss issues, roles, and responses to violent extremism. They should develop neutral forums, create alternative spaces, and strengthen the role of existing “bridge mechanisms,” as CSO approaches often depend, in practice, on links with government to function, advocate, and implement their programs. The state’s presence and impact in Southeast Asia’s hotspots of violent extremism may vary, but it is rare that the state has no reach at all.
- **Support the development of holistic, coordinated approaches across identified high-priority sectors.** They can be challenging to implement, and donors must be realistic about what CSOs and government can achieve in this regard, but such approaches are critical, particularly given current trends towards more authoritarian government leadership and less space for civil society. This kind

of approach requires donors to tolerate risk, learn from failure as well as success, and back CSOs in challenging circumstances.

- *Support more online prevention efforts.* Online media are an increasingly important influence on violent extremism, yet they are too often neglected by civil society in Southeast Asia.
- *Gender differences need more attention.*⁴ Gender-based roles and interactions between genders are complex and critical factors in supporting, undertaking, or influencing violent extremism. They need to be fully considered in program approaches and in capacity development. Most CSOs currently have limited capacity to assess and respond to gendered aspects of violent extremism—such as the roles of women and girls in extremist movements and the structural impact of associations between masculinity and violence. Gender roles vary significantly, both across Southeast Asia and more locally, so integrating analysis with local research and practice is essential. CSOs should be encouraged to employ and support women staff members and to engage with women as part of their target groups. Women-led CSOs should be supported directly where possible.



For more detail, go to Lessons 4 and 5

Adaptive aid approaches—coping with unpredictable change

Support for CSOs operating in complex and politically sensitive areas, especially those working to address violent extremism, is constrained by various aspects of current aid-delivery systems. These limitations include short-term project time frames, inflexible project plans, and a focus on externally driven deliverables. For PVE work, there is a particularly acute need to be adaptive and process oriented, given the importance of relationships, trust, and sensitivity. This observation leads to the following recommendations, which apply particularly to international donor support:

- *Adopt iterative, flexible approaches.* Donors and governments should apply approaches and lessons to CSO PVE programming gleaned from their support to sectors such as peacebuilding, where the critical importance of flexible or process-oriented approaches and adaptive management techniques is recognized and accepted.
- *Increase the use of qualitative monitoring and evaluation approaches.* PVE monitoring and evaluation should be strengthened and deepened through the use of qualitative approaches to data collection in conjunction with traditional, quantitative approaches. Examples of qualitative approaches include ethnographic studies, outcome harvesting, and combination metrics (e.g., perception indices). Proxy indicators can be used to assess complex and important dimensions such as levels of trust between stakeholders.
- *Adopt pragmatic approaches to civil society sustainability.* Donors should recognize that the development of successful CSO PVE programs in vulnerable countries will require some external support for the foreseeable future. Alongside these efforts, they should also advocate for broader recognition by governments of the important role that civil society plays in PVE, and for the development of independent national support mechanisms that can assume some of the financial burden without the risks of distorting the nature of civil society and its relationship with government. In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, some governments have looked to control civic space, further emphasizing the need for external support and protection.
- *Develop a more rigorous evidence base on PVE impact.* All actors should invest in developing a sound research evidence base that reflects the role of CSOs in PVE. There is an ongoing need to demonstrate the impact of interventions, and to identify promising foundations on which to build and approaches that can be scaled up. Better data on the prevalence of violent extremism is also needed.



For more detail, go to Lesson 6

Introduction

Purpose and Intended Use

Since September 2001, there has been a significant expansion in the number of actors, types of approach, and body of research conducted in the fields of countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE), reflecting the high priority accorded to combating terrorism and violent extremism in this era. The Southeast Asia region is relatively poorly covered by the global literature on CVE and PVE; of the 253 studies across 15 delineated regions noted by the Royal United Services Institute in 2018,⁵ only 18 are focused on Southeast Asia, placing it seventh in a regional ranking. Valuable opportunities exist for learning, adjustment, and taking stock in this region.



This report addresses an identified knowledge gap in the Southeast Asia region concerning the effectiveness of support for civil society initiatives.

While the global understanding of the issues and challenges surrounding PVE has evolved and deepened, programs to prevent or counter violent extremism have had mixed results. Practical assessments of PVE interventions have gradually contributed to better, more evidence-based policymaking, and this report addresses an identified knowledge gap in the Southeast Asia region concerning the effectiveness of support for civil society initiatives. The primary intended audience is international and bilateral funding agencies, governments, and others supporting civil society's efforts to address violent extremism. The content should also be of value to leaders, researchers, and other civil society actors.

The research conducted for this report explores clusters of issues and lessons from the civil society experience of PVE programs across Southeast Asia. The report also draws on the broader academic and grey literature on preventing and countering violent extremism. It builds on previous work conducted by The Asia Foundation and commissioned by The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).⁶ Some findings are common to other parts of the world but may be reflected differently in this region, warranting further attention. Other findings have not been so well documented elsewhere, allowing important gaps and opportunities for future engagement to be identified. Concrete recommendations for stakeholders have been devised with the aim of increasing funding effectiveness and improving the management of PVE programs across Southeast Asia. The report also suggests further opportunities for learning and for filling critical research gaps.

The Research Approach

From April to June 2019, a team of researchers worked in collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs) to study the challenges and successes of initiatives to tackle violent extremism in four countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, and Thailand. In each country, the team was coordinated by a lead researcher and supported by national researchers alongside national specialists from The Asia Foundation. Members of the research team traveled to key locations across the four countries and collected qualitative data through project site visits, key informant interviews, and intensive focus group discussions lasting one to four hours.

Additional information and perspectives were collected from government officials, civil society leaders and CSO field workers, civil servants, parole officers, prior offenders, victims, outreach and social workers, religious leaders, teachers, academics, and independent experts, as well as community members and project beneficiaries. Semistructured interview techniques allowed the initial set of research questions to be adapted to specific contexts and to explore issues more deeply as the research progressed. Where possible, researchers met project beneficiaries and donors separately from implementers in order to triangulate and validate responses. Field research was complemented by a desk analysis of existing literature on programming and on the landscape of violent extremism in Southeast Asia.

Design and time constraints have meant that some shortcomings need to be recognized. The report did not seek to comprehensively evaluate the impact of the initiatives involved, and it sought to avoid casting

Figure 1

The four case study countries: Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines



judgement on the CSOs participating in the study. The selection of organizations sampled was purposive and attempted to represent a fair cross-section of civil society engagement. However, some sectors are not well covered, both regionally and nationally. For example, interventions operating mainly online are not addressed in depth. In addition, some information was withheld for ethical reasons to avoid sensitivities, navigate security risks, and respect confidentiality.

A loose definition of civil society is applied in this report, recognizing that many predominantly independent organizations have some associations with governments across Southeast Asia. While it would have been possible to focus only on fully independent organizations, doing so would have narrowed the scope of the study and limited the relevance of the findings. Similarly, some organizations considered in the report could be described as applied research institutes rather than locally rooted civil society groups. The distinction is not considered important for the purposes of this study.

It should also be acknowledged that several of the CSOs involved in the study have worked with The Asia Foundation, sometimes through a funding relationship. Steps were taken to ensure impartial assessment and analysis, including the appointment of independent regional and national consultants, peer reviews by participating organizations and an external reviewer, and seeking validation feedback on research findings. Elements of the research were presented at a regional meeting of the Southeast Asian Network of Civil Society Organisations in Bali in December 2019; the Australasian Aid Conference at the Crawford School of Public Policy at Australian National University, Canberra, in February 2020; and the Virtual Forum: Civil Society Cooperation in Preventing Violent Extremism, in August 2020.

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

PVE is recognized as a complex field, and associated sensitivities are compounded by the lack of universally accepted definitions for many common terms. The vagueness and inconsistency that result can thwart shared understanding, a problem exacerbated by the application of multiple theoretical models that have changed over time. For example, there is no universal description or common understanding of the way in which individuals are radicalized, adopt extreme views, and sometimes

engage in violence. Briefly, the dominant paradigm has evolved from primarily linear, progressive explanations to more dynamic, multidirectional models that recognize the variability and complexity of each individual's journey.⁷ Some points are disputed—for instance, the distinction between push and pull factors (see the terminology box before this section).⁸

Some consensus is emerging over the best conceptual approach to the broader phenomenon of violent extremism itself. Practitioners and researchers increasingly conceptualize violent extremism as the outcome of multiple factors operating at three main levels: those operating at the macro level, reflecting grievances, structural inequalities, and other important foundational factors; those that operate within community and identity groups, at the meso level; and those that operate at the micro or individual level, which vary depending on a person's characteristics.

Unfortunately, existing models are not readily applicable from a practical programming or predictive perspective. Across the countries considered, a lack of clarity also emerges over which conceptual models are being applied to projects, to overarching programs, or to the broader strategies of donors and national governments. The relationships between violent extremism and development or conflict mitigation are also poorly articulated in global policy frameworks, hindering holistic or integrated approaches and indicating a lack of consensus on approaches to violent extremism. While some Western aid agencies have supported initiatives or produced guidance articulating their approaches to violent extremism, several benchmark multilateral publications avoid addressing the topic or do not use the term.⁹

Southeast Asia Specificity

The further observers are removed from the specific cultural and political context of a phenomenon, the more generic their observations will be. This is perhaps self-evident, but it complicates efforts to draw lessons which can be applied usefully within any one sector or locality from civil society programs across a large and diverse region like Southeast Asia.

Nevertheless, some characteristics can be identified across the region that do influence the PVE landscape and the manifestations of violent extremism:

- Domestic motivations are typically more influential than international influences, although both contribute to violent extremism.
- National governments in the region have mixed capacity, and governance is typically partially democratic. The four states in which this study was conducted have some strong, functional capabilities but also significant limitations, and these limitations often become clear where the state is frayed, such as in subnational conflict zones or when confronted by violent actors.
- Relationships between the state and civil society are contested, and the tendency of governments to suppress dissent may be counterproductive from a PVE programming perspective.
- Although they are mainly of middle-income status and offer education and health services that are fairly good by global standards, Southeast Asian countries typically provide poor social services for specific needs or specific groups such as released prisoners or identified at-risk populations.
- These middle-income countries have also typically performed well economically, and rapid changes produced by fast economic growth, including changing gender roles and expectations, have created many positive opportunities. But they have also generated uncertainty, perceived threats, and inequality.

Other regional characteristics may also be relevant—for instance, value systems, patterns of leadership, and even prosaic factors such as high levels of internet use. Even so, these regional similarities may be less significant than other patterns or trends – for instance, the existence of subnational conflicts where the state is a party, or of sector-based programs such as the reintegration of returned fighters. Many of the challenges identified in this report are as much global or local as they are regional (for instance, poor governance, internal conflict, and economic, political, or social marginalization), even if each type of challenge does have specifically local dimensions. Overall, country-level factors appear to be more important than regional factors, while international, extraregional dimensions also feature prominently.

Civil Society in Southeast Asia

Shrinking civic space is the defining feature of contemporary relationships between civil society and government across much of Southeast Asia. When accompanied by high and often rising levels of political polarization and the endemic tensions in regions of violent conflict or fractured state-society relations, this creates a challenging operating environment.

“
Despite progress in some arenas, it has become increasingly difficult over the past decade for civil society actors to play their role.”

Despite progress in some arenas, it has become increasingly difficult over the past decade for civil society actors to play their role. The factors constraining civic space vary among the countries in the case studies, from attacks on the legitimacy and reputation of civil society and clamp-downs on social media, in The Philippines, to an atmosphere of suspicion and occasional intimidation of human rights organizations and independent media, in Thailand. Even in Indonesia, where civil society appears to be vibrant, contradictory and ambiguous legislation introduced in 2013 has given rise to concern.¹⁰ The current state of play is complex and ambiguous, as some aspects of civil society flourish and others struggle in the face of reduced civic space.¹¹

These challenges are especially apparent in conflict-affected areas where government security agencies regard CSOs with suspicion and relationships are often antagonistic.¹² CSOs may also struggle to build long-term relationships with government, given that policymaking is often personalized, government approaches change rapidly, and personnel are rotated or voted out of office on a regular basis. These trends are exacerbated by CSO staff turnover resulting from short-term funding.

Yet relationships between nongovernmental bodies and the state are often less antagonistic than may be thought. In many cases, pragmatic cooperation and even direct collaboration are common. What is more, Western expectations that civil society should be entirely independent of the state may be alien, and in some cases damaging, in those Asian countries where state institutions are heavily represented across most sectors.¹³ In some cases, semigovernmental organizations such as public research institutes blur the distinction between civil society and government agencies.

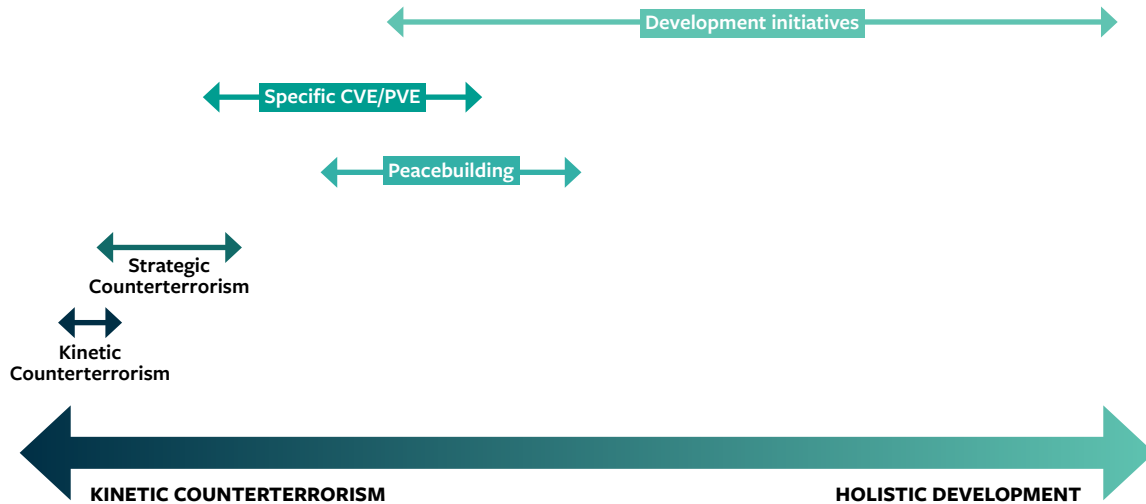
Donor agencies encounter many further challenges in providing assistance to CSOs: ensuring that support reaches beyond those bodies dominated by local elites or a small cadre of English-language speakers; failing to reach possible allies such as faith-based organizations, trade unions, and business associations; potentially undermining long-term sustainability and legitimacy by offering only project-based and short-term support; and failing to understand and navigate the complex political economy of civil society organizations, including their leaders' rivalries, affiliations, and political interests.¹⁴ Donor specialists from other sectors will find these concerns familiar, and they are relevant to the PVE field.

