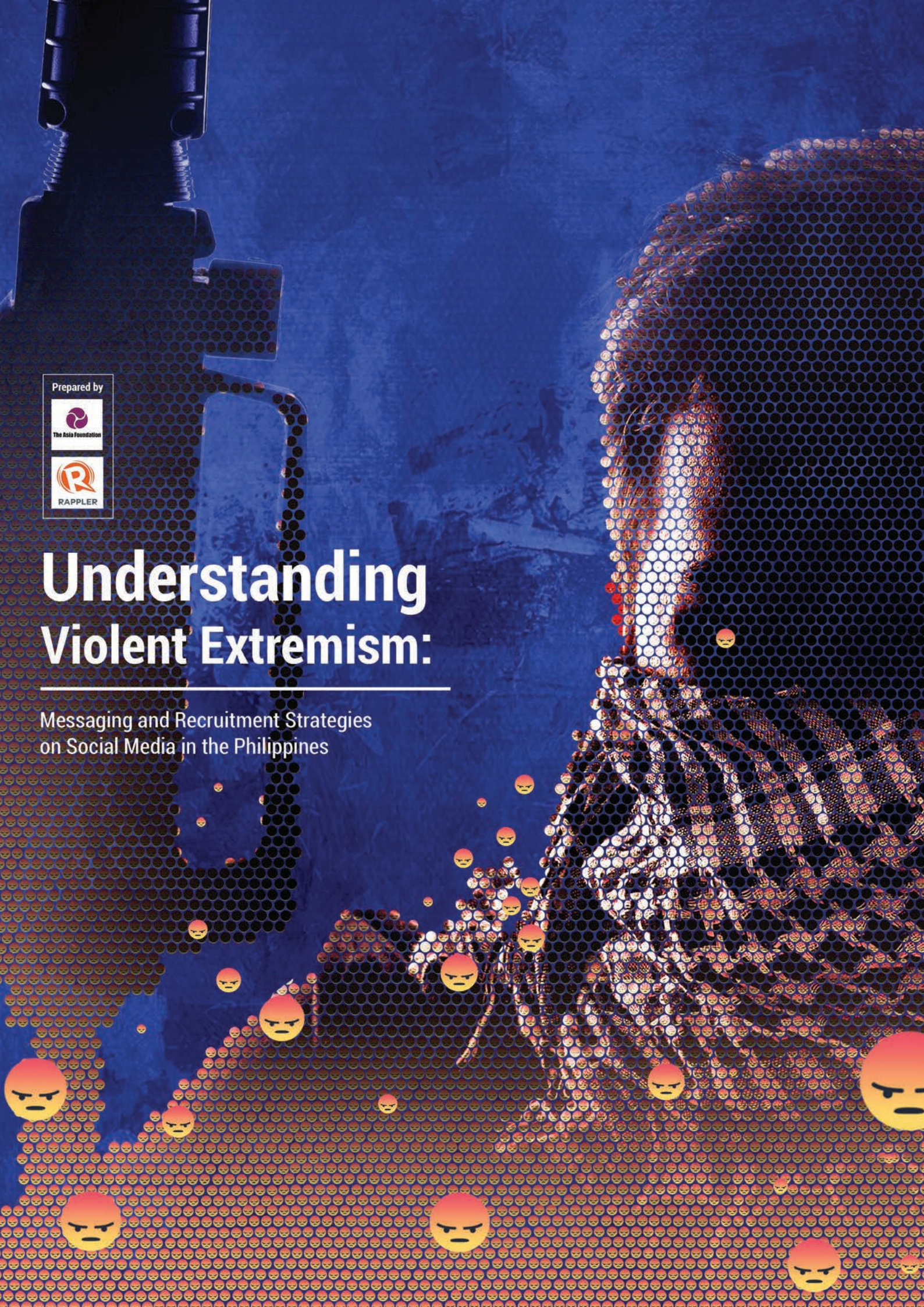


Prepared by



Understanding Violent Extremism:

Messaging and Recruitment Strategies
on Social Media in the Philippines



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The Asia Foundation



RAPPLER

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The Asia Foundation

33F, One San Miguel Ave., Bldg., San Miguel Ave., cor., Shaw Boulevard,
Ortigas Center, Pasig City 1603
Tel: +632 722-9999
Fax: +632 724-9999
Email: philippines.general@asiafoundation.org
Website: www.asiafoundation.org

Rappler Inc.

Unit B, 3/F, North Wing Estancia Offices, Capitol Commons, Ortigas
Center, Pasig City 1605
Tel: +632 661 9983 to 85
Fax: +632 576 3931
Email: desk@rappler.com
Website: www.rappler.com

Executive Summary

Violent extremist activity on social media in the Philippines is a relatively new phenomenon in the complex conflict environment that exists in the southern part of the country. Following the proclamation of the Islamic State (ISIS)¹ caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2014, a significant number of pre-existing Mindanao-based terror groups were seen posting images and video online pledging allegiance to ISIS and its caliph. In the months leading up to the May 2017 Marawi siege, extremist groups used social media to reach and recruit Moros across Mindanao. These actions were followed by the deliberate and tactical use of online media to spread materials about the attacks on the city, as well as online conversations linking local extremists to larger international violent extremist networks.

The rise of online violent extremism emerged despite the Philippines' significant strides in the Mindanao peace process. The island-region has been facing armed rebellions for more than four decades now, caused largely by local grievances against the state. Protracted negotiations with two major rebel groups in Mindanao ended in two peace agreements: the first in 1996, between the Ramos administration and the Moro National Liberation Front, and the second in 2014, between the Aquino government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro between the government and the MILF was a landmark achievement. Yet a number of armed groups rejected the deal, many of which are now engaged in online extremism.

The apparent affiliation of these groups with issues beyond Mindanao and the Philippine state signaled a potential new era of conflict in the country.

With these concerns as a backdrop, The Asia Foundation (TAF) and Rappler worked together to explore how young Filipinos interact with social media networks, and look into the prevalence and characteristics of violent extremist messaging and recruitment in the Philippines in 2018.

The project was built around the following key concern: How are youth young Moros in the Philippines radicalized online?

¹ Also known as Daesh, Islamic State of Syria and the Levant, Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Moros and Mindanaons often refer to local groups adopting their symbolism as 'Black Flag'

The rapid four-month study from March to June 2018 tested these questions through an in-depth examination of extremist activity on Facebook as well as discussions and interviews with at-risk youths in Mindanao who spoke about their personal online experiences and interactions.

The project observed numerous instances of violent extremist activity, and discovered complex networks of online coordination. A majority of the interactions are organic and unsophisticated, and mirror the daily social interactions of digitally active youth.

Some of the key findings are the following:

- The vast majority of violent extremist activities online are opportunistic and unsophisticated. Content is often basic or reactive to larger online discussions, while the range of contact is confined within small community networks.
- Online networks replicate offline communities. This means that the scope for radicalization and recruitment often follows pathways already identified as being influential in the Philippines. To target individuals they already have a connection with, whether through their local communities or other channels, most recruiters regularly use networks such as Facebook and its messaging platform.
- Extremist messaging in the Philippines is highly localized, and connects with local grievances that often spring from the municipal or provincial level. Content expressing support for violent extremism is commonly shared in Moro languages, particularly Maranao, Maguindanaoan, and Tausug.
- The dissemination of highly viral media on global Islamic State channels, as witnessed during the Marawi siege, has diminished. This suggests that those engaged in these activities were either killed or detained when the conflict ended in October 2017, or have shifted tactics.

-
- Violent extremist activity on social media remains a security concern in Mindanao, particularly since it is locally driven and not easy to detect. Further, the continued existence of private networks of communication means that efforts to eradicate public expression of violent extremism will only have limited effect.

The lessons from this study show that the emerging risks of violent extremism on social media are hard to predict. While in general the immediate danger may appear low, the evolution of specific threats suggests that all actors must remain vigilant and engaged in monitoring developments in online activity.

One recommendation based on this research is the crafting of niche, timely interventions to respond to the opportunistic approach extremists have taken online. The tactic of simply removing offensive content from social media sites has proven to be ineffective. More proactive measures preventing and countering violent extremism in both online and offline environments need to be pursued.

It is the aim of this study to inspire evidence-driven policy and programming options for effectively countering and preventing violent extremism messaging and recruitment in the Philippines. Concrete recommendations are presented in the concluding chapter of this paper, directed at national agencies, local governments, civil society, international NGOs and aid donors, the MILF, and MNLF, religious leaders, and universities and academia, as well as social media platforms and companies.

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Chapter 1

The Violent Extremism Landscape and Social Media in the Philippines

The first external signs of the rapidly escalating violence in Marawi on May 23, 2017 came from social media.

Blurry images and videos of cloaked men carrying the ISIS flag began to be posted and shared across Facebook and other sites, as news quickly spread that a major confrontation was taking place between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP) and armed militias in the central business area of the city.² As the conflict spiraled out of control, these images were followed by media releases from the armed groups, as fighters began sharing footage they had captured while engaged in combat.

The five-month siege in Marawi was an attempt by the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS)-Ranao – a force comprised of predominantly Maute Group fighters led by Omar and Abdullah Maute, along with Isnilon Hapilon of the Abu Sayyaf Group – to establish a region of the Islamic caliphate in Mindanao. The groups behind the attack had previously pledged allegiance to ISIS, sharing images and videos of their ritual through YouTube and social media platforms. This marked a new phase wherein a global form of violent extremism is espoused by a small number of political actors from other parts of the world

who, in the case of the Philippines, adopted public communication tactics not previously deployed by violent extremist groups in the country.

These realities indicate a new era of violent extremism in the Philippines, where advances in internet penetration and communication technologies enable linkages that were not previously possible between international conflict theaters. Given the impact of social media on the actual battlefield during the Marawi siege, the activities of violent extremism actors in Mindanao – both offline and online – need to be better understood.

1.1 Context & Demographics

Historically, only a small portion of Filipinos joined extremist groups like the Abu Sayyaf or the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters because of ideology. Prior to the ISIS-inspired groups, evidence suggests that the majority of Filipinos who joined violent extremist organizations did so for two reasons: poverty and/or kinship.³

The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in Mindanao has long dealt with conflict

² "Maute Group waves ISIS black flag on Marawi streets," Rappler, May 23, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/170729-marawi-city-black-flag-maute>

³ The comparison of ideologically driven terrorism in Southeast Asia is documented in Ressa, Maria. *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al-Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia*. New York: Free Press, 2003. You can find more focus on Philippine networks and kinship ties in Ressa, Maria. *From Bin Laden to Facebook: 10 Days of Abduction, 10 Years of Terrorism*. London: Imperial College Press, 2013.



BLACK FLAG. ISIS black flags are seen atop vehicles roaming the streets of Marawi City. Photo by Maulana Macadato

and discontent, going back to the Spanish colonial era. It is where the vast majority of the Philippines' over 6 million Muslim population⁴ lives, within Asia's largest Roman Catholic nation. It is also home to some of the Philippines' poorest regions. While the national poverty incidence rate is 21.6 percent, ARMM's poverty incidence rate is drastically higher at 53.7 percent.⁵ It also has more out of school youth in the country, at 14.4 percent compared to 10.6 percent nationwide.⁶

The confluence of these social indicators means that membership in armed groups is often predicated

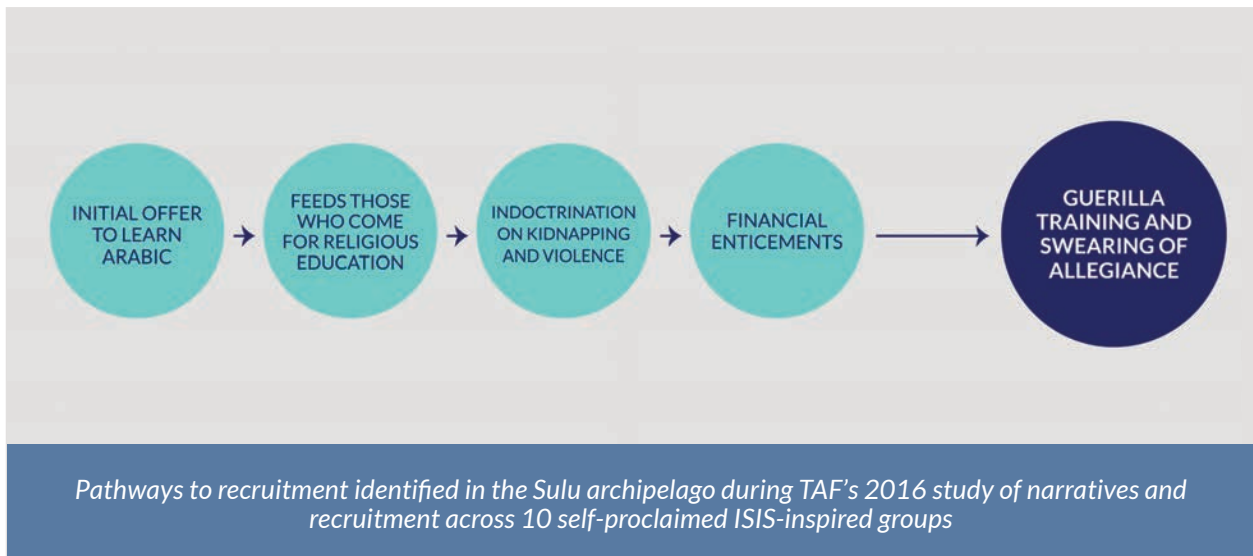
on a number of determinants. Ideology may inspire participation, but other factors such as poverty and kinship play a significant role. In interviews with the Abu Sayyaf Group kidnappers of journalist Ces Drilon in 2008, the young men pointed out that they joined the group because of family or for protection. By joining, they become part of a gang, given a job and a gun.