The Balance and Focus of Civil Society Work on Preventing Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia

Interventions to tackle violent extremism in Southeast Asia cover a broad spectrum, with counterterrorism at one end, CVE and PVE in the middle, and peacebuilding alongside more traditional development activities at the other end (figure 2). PVE-specific programs tend to emphasize activities at the meso and individual levels, while peacebuilding programs and development activities tend to operate at the meso and macro levels.

The sample of eighteen organizations and their programs reveals a wide range of approaches and activities across the four country case studies. Within this diversity, clusters of programs addressing common areas can be found in each country. Some initiatives follow common international approaches (e.g., targeting the rehabilitation and reintegration of released prisoners), although a majority respond to specific local or national conditions.

Figure 2
Spectrum of PVE initiatives



The relatively modest size and overall diversity of the case-study sample limit the scope for generalizations. Nevertheless, the case-study programs can still be placed in three broad categories with distinct theories of change:

1. Programs addressing **underlying structural inequalities** and related issues such as poor governance, poverty, and political, social, or economic marginalization. *Theory of change*: addressing broad societal grievances and injustices can reduce the factors and conditions that may fuel violent extremism or contribute to its emergence.
2. Programs addressing **social cohesion issues**, such as social and political marginalization in conjunction with other dimensions. *Theory of change*: if widespread understanding of difference, tolerance for diversity, and acceptance of alternative identities or worldviews is increased, then social and political marginalization will be reduced, and frustrations will be less likely to induce violent extremism.
3. Programs addressing **at-risk communities and individuals** through ideological counternarratives, moderation of extremist views, or tailored rehabilitation and reintegration schemes such as those aimed at prisoners, returning fighters, and jihadists. *Theory of change*: countering the appeal of messages and pull factors, as well as working to provide positive alternative futures for individuals, will reduce the risk of personal despair leading to recidivism and limit the recruitment of others into extremist networks.

The CSO case studies have been listed according to their theories of change in table 1.

The three program approaches and their theories of change broadly correspond to the macro, meso, and micro levels, respectively. This three-level categorization draws on a conceptual scheme devised by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), shown in figure 3, below. The scheme indicates the overall level of investment necessary to address the identified tiers. The first tier, the macro level, which corresponds to category 1 in table 1, consists of initiatives working on challenges that are most likely to be addressed by development programs or broad political reforms to tackle structural inequalities. Relatively high levels

Table 1**Aims and actions of CSO initiatives assessed in fieldwork**

N.B. Some programs may cover more than one category. See annex 1 for further detail on case-study projects and organizations.

Name of the organization and country	Overall aim	Activities
Category 1. Programs addressing underlying governance issues or structural inequities (macro level)		
Integrated Resource Development for Tri-People (IRDT) (Philippines)	Peace and stability	Works on WASH, livelihoods, and life skills to address the lack of economic opportunities and break cycles of conflict.
Moropreneur, Inc. (Philippines)	Encourage positive economic values	Works on helping entrepreneurs and businesses to be successful and address failed development in Mindanao.
Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) (Philippines)	Public policy and security-sector reform	Works on policy issues shared by stakeholders in governance and religion, including the government, the sultanate, and Ulama (Islamic scholars), through technical working groups on issues such as managing returnees and their reintegration, preventing radicalized youth, and harmonizing governing protocols.
Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), “Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia” (Malaysia)	Religious and community solidarity	Encourages moderate and progressive support for impoverished Muslim communities beset by disaster, in the form of humanitarian aid and medical supplies. It also works with vulnerable individuals in its own community.
IMAN Research (Malaysia)	Research on public-interest issues	Publishes research reports and information on public perceptions of important issues such as levels of acceptance of violent extremism.
Center for Detention Studies (CDS) (Indonesia)	Prison reform	Works with government to address law and policy issues.
Patani Forum (Thailand)	Cross-religious dialogue, building a just peace	Provides safe spaces to address critical issues for government, civil society, and the community. Encourages nonviolent legal and other alternatives to address injustice and negotiate alternative narratives that remain broadly compatible with mainstream Thai nationalist beliefs.
Category 2. Programs addressing social-cohesion issues (meso level)		
CSO initiatives in Sabah (Malaysia) ⁵	Address grievances and economic marginalization	Working with communities; addressing human rights issues, statelessness, and refugee issues.
Saiburi Looker (Thailand)	Rebuild community trust	Addresses divides through interactive art events, music, and sports to break down barriers and misunderstandings.
Buddhist Network for Peace (B4P) (Thailand)	Address grievances and marginalization in the peace process	Civic education and the promotion of peace to increase social cohesion, trust, and harmony, as well as constructive dialogue debunking myths and negative narratives, providing alternatives to violent confrontation.
Category 3. Programs addressing at-risk communities and individuals (micro level)		
Program Against Violent Extremism (PAVE) (Philippines)	Reintegration of Abu Sayyaf fighters	State-run program of reintegration and demobilization to prevent recidivism, based on addressing practical issues such as poverty, not ideology.
Action for Advancement and Development in Mindanao (AFADMin) (Philippines)	Provide counternarratives to VE	Supports and educates Ulama on issues of extremism and its prevention.
Pertubuhan IKRAM Malaysia (IKRAM) (Malaysia)	Promote positive religious values	Encourages positive discussion of jihad and being a benevolent nation through education programs and outreach.
Southeast Asian Regional Center for Counterterrorism (SEARCCT) (Malaysia)	Research and training	A research and training organ created by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that seeks to build the capacity of enforcement and security officials from governments in the region and beyond.
Civil Society Against Violent Extremism (C-Save) (Indonesia)	Rehabilitate and reintegrate females returning from other countries	Community rehabilitation and reintegration of women in society so they are not radicalised in prison. Working with local government on an integrated system incorporating data, mediation and referrals.
Fahmina (Indonesia)	Early warning and response	Works with communities to develop early warning and response systems for VE using existing conflict management mechanisms, discussions, and building the capacity of female ulama for societal resilience to VE.
Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP), Institute for International Peace-Building (Indonesia)	Rehabilitate and reintegrate prisoners convicted of crimes related to terrorism	Works with government in correctional facilities on a community-based corrections model for reintegration, and with regional authorities in social services.
Duay Jai Group, “Hearty Support” (Thailand)	Promote human rights as a precondition for peace and justice	Provides psychosocial and legal aid for crimes related to insurgency, as well as case management for returnees with post-traumatic stress and their reintegration into society.

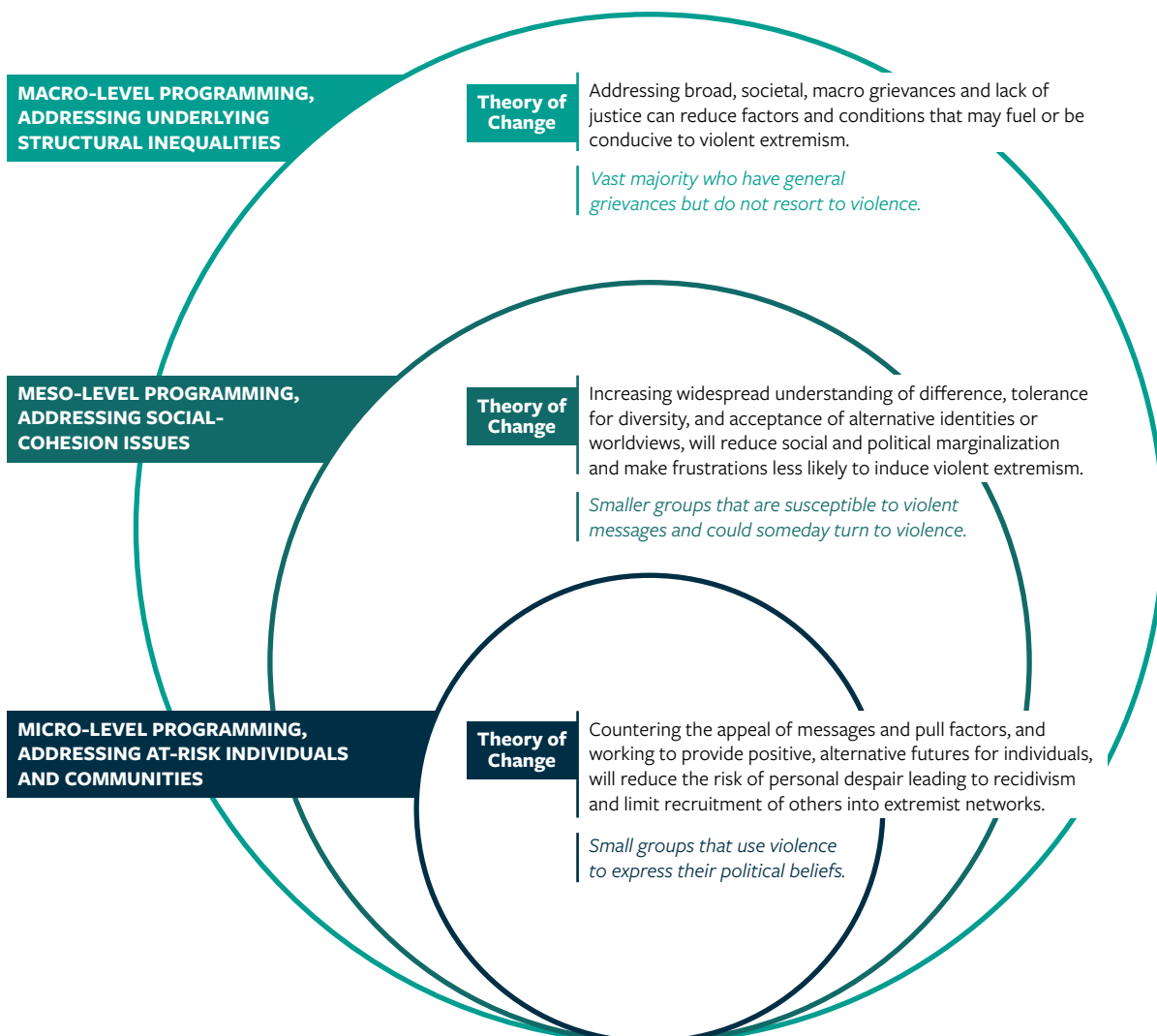
of investment are likely to be required for these programs, even if they are targeted geographically or towards historically marginalized groups.

The second tier, those susceptible to violent messaging and who may use violence in the future, works at the meso level and builds on existing structural drivers or grievances, alongside additional factors such as issues of identity, marginalization, lack of justice, or perceived persecution. Examples of programs addressing these social-cohesion factors include the three groups found in category 2, above.

The investments required in the third tier—the micro level, those who are willing to use violence—which broadly corresponds with category 3 above, are likely to be directly related to the scale and frequency of violent incidents or the number of individuals or groups involved (i.e., there should be a degree of proportionality). Examples of programs targeting this group include the prison rehabilitation and reintegration approaches of Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP), Civil Society Against Violent Extremism (C-SAVE), and the Center for Detention Studies (CDS) in Indonesia; the work of Duay Jai in Thailand; and the IAG and PAVE programs in The Philippines.

Figure 3

Levels of programming, theories of change, and relative numbers of people affected by psychosocial and political, social, and economic factors affecting radicalization.



Drawing on Royal United Service Institute [RUSI] 2016. ToC = theory of change

Lessons, Issues, and Observations from the Research



Lesson 1. Effective Prevention Responds to the Varied Causes of Violent Extremism

Whatever the particular concepts and models being applied at the project level, the literature recognizes that violent extremism is multicausal and multifactorial. As noted above, these different factors can be considered to function at the macro, meso, and micro levels. At the broader, macro level (i.e., structural issues), this study identified the following governance issues as particularly prominent causes of the conditions or vulnerabilities that foster extremism: perceptions of political and economic marginalization, where populations or groups feel they are being “passed by”; general disenchantment over opaque and often unaccountable ruling elites; and direct experience of corruption in state institutions.¹⁶

In all four case-study countries, national approaches to tackling violent extremism focus primarily on state-led security and counterterrorism. The role of CSOs in addressing violent extremism—through a range of different approaches, in accord with the context, and reflecting their identification of the drivers of violent extremism—is generally insufficiently acknowledged or supported by national governments, although there are good exceptions and some strong relationships at the subnational and local levels.

The UN has left it to member states to define violent extremism, and it has encouraged national plans of action to anchor responses. Based on the principle of national ownership, and in accordance with international law, governments should set out their national priorities for addressing local drivers of violent extremism to complement national counterterrorism strategies where they already exist.¹⁷ However, the case-study countries have not yet published such documents.¹⁸ Some countries are developing action plans and putting in place coordination mechanisms (see Section Four, “Improving the Policy and Legislative Enabling Environment”) and governments are increasing their engagement with a broader set of stakeholders. The absence of documented plans in the public domain makes it hard to identify any overarching strategy by national governments or donors providing assistance. As a result, there is limited scope to work collaboratively or strategically.

The contextual specificity and multicausal nature of violent extremism suggest that the most effective approach in a given context may be a portfolio of interventions, which is likely to look different in each country. In some cases, ongoing development programs—and to a lesser extent peacebuilding or reconciliation initiatives—may already address some of the structural issues driving extremism. For instance, in The Philippines, various peacebuilding and conflict-management programs are already in place, including large-scale, donor-supported programs supporting improved governance or service provision in marginalized areas.