These multiple avenues toward engagement in violent extremism were affirmed by TAF's 2016 study that looked into radicalization and recruitment in Basilan and Sulu, provinces where the Abu Sayyaf

⁴ Factsheet on Islam in Mindanao," Philippine Statistical Authority, September 28, 2017, <http://rso11.psa.gov.ph/article/factsheet-islam-mindanao>

⁵ See Table 2. Annual Per Capita Poverty Threshold, Poverty Incidence and Magnitude of Poor Population, by Region and Province in Tables and Thematic Maps, Philippine Statistics Authority <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases/data>

⁶ Rodriguez, Fritzie. "IN NUMBERS: #PHVote and PH Education," Rappler, March 15, 2016. Available at <https://www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2016/125903-ph-education-in-numbers>



Group have been active. While Islamic education featured in the recruitment model, the underlying conditions were linked to food, shelter, and financial incentives.⁷

Kinship inspires loyalty. This is evident when observing the operation of violent extremist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Maute Group. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), once Al-Qaeda's primary link in Southeast Asia, used marriages to strengthen strategic ties between groups from across the region. The ties that bind ISIS-affiliated groups are often built on the legacy of Jemaah Islamiyah, such as those connected with the target of the failed Mamasapano operation, the slain Malaysian Zulkifli bin Hir (commonly known as Marwan).⁸ He married women whose families connected him to JI, MILF, ASG, and the BIFF. Marwan also provided training to members of the Maute Group and worked with the Ansarul Khilafah Philippines (AKP).

1.2 Social Media Landscape & Messaging

The above narrative shows how offline networks are fundamental to the way violent extremists recruit supporters and fighters to their cause. These complex networks of extended families and communities are the foundation for most of the violent extremist groups across Central and Western Mindanao, and the Southeast Asian region.

As more Filipinos gain access to the internet, social media fuels an environment where offline worlds get reinforced online, and the networks that sustained previous interactions become more embedded as interactions and conversations continue. In June 2016, for example, AKP's Mohammed Reza Kiram appeared in an ISIS video from Syria,⁹ along with a Malaysian and an Indonesian (both of whom had trained in the Philippines) exhorting Muslims around the world to go to the Philippines for jihad.

⁷ Understanding Violent Extremism: Narratives of Radicalization and Recruitment in Mindanao," The Asia Foundation, forthcoming.

⁸ Ressa, Maria. "Exclusive: Marwan's ties that bind: From family to global terrorism." Rappler, February 8, 2015. Available at <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/83258-marwan-ties-family-global-terrorism>

⁹ Ressa, Maria. "Filipino millennial joins ISIS in Syria." Rappler, January 27, 2017. Available at <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/159609-millennial-terrorism-isis-philippines>



the Marawi siege brought together a mix of computer-savvy college recruits...

The video came two years after the declaration of the caliphate, and at a time when the Islamic State was already under significant military pressure from a coalitions of forces across Iraq and Syria.

But that wasn't the first time a Filipino used social media to push for a global jihad. In 2011, Filipino Khalil Pareja, then head of the Rajah Solaiman Movement and speaking in Arabic, used YouTube to ask Muslims to support and contribute to jihad in the Philippines.¹⁰ On Facebook, he connected with leaders of other Al-Qaeda-linked groups, making plans to join the terror network in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen. It was the first of its kind, triggering a wave of videos and audio messages from Filipino jihadists declaring allegiance to Al-Qaeda online and on social networks.

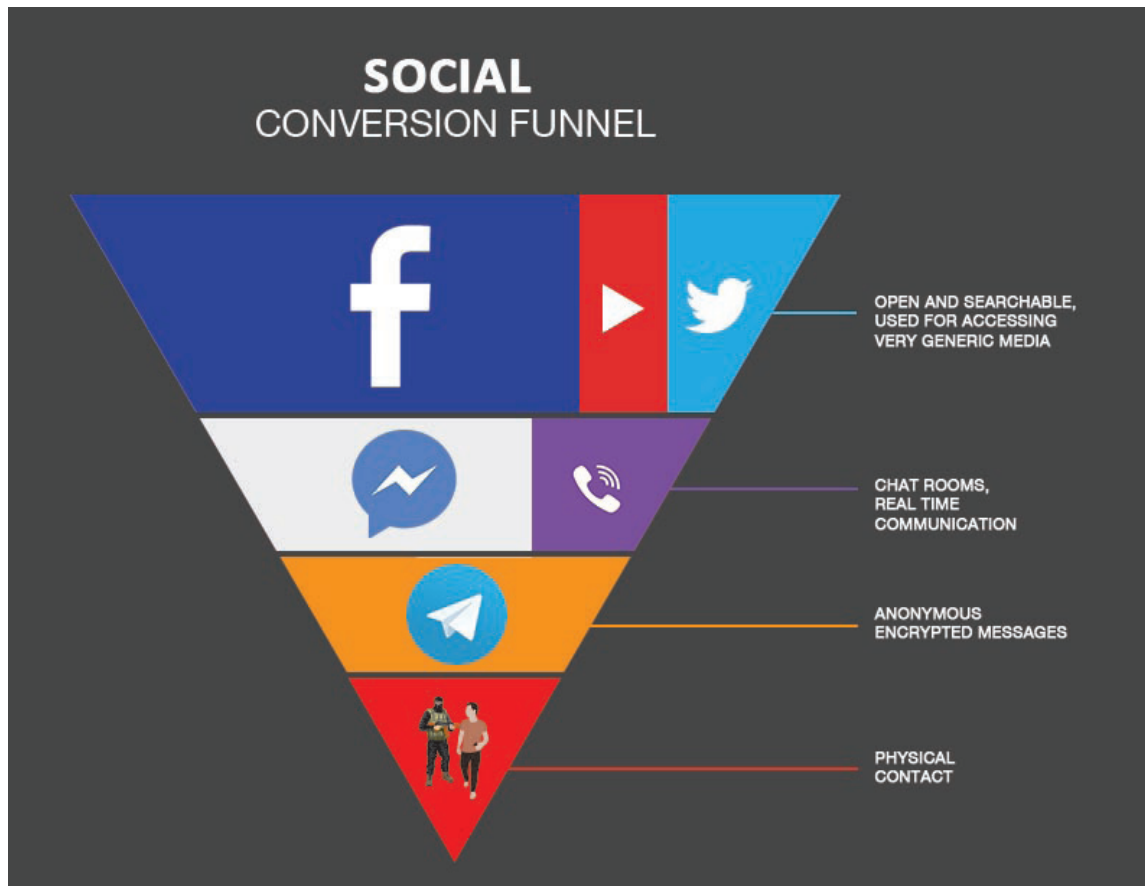
At the time, the Philippines was known as the social media capital of the world. Today, there are at least 67 million internet users in a country of 105 million people. Nearly 97 percent of them are on Facebook.

By late 2014, Indonesian and Filipino ISIS supporters had pledged loyalty to ISIS leader Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Pro-ISIS groups in the Philippines used the top of the recruitment funnel – open social media – not only for propaganda but also to contact ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Once connected publicly, they could move into private conversations on common internet-based messaging applications, such as WhatsApp. Later, ISIS began to direct recruits to use more secure messaging services like Surespot and Telegram.¹¹ Khatibah Nusantara, the ISIS unit of Southeast Asians, assisted Muslims in the region to travel to Syria, by providing funding and helping with travel arrangements and logistics. By the time the Marawi siege began, Telegram offered enough security and features that allowed violent extremist groups one-way broadcasts that reached up to 10,000 members; semi-public interactive chat groups; exclusive private groups; and secret chats for two-person communication.

In 2017, the Marawi siege brought together a mix of computer-savvy college recruits from “university campuses in Mindanao, including through Muslim student organizations and their alumni at Catholic institutions as well as at state universities and polytechnic institutes,” said a report,

¹⁰ Ressa, Maria. “Exclusive: YouTube, Facebook link Filipino terrorists to al-Qaeda,” Rappler, September 11, 2012. Available at <https://www.rappler.com/nation/12217-youtube-facebook-link-filipino-terrorists-to-al-qaeda-amp-global-jihad>

¹¹ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, “Indonesia & the Tech Giants vs ISIS supporters: Combating Violent Extremism Online, IPAC Report No 48, July 27, 2018. Available at http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2018/07/IPAC_Report_48.pdf



CONVERSION FUNNEL. Social media channels used at various points of the conversion / recruitment process in the Philippines

citing an interview with a senior military officer in Cotabato in October 2016.¹² It added, “As with other ISIS-inspired or directed operations, one of the immediate imperatives of the ISIS coalition was to document and post its triumphal takeover of Marawi on ISIS media.”

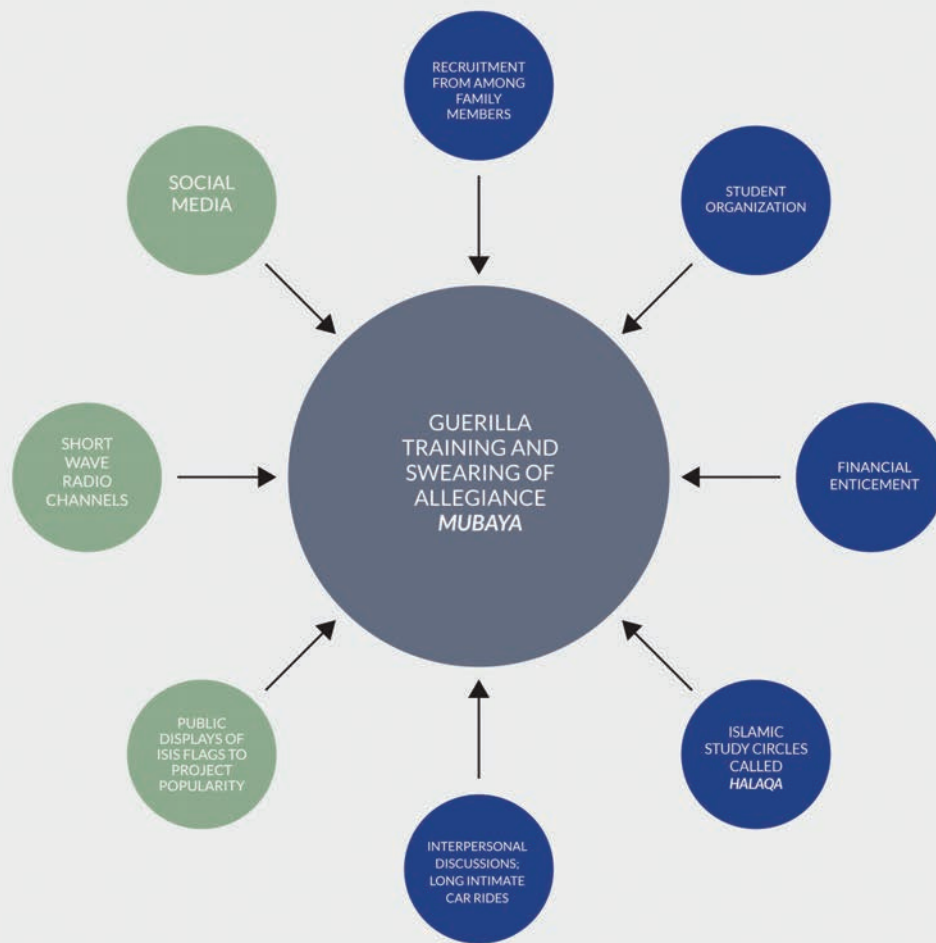
These qualitative developments marked a new era of violent combat in the Philippines, where close urban warfare was for the first time broadcast throughout the Philippines and across the globe by actors intent on drawing support for their cause.

Many of those who were recruited and who fought in Marawi were “reportedly devout youth from well-off families with the ability to contribute

substantially to the cause,” including at least two sons of prominent politicians. At the same time, according to an Impl. Project survey of nearly 3,000 people,¹³ which was focused on 15-35 year-olds in Lanao del Sur, the perception among Lanao del Sur residents was that the real foot soldiers of the Marawi siege were poor and uneducated out-of-school youth in Butig and Piagapo, recruited by Farhana Romate Maute, the Maute brothers’ mother, with the promise of an Islamic education. The recruitment messages effectively leveraged “widespread vulnerability, economic desperation, ineffective governance, and ethnic marginalization.” These recruits were joined by Abu Sayyaf members under Isnilon Hapilon and other commanders.

¹² Gutierrez, Natashya. “How pro-ISIS fighters recruited Filipino youth for Marawi siege,” Rappler, July 22, 2017. Available at <https://www.rappler.com/world/regions/asia-pacific/176302-muslim-youth-recruitment-marawi>

¹³ Impl.Project report of surveys done before, during and after the Marawi siege, ARMM 2018: Risks & Opportunities, released January 2018.