Given these likely overlaps, elements of PVE could be incorporated into larger existing programs or policies that target the structural dimensions that can nurture violent extremism. In some cases, the best entry point may be to subsume PVE efforts within trusted approaches that build on established relationships, thereby avoiding new programs burdened by direct association with highly sensitive issues of violence, extremism, and religion.

The study also found that a majority of CSO initiatives are small in scale and could be considered pilot projects rather than extensive outreach initiatives. There was limited evidence of funders adopting a broad-portfolio approach to their support for CSOs, one that would consider how funding for these small, civil society initiatives is integrated into the overall response to violent extremism in the country concerned. There was also insufficient information to analyze whether donors are supporting and

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In some cases, the best entry point may be to subsume PVE efforts within trusted approaches that build on established relationships, thereby avoiding new programs burdened by direct association with highly sensitive issues of violence, extremism, and religion.

investing in activities addressing the most significant of the local drivers of violent extremism. In other words, given that some drivers of violent extremism are more important than others in a specific country, is there proportionality in the energy and resources allocated to tackling it?

Holistic approaches that address violent extremism by combining different interventions have proven to be effective internationally, but they are typically challenging to implement in mixed-capacity environments. Delivering effectively across multiple agencies may require greater coordination and capacity than currently exists. Successful examples can be found in Southeast Asia, such as the close cooperation between agencies supporting the reintegration of released detainees or returnees in Indonesia. Another example is the provision of trauma support and survivor-centered services to relatives of conflict victims in southern Thailand.¹⁹ So, while there is scope to do more, realism is also needed regarding what can be achieved in the short-to-medium term.

AN EXAMPLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE: PROGRAMS ADDRESSING SOCIAL COHESION IN THAILAND

In Thailand, several CSOs address intercommunal tensions arising from the ongoing conflict between local Malay Muslim insurgents and the Buddhist-majority Thai government. Saiburi Looker, a small group established by local residents, seeks to tackle misunderstandings between ethno-religious communities. Concerned that growing tensions will drive some young residents towards extreme views, they seek to bridge divides through an ongoing series of participatory arts, music, and sporting events:

It is necessary to boost trust among youth by enhancing an interactive space for them to hang out as they study in different schools, then they will become friends. Activities conduct[ed] by Saiburi Looker are...crucial for youths...who come from different ethnicities.

Another organization in southern Thailand, Buddhists for Peace, hosts Peace Station, a weekly radio program that demystifies ethno-religious differences and debunks negative stereotypes. Buddhist and Muslim guests are invited to examine controversial topics that concern both communities, including the construction of safe public spaces, access to justice, cross-cultural activities, the role of youth in the ongoing peace process, and the notion of living in a pluralistic society. This has helped foster constructive dialogue. Excursions and study trips have also helped to reestablish relationships among older generations, while fostering newer bonds between younger participants of diverse backgrounds.

Interviewees emphasized that their role is not only to focus on cases of extreme violence, but also to prevent violence before it takes place. As reported by one local peace activist:

Previously they preferred to organize events and bring people to participate in conference rooms or hotels in town. But nowadays they've changed and are going to the communities and temples. The experience is that the people used to work passively, waiting to act until the bomb happened. Now we work more actively and go to the community before issues happen.

Recommendations:

1. *Adopt a “strategic portfolio” approach.* Take a holistic view of existing counterterrorism, peacebuilding and development, and PVE initiatives and assess the extent to which they are appropriate and balanced given the many factors that can drive violent extremism. This requires basic cross-sector coordination among donors and national governments. An initial PVE analysis could consider the relative weight of these factors and how they are being addressed through various national policies and interventions and international development support. Further analysis could identify capacity constraints and the potential for scaling up. While the inherent difficulty of cross-sector coordination makes national plans for action on PVE challenging to establish, some countries intend to introduce them and they may be useful tools for coordination.



Civil society organizations can build social cohesion with carefully targeted local events such as this street-soccer tournament for youth, hosted by Saiburi Looker in Thailand's Pattani Province.

- 2. *Balance and targeting considerations.*** Consider the portfolio-wide balance of initiatives and investments aimed at the macro, meso, and individual levels—again weighing the proportionality to levels of risk from various factors. Doing so may assist in decision-making to fill gaps or address inadequacies that require the development of new initiatives or the scaling up of existing ones.
- 3. *Explore a “saturation” approach in high-risk sectors.*** Interventions in high-risk sectors require sufficient depth and breadth to achieve a critical mass of effort. Addressing issues at the community level may be insufficient without a simultaneous investment in other activities led by civil society, such as advocacy for policy change, research, networking, and media engagement.
- 4. *Check the focus of dedicated budgets for PVE.*** In most cases, dedicated donor or government budgets for PVE should be directed primarily to the meso or individual levels. Meso-level initiatives will typically target high-risk groups or locations and address context-specific drivers of violent extremism. CSOs can also contribute to programmes tackling high-risk individuals, sometimes offering advantages over security-led approaches.
- 5. *Go beyond PVE-specific sectors and approaches.*** Macro-level or structural issues such as improving governance, developing livelihoods, and addressing conflict should be approached through development, peacebuilding, and other sectoral allocations and by integrating PVE elements into broader, mainstream programs. CSOs can play a valuable role in many fields that are not labeled PVE but that may help to tackle violent extremism.



Lesson 2. Bridging Gaps: Working across Sectors and at Different Levels

The case-study research highlighted the importance of bridging “interstitial spaces”—gaps between types of institutions and sectors, and discontinuities in systems of governance or public-service provision.²⁰ The following communication strategies are meant to reach beyond the sectoral siloes that usually shape development programs.

Intentionally cross-sectoral communications and interactions. The organizations that were interviewed emphasized the need for positive interactions across the different pillars of society—government, civil society, and the private sector—with each group working to address grievances from their own angle within their sector. Such interactions can also reach across identity groups, religious denominations, or government departments, and instances have emerged in many sectors in all countries. They are an essential aspect of CSO initiatives—from alliances with government agencies to address the needs of former Abu Sayyaf cadres in The Philippines, to working with national media organizations and bridging religious divides in Thailand’s conflict-affected deep south.

Diverse communication approaches to reach at-risk communities. Using the right communication channels is important for reaching at-risk communities or individuals. Here, religious, community, and local government leaders can be key facilitators of PVE-related communications among stakeholders. For example, the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) in The Philippines brings together leaders from various sectors to use their respective offices and abilities to address problems that fuel grievances, such as inadequate service delivery to vulnerable communities.

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS ADDRESSING AT-RISK COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS

In the Malaysian state of Sabah, many former migrants from The Philippines remain formally illegal and do not have identity cards. CSO interventions with former migrants and other marginalized communities have been based on the premise that their status within Malaysian society increases their susceptibility to violent extremist ideologies and limits the scope of government agencies to respond. One tried-and-true approach provides community-based paralegal training on residents’ rights under the legal system of Malaysia.

The community-based paralegals inform people of their rights and help with problems of local justice. Paralegals are also directly involved in community education. They teach communities about the mechanisms for protecting and exercising their rights, and familiarize village leaders with formal processes like obtaining marriage licences or proper documentation for obtaining citizenship so that they can train others. Program staff, beneficiaries, and communities have provided anecdotal reports of success. According to one village head:

[This effort] has fostered an ability for communities to engage with authorities. Previously, citizens would run away. Now they are not afraid to speak up. They report cases.... This has built their confidence, but it also raised the awareness of [the importance of] tracking and reporting issues.

Grassroots feedback and upwards communications. An important component of these efforts is evidence-based testing of assumptions through direct communication with at-risk individuals or groups, including youth and women. Upwards or participatory communications enable programs to respond to specific, individual or group motivations and to challenge policy positions which make false assumptions about why some people choose violent extremism. In Malaysia, for example, the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Counterterrorism (SEARCCT) does peer-to-peer youth outreach to explore individual perceptions, and then uses their findings to mount interventions. IMAN Research, also in Malaysia, surveys youth about their views on violence and other issues in order to improve policymaking.

“Saturation” cluster approaches for critical sectors. Another promising approach employs several mutually supporting interventions simultaneously to address a particular sector. While broad “portfolio”

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In Indonesia, a cluster of programs works with the prison system ... this example pursues several different approaches simultaneously within a single sector to achieve a critical mass for social change...

approaches were recommended in a previous section to address the multiple drivers of violent extremism across multiple sectors, this example pursues several different approaches simultaneously *within a single sector* to achieve a critical mass for social change in that sector. In Indonesia, a cluster of programs works with the prison system, including direct engagement with people detained on extremism-related charges. The Center for Detention Studies is one of several organizations working “upstream” on prison-reform policy, while others such as C-SAVE and Yayasan Prasati Perdamaian are implementing downstream programs that work with convicted terrorists in prisons and in the community. In addition, Fahmina works at the community level on early warning systems and community resistance to violent extremism.

This cluster of initiatives addressing prisons and prisoners in Indonesia demonstrates the type of synergy that can be achieved. Critically, some organizations have also been working closely with government institutions, such as the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT) and the Ministry of Social Affairs, at the national, regional, and local levels, enabling policy reform and scaling up actions. Yet challenges still emerge, especially in relationships with government agencies, because CSOs need to maintain some distance from government to avoid compromising their trusted relationships with target groups. In addition, despite evident synergies among CSOs, coordination and collaboration are still limited and could be improved.

While the potential for effectiveness in this field is clear, there are still a number of questions. For instance, are levels of funding sufficient in each part of the cluster to maximize effectiveness? Do some elements need proportionately more emphasis? How can the networking, collaboration, and complementarity among the various organizations and stakeholders, including government, best be reinforced?²¹

Recommendations:

1. *Cross-sector interactions* enable critical linkages to be made between CSOs and organizations with which they do not ordinarily interact. Rather than encouraging CSOs to operate on isolated project “islands,” funding should support engagement with other stakeholders, including civic or religious institutions, research bodies and universities, local and national government agencies, and the private sector. These interactions complicate implementation and evaluation, as outputs become dependent on external variables beyond the control of a single project, but they are essential to working effectively beyond very small-scale initiatives.
2. *Engagement with at-risk individuals and groups is essential*, but sufficient time and resources are required. Relationships with intermediaries and local influencers are likely to be critical, and the social capital of CSOs is a vital asset. Long-term initiatives provide more time to build relationships and should be preferred when possible. Project-planning tools, including monitoring frameworks, should recognize relationship-building as an essential interim output.
3. *Upward communications* can be improved through research and other steps that “listen” to the voices both of mainstream demographics, like young men and women, and of marginalized subgroups. Aside from tools like surveys and interviews, empowering and proactive methods adapted for conflict-affected populations, such as “listening methodologies,” can be employed.²² For example, researching the views of a marginalized group, and then situating those ideas within the broader society, may reveal that views considered extremist by outsiders are regarded locally as normal. Such findings can help implementers decide whether to focus directly on specific groups or to aim for wider social change, and they can be a salubrious corrective to ungrounded assumptions about the causes of violent extremism in a given context.
4. *Support research into gender roles in different vulnerable contexts*. Gender roles and interactions are critical factors in supporting, undertaking, or influencing violent extremism, and they need to be fully considered in program approaches and capacity development. Gender roles vary significantly, both locally and across Southeast Asia more broadly, so integrating gender analysis into local research and practice is essential.



Lesson 3. The Importance of Context and Locality

In Southeast Asia, as in the rest of the world, the meaning and associations of violent extremism are complex and often contested. Violent extremism may be associated with international networks, but also with violent domestic movements, internal conflicts, or growing intolerance between ethnic or religious groups. The implications and sensitivities of these associations in each locale are critical for PVE policy and programming, and a failure to appreciate them can affect the success of programs or even do harm (contravening DFAT CVE Principle 1).²³

The use of terminology inappropriate to the specific context may be regarded as evidence of an externally imposed approach, and this may provoke resistance or hobble interventions, relationships, and trust between actors. In Indonesia, for example, the term “radical” enjoyed currency among CSOs discussing violent extremism until it picked up negative connotations as a label used to justify government crackdowns on opposition parties. Alternative terms are now preferred.



The use of terminology inappropriate to the specific context may be regarded as evidence of an externally imposed approach

A failure to understand local nuances may also influence government views, reducing official tolerance for civil society actors and their work. Security officials may be concerned about CSOs straying into sensitive policy areas, or suspect that they sympathize with the ideologies and behaviors under scrutiny. Associations with influential foreign actors, through externally designed initiatives and the terminology that accompanies them, can provoke governments to crack down on civil society initiatives. This can be seen clearly in highly sensitive conflict areas such as Thailand’s deep south, where the principal frame of reference for CSOs such as The Patani Forum and the Buddhist Network for Peace is separatism and resentment of the perceived impositions of the central state, rather than internationalist calls to take up arms. This subnational conflict follows a pattern found elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia, where members of a population that is a national minority but a local majority (in this case Malay Muslims in southern Thailand) confront state security forces. In the Thai case, the aims of the insurgents are secular and political rather than ideological.

Externally oriented programs may also affect the credibility of CSOs in the eyes of local communities. Building trust and confidence typically involves tapping into vernacular concepts and understanding, avoiding in the process generic approaches or awkwardly translated international terms. Doing otherwise can alienate local partners or create the belief that foreign-funded CSOs are in fact aligned with the state security apparatus, handing an easy propaganda win to the mobilizers of violent extremism.

The understanding of violent extremism in each context informs the approaches that CSOs take in tackling it, most importantly because motivations for violence stem largely from local grievances and concerns. As implied here, different stakeholders may also understand violent extremism differently, particularly government actors whose views may be at odds with those of community members or CSO representatives. These critical differences need to be understood, as they affect local attitudes towards violent extremists, underscoring the old adage that one man’s terrorist is another’s liberation fighter. For example, conflict in Mindanao primarily concerns subnational tensions, along with high levels of local crime and political rivalry. Violent extremism is an additional layer on top of deeper grievances based on long-term marginalization and uneven power relationships. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, the newly empowered semi-autonomous region where the majority of Muslim Moros from Mindanao live, lags well behind the country’s other regions in development and poverty indicators.²⁴

The state itself is a major conflict protagonist in Mindanao and the deep south of Thailand, complicating its relationships and the objectivity of its approaches to violent extremism. Muslim-majority Indonesia and Malaysia, meanwhile, are very different contexts, where a host of other factors motivate people to commit violent acts and determine the state’s response to the threat of violent extremism.