Pathways to recruitment identified in Central Mindanao during TAF's 2016 study of narratives and recruitment across 10 self-proclaimed ISIS-inspired groups

The Asia Foundation's study of drivers of radicalization in 2016¹⁴ shows how local violent extremist groups in Central Mindanao have been able to draw in recruits through a complex array of recruitment channels. While familial ties still remain important, these co-exist with old and new forms of recruitment, including the active recruitment of Moros to fight with local extremist groups through social media.¹⁴

According to a complex network analysis conducted by Gregory Waters and Robert Postings, the network of Facebook accounts in the Philippines linked with extremism is one of the most interconnected in the world, second only to Afghanistan.¹⁵ It reaffirms the narratives in this introduction and evidence collected in the report that the network among violent extremists in the Philippines is extremely interconnected, existing between different cells

¹⁴ The Asia Foundation, 'Understanding Violent Extremism: Narratives of Radicalization and Recruitment in Mindanao', forthcoming. These observations were shared by both IPAC reports and Impl.Project surveys.

¹⁵ Gregory Waters and Robert Postings, "Spiders of the Caliphate: Mapping the Islamic State's Global Support Network on Facebook" (New York, London, 2018).

and members at a national level. But the report also points out that these networks have the least number of external connections, highlighting the domestic origins of online frustrations compared to global motivating factors. It also shows that connections between local terrorist actors in the Philippines and global networks are relatively few compared to others.

1.3 The Report

This document is the summation of four months of research from March to June 2018 into the complex nature of the intersection between social media and violent extremism in the Philippines. The project was built around the following key question: How are youth young Filipino Muslims radicalized online in the Philippines?

Three distinct but interlinked questions were tested throughout the course of the study:

- [1] What are the primary platforms through which Moros and Muslim youth access information through the internet?
- [2] How do proponents of violent extremism disseminate their views, publicize their actions and promote their ideologies online?
- [3] How are members of violent extremist groups recruited online in the Philippines, and what narratives and techniques do they use?

The goal is to establish the evidence base that would help in the crafting of policy and program recommendations for effectively countering and disrupting violent extremism messaging and recruitment in the Philippines. To achieve this, we developed and deployed a mixed-method research method involving qualitative and quantitative processes, four focus group discussions (FGDs) across key sites in Mindanao and Manila, and key informant interviews with experts and individuals with personal experiences in online violent extremism. Rappler, an organization with considerable experience in monitoring online discourse and propaganda, conducted a four-month social media network analysis of Facebook groups prominent in Mindanao. The results of these activities drive the information and analysis found in this report.¹⁶

The following chapters address the research questions and contain digital and narrative evidence to support the report's claims. Findings and recommendations for Philippine national agencies, local government, civil society, international NGOs and aid agencies, the Moro fronts, religious leaders, universities and academia, and social media platforms are provided in the concluding chapter.

¹⁶ Further information on the design of the study can be found in annex 1.

Chapter 2

Young Filipinos and Social Media Usage in the Philippines

Among online platforms, Facebook is the most popular in the Philippines.

The number of Facebook accounts in the country is almost equal to the number of internet users among the population. For many Filipinos, Facebook is the internet. As of 2018, there are 50 to 60 million monthly active Facebook accounts in the Philippines, according to Facebook's Audience Insights dashboard.¹⁷



For many Filipinos, Facebook is the internet

One of the main reasons that Facebook far outpaces other social media platforms in the Philippines is that mobile users can access the app for free even without data subscription. On the other hand, Twitter, which figures significantly in studies overseas on the use of social media by violent extremist groups, only has roughly 9.5 million users¹⁸ in the Philippines and requires a paid data subscription.

In terms of monthly traffic, Facebook, with an average of 1,046,200,000 total visits per month as of fourth quarter of 2017, also far outpaces other social media sites like Youtube (at 330,400,000) and Twitter (at 68,300,000), according to data from SimilarWeb.¹⁹

Facebook is popular across all age groups but is particularly dominant among the youth.²⁰

¹⁷ Facebook Audience Insights is a tool designed to help marketers learn more about their target audiences, including aggregate information about geography, demographics, purchase behavior and more.

¹⁸ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/490561/twitter-users-philippines/>

¹⁹ SimilarWeb's Ranking of Top Websites, Digital 2018: The Philippines, February 1, 2018, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2018-philippines?rq=philippines>

²⁰ It should be noted that the accuracy of Facebook demographics information has been questioned, see: Simon Kemp, "Facebook demographics analysis reveals several startling truths," <https://thenextweb.com/facebook/2017/03/22/facebook-demographics-analysis-startling-truths/>, March 22, 2017



There are no precise Facebook or online statistics on specific population data, such as young Moros in the Philippines. Facebook's Audience Insights dashboard estimates that the platform has between 8,400,000 to 10,150,000 users in Mindanao (see chart below). Based on these statistics, the level of Facebook usage in Mindanao is therefore between 33 and 40 percent, below the national average of 60 percent.²¹ Anecdotally, these figures would seem to correlate with the relatively weak penetration of internet services on the island, particularly in remote, non-urban areas.

Assuming that the demographics on Facebook are similar to population figures per location, the

estimated number of Mindanao-based Muslim Filipinos would be between 999,460 to 1,233,272. Within the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, it is estimated that there are between 273,840 and 319,479 Muslims active on Facebook. This means that less than 10 percent of the region's Muslim population are active on the social network site.

Despite these low metrics, results from the focus group discussions as well as key informant interviews are consistent with the conclusions that Mindanao-based Muslims with internet access are all equally active on Facebook. A key requirement in targeting participants is their exposure to social

²¹ Figures are calculated based on 2015 Population and Census data.

| City\Platform | Facebook | Twitter | Instagram | Snapchat | Pinterest |
|---------------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Manila | 100% | 29% | 39% | 0% | 0% |
| Zamboanga | 100% | 28% | 38% | 3% | 13% |
| Cotabato | 100% | 32% | 43% | 3% | 14% |
| Iligan | 100% | 13% | 16% | 10% | 3% |
| Total | 100% | 25% | 34% | 4% | 7% |

Percentage of Focus Group Discussion participants on different social media platforms



Facebook is almost the exclusive theater through which extremist actors are able to grab the attention of local audiences and engage in dialogue with persons they're seeking to influence.

media and the internet. Four workshops were conducted in Manila, Zamboanga City, Cotabato City, and Iligan City in March and April 2018. The workshops were attended by a total of 122 participants aged 18 to 35 years old.

All 122 individuals who participated in our FGDs are active on Facebook. Meanwhile, only a quarter had Twitter accounts (31). Other social media platforms that participants used were Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest. The majority of the participants have been on social media for 5-7 years.

For these reasons, this report focuses on violent extremism as observed and experienced across Facebook in Mindanao.

As the platform where nearly all internet-active Moros are present, Facebook is almost the exclusive theater through which extremist actors are able to grab the attention of local audiences and engage in dialogue with persons they're seeking to influence. The following two chapters outline the methods that violent extremists use in spreading their messages on public forums, and the types of private interactions which aim to recruit susceptible Moros to support their cause.

Chapter 3

Extremist Content and its Dissemination on Social Media

On May 30, 2017, at the height of the battle between government forces and the Maute Group in Marawi, kidnappers of Marawi priest Father Teresito Soganub released a video of their captive on Facebook.²²

In the video, Soganub echoed his kidnappers' demand for Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte to withdraw government troops from Marawi City.

Calling himself and his fellow captives as “collateral damage of war,” Soganub told President Duterte: “Do not use violence, because your enemies, they are ready to die for their religion. They are ready to die that their laws will be followed.” He added: “Mr President, you are from Mindanao. You know the conflict in Mindanao. You know the problem in Mindanao. I hope, Mr President, you understand them. I am also saying these things, Mr President, because you know the history.”

The video attempted to connect the Maute Group's attacks to deep-seated grievances that young Filipino Muslims share with their fellow Muslims in the Philippines and other parts of the world. A number of these pressure points, which surfaced in the FGDs, were also evident in online conversations:

the repeated delays in the peace process, discrimination against Muslims in school and at work, and alleged abuses by Philippine security forces in perennially war-torn provinces.

In the following months, this particular video was removed from Facebook and the internet. This was done reportedly upon the request of the Philippine military. However, copies of the video remained online, and were widely covered by news and other digital media and shared by Facebook users.

The fact that the video, which could only have come from the Maute Group or its allies, was circulated on social media shows how local violent extremist groups were conscious of the power of this medium in shaping public opinion during that period.

This study, which was conducted almost a year after the Marawi crisis erupted, found no Philippine public groups or pages dedicated to and exclusively promoting local violent extremist groups. If there were such groups during the siege of the city, they may have been erased by Facebook for various reasons, such as requests coming from the Philippine military and online users. Nevertheless, the study managed to identify over 30 active Facebook accounts which published posts and comments

²² Paterno Esmaguel II, “Propaganda shows Marawi priest echoing kidnappers' demand,” Rappler, May 30, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/171413-propaganda-shows-marawi-priest-echoing-kidnappers-demand>

PHILIPPINES

Propaganda shows Marawi priest echoing kidnappers' demand

'Do not be happy, Mr President, that we are the collateral damage of war,' Father Teresito Soganub says in a propaganda video after he was kidnapped in Marawi City

**Paterno Esmaguil II**

@paterno_ii

Published 4:00 PM, May 30, 2017

Updated 11:30 AM, May 31, 2017



Facebook



Twitter



Reddit



Email



MAUTE CONTROL. Father Teresito Soganub issues an appeal to President Rodrigo Duterte, apparently under the control of the terrorist Maute Group. Facebook screengrab

A screen grab from Rappler of the video released by IS-Ranao featuring Father Teresito Soganub

openly supporting ISIS and the Maute Group. Many more can be seen to position themselves in a manner which, through their posting of text, images, and banner and cover photos, clearly seek to draw a direct connection between their profile and the symbolisms associated with violent extremism and the Islamic State. These users identified themselves as Filipinos, are shown in their profiles and posts as being located in various provinces in the Philippines, or used local languages in voicing such support.

These instances are discussed further in the next chapter.

The video of the Marawi priest was not the only pro-Maute content that was circulated on – but eventually taken down by – Facebook during the Marawi siege. Takedown requests figure significantly in the Philippine military's intervention approaches when it comes to content circulated on social media.²³

²³ Carmela Fonbuena, "PH military asks Facebook to close terrorist accounts," Rappler, June 9, 2017. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/172479-philippine-military-facebook-close-terrorist-accounts>



Available data indicate that the online strategy to radicalize Filipino Muslims has been largely opportunistic

That other accounts and similar content remained online a year after the siege – providing a rich albeit incomplete material for this study – along with fresh content that has been posted since, means that Facebook is unable to completely filter or wipe out dangerous content. It also casts doubt on the effectiveness of deletion as a strategy towards addressing the spread of such content on social media.

Almost a year after the fighting in Marawi, available data indicate that the online strategy to radicalize Filipino Muslims has been largely opportunistic. Large-scale digital campaigns are typically characterized by the use of hashtags, common keywords, and copy-paste messages distributed across public spaces and public conversations (public groups, public pages, public posts). The project found no evidence of these strategies during the period covered by the study.

The posts supporting ISIS and ISIS-linked groups appeared uncoordinated and scattered. Much of the extremist content was observed in the comments sections rather than the posts themselves. The posts that do exist are in line with the common practices of young people sharing pictures and updates on their personal lives, or political and religious messages that they commonly identify with. Messaging is personalized, reactive, and poorly-planned, at odds with the professional and coordinated extremist messaging usually associated with the Islamic State, its news agencies and affiliates. These types of messages, lacking the clarity and coherence of other observed social media influencing campaigns, raise doubts about their efficiency but also make them difficult to track, map, and respond to in an automated manner.

3.1 Types of online content

Despite this incoherence, it is possible to identify commonalities relating to violent extremism. Messaging exploits grievance over particular issues – often local – and adopts a position that expresses opinions meant to influence communities against the government and the military. Certain issues appear to gain wider traction in Mindanao provinces, and these are exploited to radicalize targeted local communities.

The following recurring “hot-button”²⁴ issues were particularly referenced in violent extremist content identified during the study:

²⁴ “Hot button” issues refer to topical concerns that are regularly shared among communities, and across regions. A master list of priority issues was built during the focus group discussion phase of the research, and verified through the monitoring of conversations online. See annex 2 for greater discussion of hot button issues in the Philippines.

I Care for Bangsamoro Movement
1 June at 17:55 · 🌐

HINDI original na BBL na sunod sa peace agreement kung di isang malabnaw na BBL ang ipapasa ng congress. Kaya maraming na dismaya dahil parang fake BBL na ang ipapalit sa ARMM. Isang halimbaw, na tinanggal ay ang kapangyarihan ng Bangsamoro pakinabangan ng buo ang kanikang yaman dagat at lupa. Sa ipapasa na BBL, ang national government parin ang may control sa mga natural resources.

Sa bicameral meeting, maari pa ito maresolve at pagusapan para umayon sa agreement ng MILF at government.