Overall, many local factors shape the context in which civil society organizations can play a useful role in preventing violent extremism. The socioeconomic characteristics of the individuals or families involved in violent extremism vary greatly. For instance, some participants in violent extremism in Mindanao are residents of very poor communities, while recruits in other countries may be financially secure. Even within one country there may be huge variations. Students and young people in peninsular Malaysia may

CONTEXT SPECIFIC APPROACHES

Example A: religious and cultural approaches to tackling violent extremism in The Philippines and Malaysia

Respondents in The Philippines repeatedly mentioned the importance of collaborating with religious leaders and entities. Some of them cited examples of religious bodies or figures taking the lead against the violent extremist agenda. For example, the National Ulama Conference of The Philippines, a network of Islamic leaders who work to combat violent extremism through weekly religious sermons, creates carefully crafted and field-tested materials that they distribute to religious leaders across the country. These resources are complemented by materials developed by education experts for religious schools. The ulama particularly emphasize disseminating messages in schools and mosques located in “hot spots” across the southern Philippines, such as Basilan and Cotabato.

Similar approaches are implemented in Malaysia, where the Pertubahan IKRAM organization oversees a network of Islamic schools focusing on “becomingness.” Becomingness concerns harmony and balance, considering people, communities, and religious teachings as whole beings or phenomena, not just as the sum of their individual parts. Other groups in Malaysia seek to build a positive, grounded sense of what it means to be Malay, in order to create a sense of identity and self-worth associated with positive values rather than negative, oppositional positioning. These initiatives seek to reinterpret government-led efforts to define national identity, and to counter the alienation that leaves individuals open to extremist messaging.

Example B: prison reform programs in Indonesia

The May 2018 Anti-Terrorism Law obliges all returnees to Indonesia from illegal actions in Syria to serve jail time and enroll in a reintegration program. The challenge that an influx of inmates poses, coupled with the significant local population of extremist detainees, further complicates ongoing efforts at system-wide prison reform.

The National Corrections Bureau faces challenges in terms of capacity and outmoded practices. Recognizing these shortcomings, prison officials accepted technical assistance from civil society organizations, and the Centre for Detention Studies (CDS), a Jakarta-based civil society organization, has focused on the management of “notorious inmates.” By adapting models implemented in Australia and Canada, CDS has worked to develop rules and regulations for the intake, oversight, and release of detainees. Improvements have been seen in management, in counseling, and in soft-skills development for inmates.

Another organization, Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP), has developed several programs to increase the capacity of probation and parole officers. One seeks to establish a working group for the reintegration of extremist convicts. This group involves probation offices, local government, and CSOs in supporting convict reintegration both during detention and following release.

YPP is also developing a community-based corrections model involving wider society in the reintegration process. They use a custom guide that emphasizes transparency and the need to understand the broader context in which violent extremism takes place. This involves considering factors that push inmates towards extremism. Local community leaders on the village council and workers in key public outreach services encouraged to understand each inmate’s background, the crime they committed, and the support they need after release from detention. Community members and even neighbors are contacted to raise their awareness and reduce the stigma attached to returning inmates. Public sharing of information on inmates’ status is more firmly based on community cohesion than Western models of inmate reintegration.

be categorized as a relatively privileged group, while migrants in Sabah suffer great disadvantages and can generally be considered under-privileged. Given this diversity, it is important to avoid preconceptions or prejudices about what motivates violent action, and to base interventions on accurate and context-specific information.

Finally, the relationships between communities and the state that prevail in Muslim-majority countries are very different than those in countries where Muslims are a minority. In the latter, the minority’s aspirations for a distinct cultural identity, and limited state tolerance for diversity, can fuel deep grievances.

Recommendations:

1. *Develop a more comprehensive guide and framework for conducting PVE context analyses.* DFAT states that analysis of the PVE field should adopt a sound political economy perspective (DFAT 2017).²⁵ However, without more specific guidance, analyses can easily miss important nuances and sensitivities critical to the design of successful interventions and the balance between different types of initiatives. An augmented set of guidelines could draw on existing approaches to conflict analysis while including the following additional considerations:²⁶
 - Consider the legal frameworks that enable or inhibit civil society. Do they create ambiguity that allows CSOs to be seen as violent extremist actors or supporters?
 - Identify context-specific sensitivities, risks, and implications for supporting civil society engagement—for instance, the local validity of a proposed PVE approach and its terminology. Ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into assessments.
 - Explicitly canvass the views of local CSOs and government stakeholders on the drivers of violent extremism. If CSOs are engaging effectively with communities, they will have a deep understanding of the salient local grievances that may contribute to support for violent extremism.
 - Plan for PVE interventions that consider the extent of existing development or peacebuilding programs in the country and appraise the relative importance of the different drivers of violent extremism.
 - Ensure that country assessments do not prejudge the causes of violent extremism or apply uniform nationwide explanations to what is often a nuanced and local reality. Within any one country or even one subnational region, different groups may be attracted to violent extremism. Nuanced responses are needed, including measures to work beyond traditional communities—for instance, by engaging students or online networks.



Moropreneur Inc: entrepreneurs with women's garment products



Lesson 4. Improving the Policy and Legislative Enabling Environment

All four countries in the study, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and The Philippines, have clear national definitions for *terrorism*; however, they do not have standard definitions for *violent extremism*—perhaps unsurprisingly, given its emergence as a concept from Western experience and perspectives—and the terms are often used interchangeably in the national discourse. What is more, no common definition exists at the regional level.²⁷ This means there is considerable leeway for states to interpret a broad range of actions as terrorism. For example, the National Security Council of Malaysia defines terrorism this way: *unlawful use of threat or the use of force or terror or any other attack by person, group, or state regardless of objective or justification aim at other states, its citizens or their properties and its vital services with the intention of creating fear, intimidation and thus forcing governments or organizations to follow their impressed will including those acts in support directly or indirectly.*²⁸



In conjunction with new legislation, governments are seeking to broaden approaches from a narrow counterterrorism focus.

The use of *indirectly* creates ambiguity, potentially affecting CSOs working with vulnerable or at-risk groups to prevent or counter violent extremism.²⁹

New legislation on terrorism and extremism across the region gives strong powers to authorities, and in the four case-study countries it has been or is being updated to accommodate new situations and events. For instance, Indonesia passed a revised antiterrorism law in 2018 after a series of suicide bombings and armed attacks on churches and police posts in East Java and Sumatra. Interestingly, despite the perceived closing of space for civil society, the revision of the law involved consultations not only with various political factions represented in the legislature (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR), but also with women’s rights organizations, academics, religious groups, and CSOs.³⁰

In Malaysia, the government repealed the long-standing Internal Security Act of 1960 and replaced it with the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act in 2012, supplemented later by the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2015. The new legislation enables Malaysian authorities to detain terror suspects without trial or judicial review for two years.³¹ The Special Measures against Terrorism in Foreign Countries Act was also introduced in 2015, soon followed by the National Security Council Act (2016), which grants the prime minister extensive powers to counter terrorism.³²

In The Philippines, the primary antiterrorism law is the Human Security Act of 2007, which is specifically aimed at militants in the southern Philippines.³³ The Act defines terrorism as a crime that “causes widespread and extraordinary fear and panic among the populace,” allowing authorities to arrest terror suspects without warrants and to temporarily detain them without charges. As in Malaysia, this law has been supplemented repeatedly by further legislation.³⁴ Finally, Thailand is currently drafting a new counterterrorism act, aiming to integrate existing terrorism-related laws into one document.³⁵

In conjunction with new legislation, governments are seeking to broaden approaches from a narrow counterterrorism focus. Indonesia is trying to move to a “whole-of-government” approach that should in principle facilitate institutional coordination among ministries and agencies.³⁶ The Philippines’ National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism 2019 goes further and specifically aims to prevent radicalization through a “whole-of-nation” approach, which involves the convergence of government, CSOs, religious institutions, and other stakeholders.³⁷ The Department of the Interior and Local Government, along with other government agencies, will focus on areas of relevance to counterterrorism and deradicalization, including education, detention, and deradicalization approaches.³⁸ The rhetoric proposes more inclusive approaches, further work with civil society, and additional preventive efforts, rather than solely prioritizing counterterrorism and responding to incidents.

These initiatives offer small but encouraging indications that governments recognize the need to work with other stakeholders, both inside and outside government, despite counterindications such as the general reduction of space for civil society.

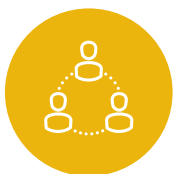
However, the government has little capacity to communicate and coordinate work between departments and sectors across the region. Restricted public information on national security issues also limits the space for CSO involvement. For example, Thailand continues to apply the 2017–21 National Counterterrorism Strategy to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks, but details of the strategy are not public.³⁹ While some government agencies have worked to understand and respond to the widely felt grievances in the conflict-affected deep south, structural change has not been meaningfully pursued, and the overarching conditions that lead to violence remain in place. In such a context, improving the policy or legislative environment requires broad political and governance reforms rather than the more technical remedies of building capacity or drafting legislation.⁴⁰

Recommendations:

- 1.** *Support the development of government policy frameworks and national PVE action plans that include CSOs and enable them to contribute more comprehensively to preventing violent extremism.* Recognizing that legislation has limited effectiveness and that the grievances that drive violent extremism are rooted in persistent structural problems, the policy arena needs to encourage and legitimize civil society involvement. While security concerns understandably limit transparency in some areas, CSOs can help improve the understanding of violent extremism and do prevention work within their areas of competence. Policy frameworks should draw on international good practice as appropriate.⁴¹
- 2.** *Ensure that national PVE policy frameworks include CSOs as equal and responsible actors.* There is a danger that, despite good intentions, the policy arena will become another government tool to control civil society activities.
- 3.** *Consider linking policies with national applications of the women, peace, and security agenda* defined in United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2242.⁴²



Youth brainstorming strategies for reducing violence and tension in Thailand's deep south.



Lesson 5. The Roles and Relationships of Civil Society and Government in PVE

While the hard-security end of tackling extremism is typically considered the domain of specialist government agencies, the middle of the spectrum (CVE, PVE, and peacebuilding) and the development end lend themselves to multistakeholder engagement. Even so, the involvement of multiple stakeholders in any part of the spectrum can be fraught, due to the often tense relationship between government and civil society.

Where governments are willing to engage with CSOs as peers, there is a need to increase mutual understanding and cooperation while minimizing the risks of doing harm. The relationship between a government agency and a CSO can be complex. CSOs may need to maintain a respectful distance from state authorities to avoid the appearance of overly close affiliation with security or intelligence forces. Cooperation, coordination, and collaboration may also be constrained by personal rivalries, defensiveness, or rapid staff rotation in local administrations. CSOs may at times choose to position themselves as critical advocates for change rather than allies of government.

Despite these challenges, CSOs in Southeast Asia often work effectively with governments. They are able to navigate complex or opaque official institutions and find entry points, identify ways to support or promote policy change, and cooperate with governments on program delivery. Many CSOs are also well positioned to offer practical, specific advice to local or national government agencies. Cooperation extends beyond the specific field of violent extremism, especially when addressing background causes of violent extremism such as injustice, poverty, and exclusion.

Some organizations, such as the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Counterterrorism (SEARCCT) in Malaysia and the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) in The Philippines, have successfully bridged institutional divides and worked across different sectors despite declining civic space in both countries. IAG, a Filipino think tank based in Cotabato, has worked in all 39 municipalities in Mindanao. It created the Technical Working Group Program on Preventing and Transforming Violent Extremism (with DFAT funding), which aimed to bridge the gap between the sultanate (traditional leadership), the Ulama Federation (religious leadership), and the government. The program leveraged traditional Maranao family systems and clan ties to prevent violence, linking customary mechanisms with official government policies to address violent extremism. Priority was given to creating governing protocols for managing former combatants returning from war abroad, in addition to working with already radicalized youth at home in Mindanao. Stakeholders have deemed this approach a success: IAG was able to help participants rebuild trust through facilitated conversations with the sultanate, Ulama leadership, and government. The working group has since been adopted as a platform for other PVE programs supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), demonstrating the transferability of the model.

The links between government and civil society need to be handled sensitively if they are to increase mutual understanding. For example, when government security agencies convene formal coordination meetings, the inevitable power dynamics are likely to impede progress. It is important that forum conveners be perceived as neutral, as allies neither of government nor of civil society. Quasi-governmental research institutions or academic forums that convene discussions of PVE are good candidates to perform this role. The development of neutral mechanisms and spaces at different levels may help actors to articulate and develop their complementary roles. Neutral spaces may also provide an institutional home for cross-fertilization that can mitigate the inherent difficulties of staff turnover.

According to an interviewee from a CSO in Malaysia, governments should:

“Pay more attention to prevention, rather than countering [violent extremism]. However, the state really seems to feel that countering is their domain. This limited view has somewhat narrowed our perception of VE, limiting it to mainly religious factors, when it’s really so much more...about economic and social exclusion.”

“
Understanding was stronger where officials and politicians had more direct exposure to circumstances on the ground and where there were closer links between specialists, civil society, and civil servants.”

Government officials at all levels may also have limited understanding of the causes and solutions for violent extremism. Interviews with experienced academic and civil society informants in all of the case-study countries found gaps in understanding. Understanding was stronger where officials and politicians had more direct exposure to circumstances on the ground and where there were closer links between specialists, civil society, and civil servants. Local governments and CSOs would benefit from greater capacity in priority fields such as awareness campaigns and public education, cross-sectoral cooperation, and interethnic or interreligious relations. Where interactions were occurring at the community level between government and nongovernment organizations (for instance, in Malaysian Sabah or villages near Cirebon in Indonesia) they appeared to build mutual understanding.

Three further points. First, governments and CSOs still have an inadequate understanding of gender relations and roles in PVE, despite the prominent role of women and girls in recent, high-profile violent incidents. Globally, research suggests not only that women can contribute to the radicalization of men and children, but that they can be directly involved in extremism themselves. They can also play a significant role in preventing extremism.⁴³ Some CSOs focus specifically on working with women (for example C-SAVE in Indonesia), and others work for women’s representation and integration into community activities. Further efforts are needed to ensure that both governments and CSOs are working sensitively and from a strong evidence base.