Like Comment Share

41 Most relevant

18 shares

Richard Teguano ubusin yan lahat..
Like · Reply · 1y

Angel Jo E Martial law na pra maubos na mga demonyo
Like · Reply · 1y
1 Reply

Yulimar Abalos Pls pray po sa marawi city
Like · Reply · 1y

Wesley James Hangad nang pangulo ay kapayapaan Hindi giyera...
Like · Reply · 1y

Thrice Fabul Anoline Castro caloocan daw
Like · Reply · 1y

Gabby Delatorre Lord help the people marawi city
Like · Reply · 1y

Jameso Gardo Wala nabang tigel
Like · Reply · 1y

Mark Anthony Perlas Carrasco Grave
Like · Reply · 1y

Mark Anthony Perlas Carrasco Katakot ngaun lng ito
Like · Reply · 1y

Bryan Sime Becul walang is sa marawi clla milf
Like · Reply · 1y

Archie Lazaro

Like · Reply · 1y

Hanny Hana I want all the so called #ISIS to all die 🙏🙏🙏🙏
Like · Reply · 1y

Aimee Nara Bedia gd mr
Like · Reply · 1y

Rahma Shalika Yarub sana nasa safe ang nga anako
Like · Reply · 1y

The post (June 1, 2018) claims that the BBL to be passed by Congress is a watered-down version and is not compliant with the peace agreement between the government and the MILF. Nonetheless, it says this can still be resolved at the bicameral meeting. At the time of capture the post elicited 41 reactions, 11 comments, and 18 shares.

- The futility of the peace process between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)
- MILF leaders, including the late founder Hashim Salamat and current leader Ebrahim Murad, as “kafir” or infidels
- Debate across Islamic theological lines, and discrimination against Muslims at work and in school
- Alleged human rights violations committed by soldiers in perennially war-torn provinces

The supposed futility of the peace process is a particularly hot-button issue in a Facebook group for residents of Cotabato City and Maguindanao, where the seat of power of the ARMM government and the center of gravity of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are located. A large number of posts on public pages provided political commentary on developments surrounding the drafting and passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law in Congress, and these often garnered a large number of interactions – comments, likes, and shares – debating the merits of the ongoing discussions.

Linked to this, a culture of criticism and resentment towards the MILF was noticeable in Mindanao-based Facebook pages and groups, with posters and commenters attacking the MILF for its handling of the peace process, and in some instances labelling them as traitors of Islam. In general, the MILF has been criticized by some sections for the delays in the implementation of the peace agreement and what they perceived as compromises that the movement had entered into in its talks with the government.

In the period covered by the research, these posts critical of the MILF proliferated. And they continued even after the passage of the Bangsamoro Organic

| | SAHABA | ISIS | TABLIGH | MILF |
|-------------------------|--------|------|---------|--------|
| KHILAFAH | | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| SHARIAH | | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| JIHAD | | ✓ | ✗ | \$\$\$ |
| KILL MURTAD | | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| JIZYA | | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| BLACK FLAG | | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| DARUL ISLAM | | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| ANSAR MUHAJIREEN | | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |
| PUGOT ULO | | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |

| بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ | |
|--|-------|
| SHIA | SAUDI |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | X |
| X | ✓ |

Datu A Miyakamboko
 Follow · June 10 · 🌐

AYABO A MAANUG KA S MGA MURTAD AYA NA SO ULAMA E REREDOON AME KNABA AME MAN REREDOWA A MGA UMALA NYO ANAN N KGYA SKAME BODN E TEYOLIK ERAN NA AMAY KA GYA MGA SAROWANG A PIYANALA ENGDAN ERAN SO DARPA EYO NA DE ERAN PAGEPTAAN SO MGA TAO A PKATAROS IRAN KA KGYA MGA PD ERAN KO TAGUT NA AMAY SKAMI AYA BO A MAANUG KA KIRAN NA MGA KAWARJ NA ILAYN SO MGA KATHARO ERAN NA LANGON SERAN E MASO2GATON KA PAPAKAYN ERAN BO A GYA BBL KA RAMIG AYA IRAN IPHAMATHAY KA NA DERAN KATWAN NA AYA MALA A PKA ANTIYOR KO PARATIYAYA IRAN AGO SIMBA IRAN KO ALLAH KA PKITOMPOKAN IRAN S KAPANAKOTO SO KOKOMAN O ALLAH SO PKABINASA A PEUR NA DE AYA ERAN PAGATAKIIN KA AYA IRAN PHAGATAKIIN NA SO PLINDING KO KABNAR O ALLAH AYA OKIT IYAN NA SO MGA KATHARO O ALLAH A QUR-AN AGO HADITH na so aya katharo eyan na DEMOCRACY aya nyan de epangoyat na TAGUT de eran pageptaan KA IKASOSOWAT IRAN antona anan a mga UMALA aya eran psangkaan so enesogo o Allah ago so kapranga ko langowan a tagut ago sherk anda dn a mga otk eyo anan va menge sombo dn s kape2ya genawa nyo ko tagut a de nyo aya khanonowan so mga katharo o ALLAH S QUR-AN AGO DI NYO KITUNDUG SO PAGANAY A ROKON O ISLAM A.SO LAILLAHAILLALLAH.

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 📺 🗣️

A post dated June 10, 2018, comparing elements within Islamic and Bangsamoro society against ISIS, claiming that the MILF is simply using 'jihad' in the pursuit of wealth.

Law in July 2018. These posts prompted the MILF to set up and promote the Facebook account of its leader, Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, and warn supporters and followers against fake online accounts masquerading as accounts of the MILF Central Committee.

Violent content related to theological debates was also rife across social media in the Philippines during the period covered by the research. The schism of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims was a prominent issue in Marawi and Lanao provinces, and so were other conversations around religion. During the Marawi siege, for instance, the Shi'a mosque in the city was destroyed by extremists in the same manner that they desecrated the St. Mary's Church of the Catholics.

FGD participants recounted how verses (ayah) in the Quran were being spliced and exploited during the Marawi siege to recruit support and fighters for the war. One particular verse that was manipulated to justify violence originates from Surah Al-Baqarah (2:190), which begins: "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you." This phrase is however incomplete, as the full text includes the following: "But do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors."

Manipulated versions of this ayah were circulated on Facebook during the early stages of the siege, though in response, a concerted effort to correct these misinterpretations was observed among some communities. Moderate voices were seen regularly responding to such posts and attempting to counter the conversation by sharing the complete version of the verses.

Likewise, anger, disinformation, and extremist views against the Philippine government and



The posts above depict the religious tension between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in the Philippines.



The post calls on all followers of Darul Ifta of the Philippine Grant Mufti Abuhuraira Udasan to realize that they were being led astray with wrong teachings. The post calls on them to focus on the "correct" version of the surah.

the military were posted, particularly at the height of the Marawi siege. The dominant grievances centered on the displacement of Maranao communities from their homes, and the widespread destruction of the city following the military's constant bombardment of terrorist hideouts.