Second, weak cooperation between CSOs and among donors has ironically had a positive effect, as a variety of small, independent initiatives have sprung up to fill the void in various local contexts. This can be seen quite clearly in some areas of Mindanao. This “organic” response to necessity may provide CSOs with an opportunity to target carefully defined categories of subjects, such as released prisoners who are considered a security risk.

This diversity of approaches can be a considerable asset. It creates new models for evaluation and new ways to adapt to local circumstances, innovations that can then be adapted to other localities. The many different projects across Mindanao draw on local traditions and cultures as well as applying nontraditional approaches such as the involvement of the private sector.

But there is a downside to this unplanned diversity, too. Where the issue or project goal is more diffuse—perhaps requiring a wide-reaching response that covers many villages or districts—CSOs currently lack the capacity to reach beyond small project areas. Their specialized programs may not lend themselves to the standardization that would enable their approaches to be scaled up or replicated more widely.

Finally, complex and often tense relations between government and civil society, along with budget constraints, mean that national government funding for programs addressing violent extremism is likely to remain limited in the near future. The type of work involved in combating violent extremism rarely lends itself to the development of sustainable funding mechanisms from communities or the private sector, so external support from donor countries and other sources will continue to be important.

Linking mechanisms

“We were not pushy, we let them determine the agenda. We did not push a framework immediately, but instead picked it up, piece by piece. They were the ones who said when they wanted to engage with political leaders, and then certain religious figures. However, they didn’t have this figured out at the start. As we facilitated the discussion, slowly the idea of the tripartite leadership emerged. Then we found capacities [among the participants]—for writing laws, writing mission statements, and framing peace policies.... Then, fortunately, there was one sultan member who knew the dynamics of legislation. And when the policy went out, they owned it.”

(CSO representative, The Philippines)

Recommendations:

1. *Take the time to analyze and understand civil society relationships.* A nuanced understanding of civil society and its relationship with the state is needed to avoid externally driven security agendas that may be damaging, elite interests and power hegemonies within civil society that inadvertently feed grievances, and relationships with the state that instrumentalize civil society for security purposes.
2. *Support steps to increase mutual understanding between civil society and government actors, including security agencies.* To strengthen existing connections and relationships, consider the scope for neutral forums, create alternative spaces, and reinforce existing linking mechanisms that can bring together stakeholders and practitioners to discuss issues, roles, and approaches related to PVE policy and practice.
3. *Adopt pragmatic approaches to developing civil society sustainability.* Donors should recognize that the development of promising and successful PVE programs with CSOs in vulnerable countries will require their support for the foreseeable future. Alongside these ongoing efforts, they should also advocate broader recognition by governments of their important role in PVE, and support the development of suitable, independent, national funding mechanisms (rather than direct government support) to assume some of the financial burden without distorting the nature of civil society.
4. *Support targeted capacity building for CSOs and government stakeholders in marginalized areas.* CSOs in remote, conflict-affected, or marginalized areas often have strong local relationships and trust, but few opportunities to develop their capacity. They need carefully tailored capacity-building programs. This may mean, for instance, translating existing resources or adapting them to local conditions, developing new material, or building the technical skills of both government and nongovernment stakeholders. CSOs should be encouraged to employ women at all levels and to engage with women and girls as key stakeholders. In many cases, women-led CSOs are best positioned to work with women in communities.
5. *Support the preservation of space for civil society engagement.* Civil society involvement in many fields is challenged by authoritarian governance, a long-term theme in Southeast Asia. Recent trends have seen a reduction in the space for civil society across the region and beyond. Open recognition of civil society's valuable role in tackling violent extremism may help to justify and protect their continued involvement.



Local government, national government, CSOs and international agencies all supported the emergency response to the siege of Marawi City in The Philippines, 2017.



Lesson 6. Monitoring and Ensuring Effectiveness

Theories of change. Research indicates that many CSOs do not articulate clear theories of change for their interventions despite often having a wealth of knowledge about local dynamics and attitudes. Problems can arise when CSO leaders are effective at identifying challenges at the community level but lack the resources to work at higher levels where solutions are often to be found. For example, CSO livelihood initiatives in Mindanao and elsewhere work mainly at the community level, but tackling structural problems with the local economy typically requires action at a higher level.



Problems can arise when CSO leaders are effective at identifying challenges at the community level but lack the resources to work at higher levels where solutions are often to be found.

At other times, a CSO may fail to make the best case for a project. The CSO may have a sound strategy for change that is implicit in the logic of the project, but fail to frame it with the concepts or language that donor institutions favor. In several cases, CSOs emphasize the positive impact of their interventions to support local livelihoods without offering a convincing explanation of how the improvements will in turn reduce the risks of extremism. In Sabah, Malaysia, initiatives seeking to improve relations between state agencies and local communities could benefit from a stronger statement of the theory of change. Clearer explanation of the causal links between the risks of local involvement in extremism and the continued marginalized status of some local communities in this area could open up new funding opportunities. It would also allow assumptions to be tested in the field and provide a firm basis for identifying indicators of progress and assessing project effectiveness.

Applying the evidence base and improving inadequate theories of change. Evaluation is difficult in the PVE sector, given the difficulty of measuring success that consists of the nonoccurrence of a violent episode. (An absence of something is rarely directly observable.) Poorly articulated theories of change make evaluation even more difficult. But thorough evaluation should still be pursued. Practitioners and donors should work together to improve the rigor of project design and the articulation of the underlying theory of change. They should also identify and challenge any accompanying assumptions.

Many CSOs base their programs on established ways of working that they adapt and apply to PVE objectives. This approach gives them a solid footing in familiar practice and an established network from which to operate, and it avoids the trap of simply copying international “best practices” when interventions built around the specific context make more sense; but it also relies on the assumption that their existing work, once adapted, can prevent acts of violence. Groups aiming to improve local livelihoods in parts of Mindanao, foster local democratic practices or reform prisons in Indonesia, or improve intercommunal relationships in the far south of Thailand all make assumptions over the impact of their work on violence.

When evaluating initiatives, funding agencies need to be aware of two challenges. First, the main objectives of initiatives outlined in formal project proposals may differ from the ultimate aim of the organization involved. Funders need to check the consistency of logic and the assumptions behind proposals. Second, the parameters or indicators by which success is judged need to be carefully assessed to ensure that they are capturing relevant change.

Funders could also consider linking implementing agencies with research-based organizations. In this way, an intervention could be evaluated as it unfolds, and the findings could be used both to improve the implementation and to inform future policymaking. Some organizations, such as IMAN Research in Malaysia, already link with other national or local organizations to produce research findings.⁴⁴

Tolerating risk and uncertainty. Addressing violent extremism is a winding path through the labyrinth of national political developments and community interests. Effective approaches take time to develop and require adaptability. Programs operating in complex environments must be able to change direction as circumstances change. For example, CSOs operating in Thailand’s conflict-affected deep south must navigate fluctuating levels of violence, the changeable dispositions of local military or civic leaders, and the government’s shifting policies and changing appetite for engaging local civil society.

Both donors and CSOs need to seize opportunities, for instance, when political space momentarily opens and leaders and communities are ready to participate. For donors, responding to opportunity

involves taking risks and tolerating uncertainty. Making progress may also require adjusting, reducing, or postponing activities if tensions rise or the enabling environment deteriorates.

Iterative approaches. Effective approaches to sensitive political issues require trust, dialogue, and cooperation among the parties. This is true at both the individual and the community level, as when released prisoners return to their communities in Indonesia. Local residents in a project area need to feel confident that proposed interventions are well intentioned and likely to work without unintended negative consequences. Dialogue alone grows shallow, however, if it does not lead to concrete actions that improve people's lives and address the causes of violent extremism.

Building an evidence base. Iterative approaches still depend on an evidence base. For governments and donors, limited data and evidence of impact make it hard to see what kinds of approaches are effective and harder still to identify changes in the overall pattern of violent extremism. Evaluation is particularly important when arguing for continued funding or when seeking to replicate successful efforts in another location.

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Better monitoring and evaluation above the project level—at the national or sector level—would help to identify areas that need capacity building and to assess overall impact in work that involves cooperation across programs and fields.

Better monitoring and evaluation above the project level—at the national or sector level—would help to identify areas that need capacity building and to assess overall impact in work that involves cooperation across programs and fields. Monitoring is typically focused on project outputs rather than geared to improvement. Government evaluations are typically based on monitoring expenditures and ensuring that promised activities have taken place, rather than assessing effectiveness.

Evaluation can be a tool for learning, but a lack of understanding of impact across the wider PVE literature suggests a need for a stronger research focus, either within existing programs or through a more objective, parallel mechanism. Organizations have been able to conduct policy-relevant research and advocate for change—for instance, work by IMAN Research on policies for working with youth in Malaysia. Some groups, such as C-SAVE in Indonesia, have been able to engage policymakers while also conducting local outreach rather than focusing on research. Stronger evidence of the types of intervention that work in practice would enable such groups to present more convincing recommendations to policymakers.

Choosing between qualitative and quantitative methods. While quantitative approaches may be suited to the evaluation of large programs and broader change beyond the level of a single intervention, they are less suitable for small-scale projects for which quantifiable and reliable attribution of impact is often extremely hard to achieve. In these small-scale cases, quantitative approaches often end up as little more than routine monitoring of project activities and qualitative methods are more likely to generate give insights into successes and areas for improvement, despite acknowledged difficulties such as the risk of overstating achievements and potential issues of attribution. In-depth case studies can provide a rich counterpoint to statistical information, yet projects rarely keep a narrative record of their activities. Qualitative approaches such as outcome harvesting that examine changes in attitudes, behavior, and relationships allow progress to be measured in short time frames of just a few years, often well before “hard” evidence of effectiveness can emerge. These approaches can demonstrate progress and support the allocation by donors of follow-up funding tranches that reward success.

Recommendations:

1. *Iterative, flexible approaches.* Donors and governments seeking to work with CSOs on PVE should build on the experiences of related sectors such as peacebuilding that accept the critical importance of iterative or process-oriented approaches and adaptive management techniques.
2. *Intentionally pursue and support research and learning mechanisms.* While better monitoring and evaluation systems may improve project assessment, programs should also incorporate specific *learning* objectives to be pursued simultaneously with program activities. Reviews, assessments, and comparative analysis should address gaps and expand knowledge within the sector to promote progress in the development of effective programs. Donors should focus on initiatives that aggregate findings and evaluate impact above the individual project level in order to build a strong

OUTCOME HARVESTING: A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION METHOD

Outcome harvesting is a participatory evaluation methodology that can also be used for monitoring projects. It does not rely on the designation of outcome indicators at the start of a project, but depends instead on stakeholders identifying changes that have occurred in the project arena and then assessing the degree to which those changes can be attributed to the interventions.

The method involves gathering and assessing evidence about how people's actions or attitudes have changed and determining how far that is because of the interventions under assessment. This approach to evaluation shifts the emphasis away from the more banal elements of project monitoring, such as ticking off lists of activities or counting numbers of participants, and towards important dimensions of social change—shifts in attitudes, behaviors, actions, and relationships. Outcome harvesting is able to monitor actions that otherwise might be overlooked, such as one-off decisions by local authorities that may reflect changes in their understanding. Such actions may be outside the parameters of a traditional monitoring and evaluation framework.

Outcome harvesting is particularly useful in assessing changes to complex, political, and fluid contexts. It incorporates program participants' views on what is changing, rather than relying on a priori metrics of success. While outcome harvesting overcomes some of the shortcomings of traditional monitoring and evaluation approaches, it still suffers from the same challenges and potential biases as other qualitative methods. In particular, assigning causality to project actions may be overly subjective, and there is also the potential danger of overstating the importance of an outcome.

For further information, see for instance: <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1027-doing-things-differently-rethinking-monitoring-and-evaluation-to-understand-change>.

evidence base. Better data on the incidence of violent extremism at the country level and below is also still needed. Where possible, data should be disaggregated by sex to ensure that monitoring addresses aspects of gender relationships that are relevant to violent extremism. Violence monitoring by neutral or nongovernmental organizations, such as Deep South Watch in southern Thailand, has a proven record of achievement.⁴⁵

3. *Improve the rigor of CSO project design and implementation.* Donors need to understand the challenges faced by CSOs, but that should not stop them from pressing for the articulation of explicit theories of change that can be tested through program implementation. CSOs should be willing to build programs through evidence-based assessment and careful contextual analysis, rather than by relying on experience.
4. *Improve monitoring and evaluation of PVE programming with qualitative approaches.* Practitioners and donors should recognize the challenges of assessing and attributing change, especially when dealing with small projects whose impact is relatively limited in comparison with other factors, and broaden PVE monitoring and evaluation to include qualitative approaches. These could include ethnographic studies; outcome harvesting; combination metrics such as perception indices, like a Likert Scale, that create a quantitative representation of qualitative change; and proxies that can assess complex phenomena such as levels of trust between stakeholders.

Iterative Approaches

“External organizations have a fixed timetable—one year, six months. But when you are working with communities, it cannot be fixed like that. This [fast pace] limits the ability to get good results, because we can’t gain the trust from people.... When donors develop the program in collaboration with the local organization staff, it becomes easier for them to follow up on the project and build their capacity to do the work. However, as currently done, they can’t understand what’s happening in the program, and the results are [remaining] with the donor.”

(CSO representative, Thailand)

Annex 1

Case Study Projects from Each Country

Case-study projects from Malaysia

Southeast Asian Regional Center for Counterterrorism

<http://www.searcct.gov.my>

One of the more comprehensive prevention efforts implemented in Malaysia emphasizes youth-led programming promoted by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Counterterrorism (SEARCCT). This approach, steered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Communications Department, has remained somewhat separate from the government's wider terrorism strategy. Through university funding, and with technical support from the Switzerland-based Center for Security Studies, it involves youth-to-youth engagement with an eye on identifying and preventing radicalization. SEARCCT employs technology and messaging, specifically through social media, to drive a mass communications strategy as a new take on well-established early warning systems.

Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement)

<http://www.abim.org.my>

Beyond government-led efforts, Malaysia offers a CSO model for using basic Islamic teachings to counter terrorist messaging. *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)*, or the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, was founded in 1971 by the Islamic Studies faculty of *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* (National University of Malaysia). The organization promotes youth activism and outreach focused on education, economic development, and humanitarian and missionary work in countries across Asia and the Middle East. In total, ABIM manages between 300 and 400 kindergartens, primary schools, and secondary schools, including those in Malaysia that primarily serve Rohingya and Syrian immigrants. ABIM's goal is to foster a nonpartisan return to the basics of Islamic teaching by providing an "avenue for Islamic ideals" and enhancing religious excellence and legitimacy.

ABIM was established to promote Islamic revivalism and has consistently taken moderate and progressive positions. ABIM has a very strong and active grassroots network engaged in improving the daily lives of communities across Malaysia. Through their various programs, they have managed to identify sympathizers of violent extremism both online and offline. ABIM's staff are trained to identify and then work with sympathizers to prevent further radicalization.

CSO initiatives in Sabah

The Asia Foundation has eight years of experience working with CSOs in Sabah.⁴⁶ Most of the activity is concentrated in eastern parts of Sabah, where violent extremism is considered to be of greatest concern due to the comparatively weak state presence at the local level and the presence of stateless residents, especially among former refugees from The Philippines or their descendants.

Efforts have focused on training more than 8,000 youth and community leaders in the prevention of violent extremism. Distinct from the religious foundations of ABIM's work, this approach involves changing attitudes by promoting democratic values and human rights, as well as encouraging a sense of identity and belonging. The Asia Foundation works with CSOs in Sabah that are connected with local indigenous and Filipino communities and that have a strong understanding of local issues: statelessness, marginalization, and limited access to basic government services including education and vocational training.

IMAN Research

<https://imanresearch.com>

IMAN Research is a social enterprise that brings together young academics, researchers, writers, journalists, policy specialists, and civil society activists from the public and private sectors. IMAN Research conducts qualitative and quantitative research in Malaysia and across the region on matters of society, religion, and public perceptions.

Malaysia's multicultural population and its location at the crossroads of Southeast Asia make it a valuable testing ground for orthodox and modern solutions that engage Muslims and non-Muslims and indigenous and immigrant populations. IMAN Research currently chairs the Malaysian chapter of the Southeast Asian Network of Civil Society Organizations on Countering Violent Extremism (SEAN-CSO). It seeks to deliver sound policy solutions with measurable outcomes, emphasizing the building of community resilience.

Case-study projects from the Philippines

Action for Advancement and Development in Mindanao

Action for Advancement and Development in Mindanao (AFADMIN) is an organization formed and led by youth in Cotabato City, Mindanao. Its mission is to promote peace in the Bangsamoro (Mindanao Muslim) community through empowerment, justice, and equity. Its activities encompass policy and research, as well as projects that focus on livelihoods and development, women's rights and opportunities, good governance, knowledge management, and culture.

AFADMIN's efforts to tackle violent extremism are still nascent. They focus on providing three-day training courses on extremism and how to prevent it to young ulama. The idea that young people, particularly those from under-resourced communities with limited educational opportunity, are susceptible to recruitment by Islamic leaders is central to AFADMIN's approach.

Institute for Autonomy and Governance

<http://www.iag.org.ph>

This organization, also based in Cotabato, is an independent, nonpartisan think tank founded in 2001 to develop ideas for making autonomy an effective vehicle for peace and development in the southern Philippines. The core perspective of the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) is that conflict in Mindanao is a political problem that requires a political solution. Like many other nongovernmental bodies operating in Mindanao, IAG views violent extremism against a broader, political backdrop of local grievances and drivers of conflict.

In order to address injustice and underdevelopment, and to promote autonomy and self-determination, IAG works with many stakeholders—with organizations and leaders that support self-determination; with the Armed Forces of The Philippines, promoting security-sector reform; and with the general public to advance public policies for peace and development. IAG does capacity building, research, public forums, roundtable discussions, and conferences. It has published numerous policy papers and journals on political, economic, and security issues. Much of its work aims to build the capacity and technical skills of local governments by providing expertise and convening forums on a broad range of governance and security issues.

Moropreneur, Inc.

<http://themoropreneur.com>

Named for its commitment to promoting entrepreneurship among the Moro community, this group was launched in 2016 by Executive Director Selahuddin Hashim, the son of a former separatist leader. Its mission is to “empower the Bangsamoro with the skills and knowledge to choose positive values.” The inspiration came from what the director has described as more than two decades of failed development programming that, despite significant outside financial support, has barely improved the region's development status. As he stated during our interview, “we understand that violence is one of the major reasons why we are at the bottom of the development scale.”

Integrated Resource Development for Tri-People (IRDT)

<http://tri-people.blogspot.com/2009/05/irdt-program-and-services.html>

Integrated Resource Development for Tri-People (IRDT) is another locally conceived initiative. Launched in Zamboanga City by Kalma Isnain, it seeks to promote development and humanitarian assistance across Muslim, Christian, and indigenous communities. The organization works in western Mindanao, particularly the smaller islands, to improve livelihoods; life skills; community enterprise; governance; planning; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Their efforts are based on promoting peace and stability. Executive Director Kalma Isnain links extremist recruitment to lack of economic opportunity and ongoing cycles of conflict, particularly on the islands of Sulu and Basilan, where recruitment by the Abu Sayyaf Group has become normalized. “The tension is already there, and the children are the ones most affected,” she said. “These children, they have nothing to do with their lives, so they will join.”⁴⁷

Program Against Violent Extremism

The Program Against Violent Extremism (PAVE) is a government initiative. It was launched in 2018 by the office of regional governor Mujiv Hataman.⁴⁸ The project is implemented in collaboration with the Army's Joint Task Force Basilan on the islands of Zulu, Tawi, and Basilan.

PAVE is designed to provide opportunities to members of the Abu Sayyaf Group who surrender, are officially processed by the police, and are then ready to reintegrate into society. The process is designed to encourage other armed rebels to follow the same path. In addition, it works with communities that have been attacked by Abu Sayyaf. “The objectives of the program are to prevent returnees from going back, to provide an opportunity to start anew, to encourage more Abu Sayyaf members to surrender, to provide path for healing, and to increase grassroots support for countering violent extremism.”⁴⁹

Case-study projects from Thailand

Buddhist Network for Peace

The Buddhist Network for Peace (B4P) was founded in Yala province in 2013 by Rukchart Suwan and local Buddhist leaders to raise the voice of the Buddhist community in peacebuilding and violence-prevention efforts. When the network started up, Malay-Muslim separatists soon began peace negotiations with the newly formed military government. It became apparent to a group of residents that the peace dialogue was neglecting the voices of the local Buddhist minority, leaving them uninformed about the political process and generating grievances. In its nascent stages, the group was set up purely for Thai Buddhists to vent their anger, frustration, fear, and sadness. To them, conflict and violence in the region stemmed from mistrust and misunderstanding between the Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim communities. Today, B4P has moved well beyond this starting point.

Duay Jai (Hearty Support) Group

<https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/thailand/peacebuilding-organisations/duay-jai/>

Duay Jai Group was established in 2010 by Anchana and Pattama Heemmina, two sisters and human rights defenders who work with victims of trauma in Thailand.⁵⁰ Duay Jai's five-person staff provides counseling and rehabilitation services for those imprisoned for crimes related to the insurgency, and for their families. The organization distinguishes itself from other development efforts by providing targeted psychosocial services to address violent extremism and promoting peacebuilding philosophies for military and government officials. Duay Jai also works to expose human rights violations to the public, because the founders believe that justice is a precondition for peace. The organization pursues a holistic approach to psychosocial services and legal aid, and active engagement with youth sympathizers of extremism. Duay Jai Group has sought to increase access to justice while ensuring that youth are protected from exploitation by insurgent groups and the military.

Patani Forum

<http://www.pataniforum.com>

The Patani Forum is a civil society coalition of former student leaders, activists, writers, and academics who seek to encourage meaningful conversation, research, and debate about the conflict in Southern Thailand. According to the Patani Forum, the road to peace requires acknowledging the distinct historical and cultural identity of the Malays in southern Thailand without undermining Thai statehood. The Patani Forum focuses much of its effort on local education about Malay political and civil rights and the community's plight. Activities include publications, live forums, mass media exchanges, and social media networking.⁵¹

Saiburi Looker

<https://www.facebook.com/saiburilooker/>

Saiburi Looker was founded in 2012 in response to growing tensions and violent incidents. Saiburi district in Pattani province has been designated a "red zone," or conflict-prone area, with high levels of insurgent activity. Deep South Watch, a local organization that monitors conflict in the region, ranked Saiburi as the ninth-most dangerous district in Thailand's three southernmost provinces.⁵² The once-thriving port town has been rendered unrecognizable by frequent violent attacks. Coupled with this, local authorities and the media have consistently portrayed Malay Muslims as southern bandits, separatist sympathizers, or drug users, adding to ethno-religious stereotyping and discrimination.

Against this backdrop, a Malay Muslim filmmaker and photographer, Anas Pongprasert, and a collective of young artists established Saiburi Looker to rebuild communal relationships and restore trust. The project specifically targets younger generations in the southernmost provinces. The founders believe that the segregated education system in the region, which limits interaction between children of different ethnicities and faiths, has alienated Malay Muslim youth in particular, and they argue that these alienated youth could be motivated to take up arms as a way to channel their frustrations.

Case-study projects from Indonesia

The four organizations on which the report focuses are Civil Society against Violent Extremism, the Center for Detention Studies, the Fahmina Institute for Islamic Studies, and Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP, or the Institute for International Peace). This selection reflects the focus of fieldwork conducted in Indonesia for this study, and inevitably is not representative of all civil society initiatives that seek through different means to limit violent extremism in Indonesia. Additional information is drawn from other sources, including discussions with representatives of other CSOs, interviews with specialists, and written sources.

Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (Institute for International Peace-Building)

<https://prasasti.org>

Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP) was established in 2008 with the view that security-led or “hard” responses to the threat of terrorism have been ineffective. YPP focuses instead on research and programs to increase understanding of peace and conflict, political violence, and terrorism and other transnational crimes. The staff encourages the participation of nonstate actors, including women and children, in community initiatives to prevent violent extremism and interrupt the spread of extreme or radical ideas. YPP is deeply involved in programs for correctional facilities, partly in response to their lack of funding from the state.

Civil Society against Violent Extremism

<http://csave.org/en/home-en/>

Civil Society against Violent Extremism (C-SAVE) is a new coalition of CSOs that was started in 2017. C-SAVE focuses primarily on deradicalizing and rehabilitating women and children. This focus is necessitated by the increasing participation of women in violent extremist groups. C-SAVE operates centers for the rehabilitation of women extremists and their reintegration into the community. The reintegration program emphasizes communal participation, rather than individual capacity building and empowerment like other programs. C-SAVE is also working with communities to create an extremism early warning system.

Fahmina Institute

<https://fahmina.or.id>

Established in 2000 in Cirebon, West Java, the Fahmina Institute promotes democracy, community empowerment, education, openness, and justice in Indonesian society. Formed during the period of democratic activism after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, Fahmina has sought to “bring a new understanding of the Islamic faith following the repressive Suharto regime, which silenced opposition and critical thought.”⁵³

The institute addresses issues including gender inequality, poverty, religious pluralism, and political advocacy through a religious approach that offers an alternative to radical religious movements. Fahmina’s role in Indonesia’s CVE landscape closely relates to C-SAVE’s work on early warning systems, and the two organizations cooperate in developing and implementing their programs.

Center for Detention Studies (CDS)

<https://cds.or.id>

One of the groups working on the pressing issue of rehabilitation and reintegration is the Center for Detention Studies (CDS). This Jakarta-based civil society organization was established in 2009 by human rights activities and academics with an interest in penal reform. Its programs focus on research and advocacy to increase the effectiveness of the Indonesian penal system. In particular, the organization addresses issues of overcrowding, long-term inmates and high-risk prisoners, and the overall organization and management of Indonesian prisons. Their research focuses on inmates’ rights and the costs of management. In addition, CDS conducts regular visits to 45 corrections facilities to monitor compliance with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (1995) and the government program known as the Integrity Zone toward Corruption Free Areas and Clean Servicing Bureaucracy.

Annex 2

Country Context Summaries

The Philippines

OVERVIEW

The southern Philippines has experienced religious and political conflict for over half a century. Indigenous Muslims, locally known as Moros, were marginalized during the intensive state-building process that followed Philippine independence in 1946. Once a majority on the island of Mindanao, Moro communities were marginalized and displaced by the migration of large numbers of Catholic Filipinos from the northern islands of Luzon and Visayas. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, the semiautonomous region where the majority of Muslim Moros live, lags far behind all other regions in per capita gross regional product and other development indicators.⁵⁴

Since the late 1960s, Moro nationalist groups seeking greater rights and autonomy have engaged in violent rebellion in Mindanao. Civil war has led to a number of peace agreements, first with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), in 1996, and most recently with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), in 2014. While these agreements have raised hopes for a sustainable peace in the region, the negotiations have also driven the splintering of rebel groups or the establishment of new ones focused on continuing violent resistance against the Philippine state.

Recent major incidents, including the siege of Marawi in 2017 and the suicide bombing of a Catholic church in Jolo, Sulu, on January 27, 2019, have focused international attention on violent extremism in The Philippines. Groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State have engaged in regular violence in Mindanao, which endured 1,123 violent extremist incidents in the three years from 2016 to 2018.⁵⁵ Research by The Asia Foundation in 2017 identified at least six distinct extremist groups active in Mindanao, although ruptures and alliances occur continually in response to local circumstances. Fighters from at least three groups—the Abu Sayyaf Group, IS-Ranao (also known as the Maute Group), and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters—are known to have participated in the Marawi siege.

In July 2019, the Philippine government adopted its National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. This plan is an effort to develop a “whole-of-nation approach,” or “the convergence of the government, civil society organizations, religious [groups], and other key stakeholders to prevent radicalization.” The National Action Plan has five specific objectives:

1. Institutionalize strategies from the national down to the grassroots levels;
2. Involve the different stakeholders across the broadest spectrum of the society in implementing programs;
3. Apply a comprehensive and people-centered approach to address the different drivers of radicalization;
4. Ensure the strategies are inclusive and culture- and gender-sensitive; and
5. Ensure that strategies uphold the rule of law, international human rights law, and international humanitarian law.⁵⁶

Although the National Action Plan lays out a progressive program for preventing and countering extremism, building on an international approach initiated by the UN in 2016, the regular occurrence of violent incidents has provoked a primarily military response. Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte declared martial law across the entirety of Mindanao at the beginning of the Marawi conflict, and as of late 2019 it had been in place for 31 months, though the siege ended after five. Tens of thousands of troops of the Armed Forces of The Philippines are now engaged in a protracted effort to eliminate small groups of fighters in the province of Sulu. The recent military engagements are the latest in a long history of attempts to bring restive areas of Mindanao under control.

Violent extremist groups in The Philippines

Local extremist groups in The Philippines tend to be geographically and ethnically distinct. Many have a long history of violence that predates the emergence of Islamic State in 2014.

- The Abu Sayyaf Group is a small but powerful organization based in the Sulu Archipelago. Despite the deaths of many of its leaders and the emergence of competing factions, the group has survived, shifting between terrorism and criminal gang activities. Before the 2017 Marawi siege, Abu Sayyaf was mostly known for piracy and kidnapping for ransom, targeting cargo ships, tourists, and others in and around the waters of the Sulu Sea.⁵⁷ Videos of faction leader Isnilon Hapilon and his cadre

pledging allegiance to the Islamic State appeared online in April 2014. Hapilon was killed in Marawi in 2017, but the Abu Sayyaf Group continues to resist government efforts to neutralize it.

- The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a group based predominantly in lowland areas of the province of Maguindanao, split from the MILF in 2008. The group has splintered into various factions, which have continued to engage in armed skirmishes. The group has also been responsible for a number of attacks using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and other means.
- IS-Ranao, also known as the Maute Group, was the primary group behind the Marawi siege. Led by brothers Omar and Abdullah Maute, the group gained a strong following among the population near Marawi. The brother's father, Cayamoro Maute, was a senior official in the MILF, and the siblings studied in the Middle East, where they are thought to have been radicalized. Omar and Abdullah's mother, Farhana Maute, was intimately involved in the group's rise. The group continues to find support in the hinterlands.

Drivers of recruitment among Filipino Muslims

The Islamic State caliphate and its black flag have become potent symbols for a new generation of young Muslims. Even so, the majority of both push and pull factors leading to radicalization are local to The Philippines. The legacy of historical injustice has left generations of Moros isolated from mainstream Philippine society and disillusioned with the central government.⁵⁸ The history of breakdowns and compromises in the Mindanao peace process, and frustration with its slow implementation, have driven some to militancy or extremist violence.

Research also points to personal factors that can drive extremist recruitment.⁵⁹ A strong sense of family loyalty and honor—locally known as *maratabat*—compels people to join armed groups as a way to exact revenge and preserve the dignity of their community. Chronic poverty and limited employment for young men has made joining an armed group an attractive strategy for earning a living for themselves and their families. And extremist groups use offers of Islamic education to recruit susceptible young men with few educational alternatives.

While the vast majority of militant recruits are young men, women and girls can play an important role as recruiters and enablers, especially when factors related to livelihoods or family honor are involved. Much more research is needed to understand how women and girls participate in and are affected by violent extremism in The Philippines.

Civil Society and preventing violent extremism

Philippine civil society is strong and vibrant, and both Moro and non-Moro civil society groups have long histories of involvement in the Mindanao peace process. The first civilian ceasefire-monitoring groups were staffed and coordinated by CSOs in the late 1990s. Their contributions to the peace process have ranged from direct input to negotiations to more community-focused programming, including community dialogues, local conflict resolution, and other peacebuilding activities.

Since the 2014 signing of the peace agreement and the subsequent emergence of local terrorist groups, many CSOs have refocused their community peacebuilding work to emphasize preventing violent extremism. They have put more work into challenging extremist narratives in their communities, sponsored intra- and interreligious dialogues, and supported networks of Muslim scholars who espouse moderate Islamic teachings. Other projects have seen CSOs work with local and regional government, including initiatives to deradicalize and reintegrate fighters who have surrendered to government forces.

Thailand

OVERVIEW

Thailand is perhaps the most distinct of the four Southeast Asian countries covered in this assessment. The country has to date avoided ongoing jihadist violence, but a separatist movement is currently waging war against the state in Thailand's deep south. In the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala and adjacent districts of Songkhla Province, where Malay Muslims make up three-quarters of the population, the violence has caused almost 7,000 deaths since it began in 2004.⁶⁰

The years of separatist insurgency in Thailand's deep south stem from long-term perceptions of enforced assimilation and political marginalization of the local population. Lack of progress in addressing these grievances, and the poor socioeconomic conditions in the region, have compounded popular discontentment with the capital, Bangkok. Most local people, including insurgent leaders, do not openly demand full independence, but do overwhelmingly support cultural recognition and increased political authority including greater local control of language and education policies in an area that was historically defined as a Malay sultanate until its final incorporation into the kingdom of Siam (later Thailand) in 1909.

Under King Vajiravudh of Siam, also known as Rama VI, citizenship was for those who spoke Thai, honored Buddhism, and revered the monarch.⁶¹ Modernization policies sought to eliminate “backward” Islamic customs and dialects and create a homogeneous linguistic, religious, and cultural identity. Ultrationalist policies under the dictatorial leadership of General Plaek Phibunsongkhram included military oppression of southern Muslims and cultural assimilation programs.⁶² From 1948 onward, militant separatists began to resist what they felt were systematic attempts by the Thai state to suppress local identity and forcibly assimilate the Malay Muslim population. Insurgents launched multiple attacks against government officials, public schools, and railways, and various separatist movements were active until the 1980s. Significant government spending on counterinsurgency operations and socioeconomic development failed to significantly change the situation in the southernmost provinces. Violence returned, and intensified from 2004.

In 2013, the Thai state agreed for the first time in history to hold formal peace talks with rebel groups in the south. The ensuing peace dialogue soon stalled, however, and further efforts towards meaningful dialogue show some promise but have made little progress. Core insurgent leaders are only minimally involved in the process, while Bangkok continues to prioritize national sovereignty and is uninterested in granting administrative changes to the region.

Most of those killed in the conflict have been civilians—both Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists.⁶³ The conflict-affected area is subject to emergency laws that grant special authority to the military. Although annual casualty rates have gradually declined since 2004, tensions and violence persist. In November 2019, a large and organized group of insurgents killed fifteen people at a checkpoint outside Yala Town, the bloodiest single incident in many years.

CSOs in Thailand’s deep south: a local definition of extremism

These circumstances make Thailand an especially interesting case. Extremism in the conflict-affected south is defined by civil society organizations in a specific way that diverges from international norms. The principal frame of reference is separatism and resentment of the central state rather than an international calls to arms.

This subnational conflict follows a pattern found in many other conflict sites across South and Southeast Asia. In each place, members of a group that is a national minority but a local majority confront state security forces. The conflict in southern Thailand is similar in some ways to the conflict in the southern Philippines. But there is no Thai equivalent to the extremist groups such as Abu Sayyaf that are active in the southern Philippines.

Insurgent leaders in Thailand’s southernmost provinces have rejected attempts to link their struggle to international extremist movements, partly because their primary goals are secular and political rather than ideological, and partly for tactical reasons. Any association with terrorism would damage their efforts to legitimize their struggle internationally and would also justify an extreme crackdown by the Thai government.⁶⁴

Attempts to recruit Muslim extremists have been identified across Thailand. In late November 2015, two IS propaganda videos were posted online with subtitles in Thai (rather than Malay or Arabic), suggesting that local Malay Muslims were probably not the intended audience. Thai authorities stated on a national television channel that more than 100,000 Thais have regularly accessed IS websites, several have traveled to Syria, and many have given financial support to Islamic extremists.⁶⁵ In 2018, Malaysian intelligence sources claimed that a Thai suspect was attempting to establish an IS cell in southern Thailand.⁶⁶

Groups including al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah, and Hezbollah have operated inside the country, using it as a transit point and a base for planning attacks. Jemaah Islamiyah is believed to have plotted the 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia, from safe houses in Thailand.⁶⁷ A separate, high-profile, transnational terrorist attack in Thailand took place in August 2015, when a bomb was detonated inside the Erawan Shrine, in the heart of Bangkok’s business district, killing 20 and injuring 125.⁶⁸

While there are few if any CSOs working directly on jihadist violence in Thailand, many organizations are working on the separatist conflict and its causes. This report focused on four initiatives: the Buddhist Network for Peace, the Duay Jai (Hearty Support) Group, the Patani Forum, and Saiburi Looker. Researchers interviewed organization staff, beneficiaries, and associated members of the community, and information was triangulated with existing literature and interviews with experts.

Civil society organizations in the southernmost provinces—an overview

Civil society organizations have some space to operate, but it is limited. The southernmost provinces are subject to emergency laws that limit social and political mobilization, and both the military and the insurgents restrict the activities of some local organizations. Some civil society leaders, notably advocates for the rights of Malay Muslim residents, have an uneasy relationship with the military.

Yet there is significant space for civil society groups to coalesce, to network, and to operate on the ground. At times this freedom has been greater than in other parts of Thailand, which have been subjected to limits on political activity and public gatherings and the temporary suspension of elected bodies during times of political instability. International observers have commented that civil society groups in the southernmost provinces have more freedom of action than groups in other conflict-affected areas in Southeast Asia and further afield.

CSOs in the southernmost provinces have various areas of focus:

- *Promoting the peace process or supporting it with parallel measures.* This activity presupposes an active peace process as an entry point and the space for civil society to engage with it. In 2012–14, CSOs were involved in devising options for decentralizing government and a range of other measures to generate momentum towards a negotiated peace. The current peace process, however, is narrower and less inclusive, offering fewer opportunities to engage.
- *Building the strength and resilience of local communities.* Some CSOs are working with village leaders and community bodies to equip them to engage effectively with conflict actors (government security forces and insurgent networks) at the local level.
- *Building local Malay Muslim institutions and structures.* Some CSOs are working to strengthen local institutions in order to build a peaceful, progressive Malay Muslim society. Examples include local after-school classes and support for local languages to build a positive local identity, especially among youth.
- *Addressing the needs and rights of victims of conflict.* Various groups such as Duay Jai work with victims of conflict, offering support and counseling and helping victims secure the government assistance to which they are entitled.
- *Media coverage and public engagement.* Some CSOs support grassroots reporting and a range of associated measures. Pattani Forum is one such example. Other groups focus on national media or influencing public opinion across Thailand.
- *Strengthening civil society organizations that can advocate for rights.* Some CSOs promote the rights of the local population. While most of these groups work with the Malay Muslim community, some, such as the Buddhists for Peace network, work on behalf of Buddhist communities.
- *Advocating for improved government services and policies.* Some groups work to improve government services like psychological treatment for victims of violence. The involvement of civil society groups enables individuals who would otherwise have little opportunity to access government services, and who typically have little trust in government itself, to access needed support. It also generates less antagonistic relations between people and the state.⁶⁹

CSOs working for peace in the southernmost provinces largely fall into two camps. The first camp aims to build common ground between insurgents and the Thai state while remaining impartial to the parties. This camp is more consensual in their relationship with the state and is relatively well aligned with a progressive perspective found among some national institutions based in Bangkok. It is sometimes referred to by local civil society members as the “cool” approach. The second camp is regarded as “hotter”: it takes more risks and has a more challenging relationship with government institutions. Members of this camp tend to support Malay Muslim rights through peaceful advocacy and networks of local activists.



A local art event in Pattani, Thailand, one of many activities set up by CSOs to help rebuild communal ties and promote peace.

Indonesia

OVERVIEW

The Indonesian state has long followed an approach that is broadly secular yet recognizes the importance of religion, as formally embodied in the state philosophy of Pancasila. At the same time, maintaining the religious identity and protecting the basic civic and political rights of Indonesia's Islamic majority were driving forces for the country's independence, and they continue to play a prominent role in national politics and protest movements. Ideological tensions and clashes of interest between Islamists and secularists exist alongside tolerance and pluralism across the vast, multiethnic archipelago of more than 250 million people.

The collapse of President Suharto's long-term, authoritarian government in 1998 and the subsequent political turmoil occurred as the incidence of violent extremism was rising around the world. These events, and the return of jihadi spiritual leader Abu Bakar Bashir to Indonesia in the early 2000s, laid the foundation for a series of lethal, high-profile attacks on Western targets, including the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people, 164 of them foreigners.

Violent Indonesian militants have extensive and long-standing ties with radical networks outside the country. Earlier extremists went abroad, to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and to Malaysia. Exiled jihadis founded Jemaah Islamiyah in the early 1990s. The Syrian civil war and the declaration of the Islamic State in 2013 provided fresh momentum to Indonesian jihadi networks. In 2015, 500 Indonesians were fighting with IS in Iraq and Syria in a special military unit established for Malay Indonesian speakers. Clerics such as Abu Bakar Bashir and Aman Abdurrahman have sworn allegiance to IS from their Indonesian prison cells.

Indonesia has been fairly stable through several peaceful elections and presidential transitions since the fall of Suharto. Yet extremist attacks have not abated. In May 2018, suicide bombers, including a mother with two children, attacked churches in Surabaya and several other sites, killing a total of 28 people and injuring 50 more. The role of a woman and her children in this incident attracted widespread publicity and underscored the importance of challenging traditional expectations regarding women's involvement in extremism. Attacks have continued, including violence in a detention center and attacks on a police station. Chief Security Minister Wiranto was stabbed by an assailant in October 2019. Religious intolerance has also grown across Indonesia, influencing the political process and public attitudes and creating challenging circumstances for addressing violent extremism.⁷⁰

At the same time, many opportunities exist. Civil society organizations have significant capacity, competency, and political space to operate, as well as some capability to work with government. Islamic organizations that can promote a more tolerant religious vision have immense reach, and the government has passed some significant legislation. There are also opportunities to encourage female representation and leadership in religious organizations, in civil society, and in government bodies that work to address violent extremism.

For this project, researchers conducted interviews and focus groups in the capital city of Jakarta and in Cirebon, a regional hub of Islamic tradition and a center for several civil society programs addressing violent extremism. Interviewees included key staff, project beneficiaries, third-party informants, and donors working on a range of initiatives in four different areas.

Indonesia's landscape of violent extremism

Support for violent extremist ideologies appears to have risen in Indonesia over the past five years. In 2016, a survey of youth attitudes towards radicalism and extremism indicated that 17.8 percent of respondents were willing to participate in a jihadist group for the purpose of practicing Islam.⁷¹ Another survey, conducted in 2018, showed that almost 20 percent of university students supported violent radical groups in some way, and 23.5 percent expressed support for IS.⁷²

Among various reasons that have been suggested for the recent spread of extremist ideology, four main factors can be discerned. First, discontent arising from national socioeconomic inequality and a long record of poor governance, including corruption and a lack of accountability.⁷³ Second, the ability of extremist groups to infiltrate and use public spaces, including mosques, for their ideological campaigns. Third, the infiltration of extremist ideologies into education. This process can occur in several ways, from the invitation of ulama (religious scholars) to preach at school events, to the efforts of extremist groups to influence pedagogical approaches.⁷⁴ And fourth, the growing use of the internet and social media for extremist campaigns.⁷⁵

In addition to the ongoing presence of groups such as Jema'ah Ansharut Daulah and a resurging Jemaah Islamiyah, there is the challenge of jihadists returning from Iraq and Syria. Indonesia has received more than 600 deportees and returnees and is expected to deal with another 630 Indonesian citizens estimated to still be in Syria and Iraq. Since 2017, over 200 forcibly repatriated Indonesians have been returned to their communities following a one-month "rehabilitation" period in state care. Although academic studies of the danger posed by these returnees have been, on the whole, inconclusive, many commentators feel that the danger requires serious measures.⁷⁶

The government has taken various steps to address the threat, including new security measures and updated antiterrorist legislation.⁷⁷ There are still major weaknesses in Indonesia's counterterrorism posture, however, including a lax prison system that allows convicted jihadis to continue recruiting and plotting from their cells, poor monitoring of former convicts and Syria returnees, and a general lack of effective action against the spread of jihadi ideology since the 1980s.⁷⁸

About 45 percent of Indonesians who traveled to Iraq and Syria to support IS in the period through 2017 are thought to have been women and children.⁷⁹ Seventy-five percent of the 250 extremists who later returned to Indonesia from Iraq, Syria, and Turkey were women or children.⁸⁰ More recently, in the May 2018 Surabaya bombings, Indonesia saw its first female suicide bomber, a mother who conducted the operation in the company of two of her children.

Overview: the role of civil society organizations in Indonesia's CVE landscape

For many years, programs to address violent extremism in Indonesia were largely spearheaded by field-level civil society initiatives.⁸¹ While the Indonesian government has increased its engagement in recent years, CSOs remain vital to the overall effort. Overall, CSOs participate in five main areas: in-prison reform and rehabilitation, social reintegration programs, counter-radicalization efforts, early warning systems, and policy-reform advocacy.

In-prison reform and rehabilitation. CSO efforts in prison settings are wide-ranging. Deradicalization programs, which aim to reduce an inmate's propensity for ideologically motivated violence, include training on how to constructively work through hardships and negative emotions, inmate-victim dialogue programs, and dialogue-based inmate reeducation. Disengagement programs aim to increase an inmate's economic independence and consequently their resistance to recidivism. Meanwhile, capacity-building programs for prison staff seek to equip parole officers to understand and manage terrorist inmates. One such initiative looks to foster understanding among prison staff of the factors that influenced inmates' past choices, while another is developing a terrorist inmate management manual.

Social reintegration programs. Programs that offer group outings, cooking classes, and other social activities and accompany them with training and financial support have reportedly helped to reintegrate former inmates into the wider community. Although the first steps to reintegrate terrorist returnees from overseas are managed by the government, CSOs also play a vital role in monitoring and managing their social intercourse with the community. Aside from monthly monitoring responsibilities, CSOs are charged with developing tailored programs such as training and support to equip returnees for economic independence.

Counter-radicalization efforts. Counter-radicalization efforts by CSOs aim to increase the resistance of individuals and communities to radical and violent ideologies. Organizations such as the Wahid Foundation, the SETARA Institute, and Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Perdamaian (LaKIP) have been pivotal in identifying the vulnerabilities of educational institutions to radical ideologies and



Early warning network meeting, Solo, Indonesia

mapping potential student support for radicalism.⁸² Schools and universities are also directly involved. Universitas Gadjah Mada, for instance, requires their lecturers to monitor student activities, and it vets outside preachers who are invited to campus.⁸³

CSOs also offer initiatives targeting families, particularly mothers. The Wahid Foundation is well known for its Kampung Damai (Peaceful Village) program, which increases the economic independence of mothers while offering training in constructive, nonviolent conflict resolution.⁸⁴ Through an approach known as "parenting for peace," the Center for Pesantren and Democracy Studies links with government social services to educate mothers and thwart the spread of radical ideologies in their families.

Media-based counter-radicalization efforts generally offer peaceful alternatives to radical interpretations of Islam. Large national bodies like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as well

as smaller CSOs, provide nationalist and tolerant interpretations of Islam through online and conventional media. CSOs have also produced films to encourage tolerance among youth.⁸⁵

Early warning systems. These efforts help communities identify individuals who are vulnerable to radical ideologies. Once they have been identified, community representatives devise a locally tailored intervention to prevent the at-risk individuals from radicalizing. Community representatives should, over time, be able to discern which cases of radicalization they can deal with on their own and which should be handed over to a security agency.⁸⁶

Policy-reform advocacy. Groups such as C-SAVE have advocated for amendments to laws, some of which have been adopted in the new antiterrorism legislation. Other advocacy groups have focused on technical policy issues, such as policies and protocols for prison system management and terrorist risk assessment.

Malaysia

OVERVIEW

Malaysia offers an interesting example of action to address violent extremism. The country is approaching developed-nation status and has successfully eliminated most extreme poverty. Its government has acted forcefully and proactively against the extremist threat, while civil society involvement has been more limited.

Terrorist attacks in Malaysia have been relatively rare, but Malaysians have been involved in attacks elsewhere, and there is acute concern over recruitment into extremist networks. Hundreds of Malaysians joined the Afghan jihad in the 1980s, and a domestic extremist network existed for several years before it was disbanded in 2002. Several major attacks in Indonesia in the 2000s were at least partly conceived by a Malaysian, Noordin Mohammad Top.

Since then, several hundred Malaysians have sought to join IS in Syria and Iraq, and a grenade attack on a nightspot near Kuala Lumpur injured eight people in 2016. There have been repeated arrests of Malaysian and foreign suspects, and the security services claim to have prevented various attacks. Returnees from Syria and emerging domestic extremist networks are also causes of concern.⁸⁷ Some research has suggested that extremist views are widespread in the country. One survey found that 11 percent of Malaysians view IS favorably, the second-highest percentage among all countries.⁸⁸

Government measures to counter violent extremism in Malaysia cover three main areas: legislation, including several antiterror acts providing for responses by the police services; intensive rehabilitation, during and after detention, to reduce recidivism; and education to prevent violent actions.⁸⁹ Education initiatives include a range of programs. For example, in 2017 the Ministry of Youth established guidelines, based on government-sponsored research, for promoting public awareness of the dangers of radicalism and involvement in extremism.⁹⁰ The government has also pursued numerous counter-messaging initiatives, while its police services have supported community outreach activities and security partnerships with communities in eastern Sabah.⁹¹

The overall effectiveness of government efforts to tackle extremism is regarded as high—probably higher than Thailand, Indonesia, or The Philippines, the other case-study countries in this report. For example, scores of even hundreds of Malaysians were prevented from traveling to join IS in Syria and Iraq.⁹² Civil society groups have raised human rights concerns over the government approach—for example, over the close monitoring of released prisoners.

Civil society approaches

Civil society has historically found that space to operate in Malaysia is relatively constrained. Malaysia's comparatively strong state, and the long dominance of the Barisan Nasional coalition led by Umno, have restricted civic engagement, especially in sensitive fields such as security. This situation, according to some CSOs, changed after the *Pakatan Harapan*, the Alliance of Hope, won the 2018 election. Dialogue with government on the development of policies to combat violent extremism increased, expanding from favored government research institutes and think tanks to include a wider range of groups. In early 2020, *Pakatan Harapan* collapsed and Umno returned to power.

Civil society engagement in addressing extremism takes a number of forms in Malaysia. Perhaps as a result of both Malaysia's high level of development and the very limited flow of international donor funding into the civil society sector, organizations tend to look beyond traditional socioeconomic development initiatives. Civil society has contributed some unique strategies that emphasize two avenues of counter-messaging: using foundational religious teachings to educate youth, and promoting democratic values and a sense of common national identity. Several research organizations have also contributed to policy dialogue highlighting the threat of extremism and supporting improvements in the government's response.

Causes of violent extremism

Malaysia's unusual policies for governing a diverse population provide a unique opportunity to assess the causes of extremism. Since the adoption of the New Economic Policy after ethnic riots in 1969, the country has pursued policies that favor the ethnic Malay and indigenous majority, collectively known as *Bumiputera*, over the large Chinese and Indian minority communities (respectively 23 percent and 7 percent of the population). Political leaders have argued for the superiority of the indigenous majority, especially Malays, while also following economic and social policies that offer some preferential treatment to Malays. At the same time, political and religious leaders have been promoting a conservative model of Islam since the 1990s.

A combination of factors, stemming largely from this rigid, ethnically defined system, is thought by some observers to create fertile soil for extremism. Ongoing, unresolved questions about identity, citizenship, religion, and socioeconomic integration are thought to feed an extremist Malay mindset. The notion of what it means to be Malay is contested, with some commentators criticizing both rigid ethnic categories and narrow, constitutionally defined perspectives that offer little space for deeper historical and cultural understanding.

A younger, urban generation of Malays also feels stronger connections to Islam than previous generations, partly as a response to the rejection they reportedly feel from economic and political elites and from non-Malay communities. In many respects, this new urban population believes that the state has failed them, as they have not received the anticipated benefits of integration into modern life. These stirrings are not confined to the big cities. A 1,300-person, household-level study conducted by IMAN Research found that approximately ten percent of respondents living outside major cities have a self-reported propensity for participation in violence. Civil society groups have attempted to tackle this malaise by promoting a more grounded awareness of Malay culture.⁹³

Sympathy for the use of violence is reportedly higher than average in the state of Sabah, far from peninsular Malaysia, where intergenerational conflict and questions of identity and citizenship continue to be a daily challenge for many people. State authority is comparatively weak in eastern Sabah, and the proximity to ongoing extremist violence by groups such as Abu Sayyaf in the southern Philippines presents a further challenge. Sabah is also home to a significant population of first- and second-generation Filipino refugees, often stateless and economically and socially marginalized.

Gender

A recent review finds that gender perspectives are largely absent from research and initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism in Malaysia, despite the significance of women's roles.⁹⁴ Recent reports recognize that in Malaysia, as in nearby countries, women have become increasingly active in extremist movements, beyond simply supporting or assisting male protagonists. For example, a 51-year-old mother was arrested in 2018 for suspicion of masterminding a plan to drive a car into non-Muslim voters on election day near Kuala Lumpur.⁹⁵ Despite the increasing participation of women in contemporary extremism, their role has remained under-researched, and women and girls continue to be an underused resource in the fight against extremism.

Government-led antiterrorism efforts

The Malaysian government's Malicious Counterterrorism Strategy is the main document that governs counterterrorist work in the country. It was developed by leading experts in the Counterterrorism Division and is implemented in close collaboration with police and national security forces. The goal is to identify and root out ISIS cells or threats, with lengthy prison sentences or the death penalty for those who are convicted. While some support is provided to improve vocational training in the prisons, most of the work relies heavily on intelligence, including tracking current and former inmates' activities. According to one government representative, in a given group of 200 detainees, just seven will reoffend after release from the Malaysian government's detention program. There are four criteria for success: (1) absolute non-reengagement by the former inmate, (2) a demonstrable change in mindset, (3) effective reintegration into society, and (4) cooperation with authorities on any investigations, requests for information, or other broad solicitations of assistance.

The government's claimed rate of success notwithstanding, CSO representatives report concerns over the lack of transparency. Despite repeated requests for information on the guidelines and training given to parole officers and prison clerics, the government has been unwilling to publicly share that information. One interviewee asserted that those who are arrested will always be charged, without concern for the guarantee of a fair trial. If true, this approach could exacerbate the alienation and disenfranchisement of already marginalized groups and individuals. According to an interviewee from a civil society organization, the government should:

...pay more attention to prevention, rather than countering [violent extremism]. However, the state really seems to feel that countering is their domain. This limited view has somewhat narrowed our perception of VE, limiting it to mainly religious factors, when it's really so much more...about economic and social exclusion.

The number of inmates detained for VE has reportedly risen steadily since 2013. Instead of focusing overwhelmingly on intervention and detention, many interviewees are hopeful that there will be a growing appetite for the government to support prevention initiatives, including the work of nongovernmental and civil society organizations.

Endnotes

1. Adapted from Asia Foundation, *Countering Violent Extremism in Asia: The Role of Development Assistance* (San Francisco: The Asia Foundation, 2017), <http://asiafoundation.org/publication/countering-violent-extremism-asia-role-development-assistance/>.
2. DFAT, *Development Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism*, undated, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-approaches-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>.
3. See, for example, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Development Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism*, p.3, DFAT website, accessed Sept. 23, 2020, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/development-approaches-to-countering-violent-extremism>.
4. For guidance on mainstreaming a gender approach, see:
 - a. the Global Counterterrorism Forum's *Addendum to the GCTF Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism, with a Focus on Mainstreaming Gender*, <https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2019/GCTF%20Addendum%20to%20the%20GCTF%20Good%20Practices%20on%20Women%20and%20CVE.pdf?ver=2020-01-13-141028-400>.
 - b. FHI 360's *CVE Reference Guide for Local Organizations on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion*, <https://www.cverefereceguide.org/gender-equality-and-social-inclusion-gesi>.
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