While President Duterte remained popular in Mindanao during this period, dissenting voices regularly attacked posts shared by other users about the President's comments on the siege and

the city's rehabilitation. For example, a news item on President Duterte apologizing for the destruction in Marawi triggered comments that said Duterte should just have allowed the establishment of an Islamic *wilayat* in the city instead of ordering the military to bomb it. In the thread below, one account posted a comment which called for the strict enforcement of sharia law because it's what would "stop the bad habits" of the Maranaos. The comments also blamed the government for the violence.

WE are MARAWI
#TOGETHERWEWILLRISE

Marawi City Current News/update, Pulse survey

Home
About
Videos
Posts
Photos
Community
Create a Page

Marawi City Current News/update, Pulse survey is with Ups Khan Renayong.
20 June 2017 · 🌐

Nanghihingi ngayon ng sorry si Pangulong Duterte sa lahat ng taga-Mindanao dahil sa pagdeklara niya ng Martial Law sa rehiyon. Iginiiit ng pangulo na kaya siya nagdeklara ng Batas Militar dahil gusto niyang mapulbos na ang teroristang grupong Maute. Nangako si Duterte na ibabalik niya sa normal at maayos na pamumuhay ng mga residenteng naipit sa kaguluhan. Tutulong din umano siya sa rehabilitasyon para manumbalik ang kagandahan ng Marawi City.

Repost from even de mata.

Political organ

Community
Invite your
37,743 peo
39,042 pec
Carmela Fc

About
Send mess
Political orq
Suggest Ed

Related Pages
Mara Comr
Mara Blog
LGU Gove

Pages liked by t

#repost Tatang digonggong
Kungg hinayaan muna Ing sana ung mga extremist na yan ipatupad nila ung sharia law sa marawi hindi sana ito mangyayari, pareho kau ngaun ng mga maute na sumira sa marawi..wla mang mangyayari kung waling offensive movement ang gwra ng government..the objective of the isis is to stop the bad habits of the meranao such as dealing drugs,prostration, and others habit that are not allowed in islam.. and force the people to do good things in appropriate in islam.

#Dogterty!
#DutaeAso!
#Manguotonanaman!

#Repost
mamiss e kataro so politician, "3 to 6months tapos na droga baba ako s pwesto pag ndi natupad.", "pupunta ako s spratly island magwawagay ako ng flag ng philippines and sisigaw ako ng this is our land", "tataasan ko sweldo ng pulis", etc more promises.

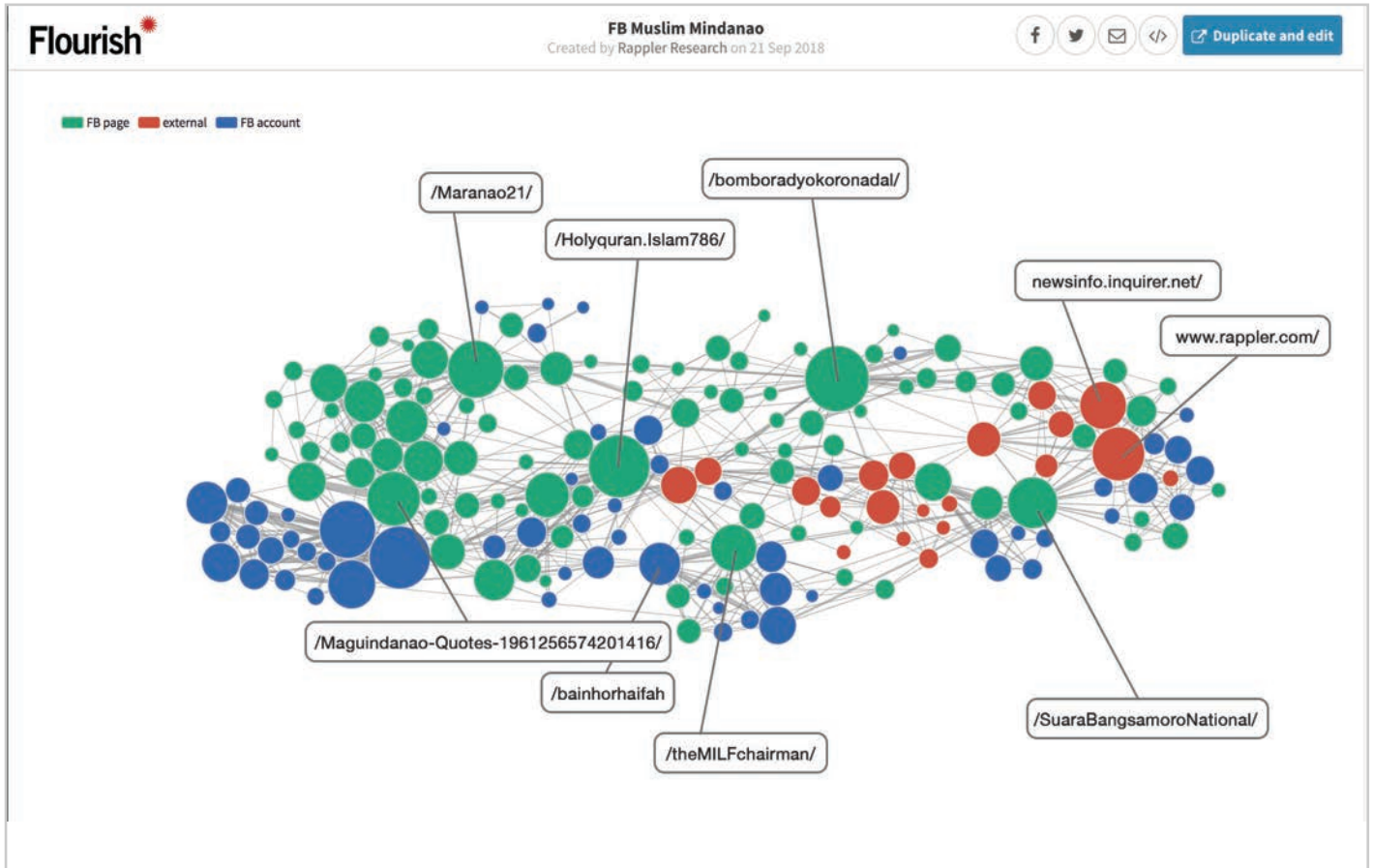
ou binuto ko cea para Ing makakita ako ng babarilin ng mga chinese nakasakay s boat s spratly. kaso sayang di natupad.. poro dada Ing pla.

#Repost
OPAMA NA PHAKAMIYADAAN O MRANAO SO KYAPULANG O MGA SIBILYAN SABAP KO MGA BOMBA KAGIYA MYAGSORRY? PHAKAMIYADAAN O MRANAO SO KYAGABA A MARAWI KAGIYA MYAGSORRY? PHAKAMIYADAAN IYO A KYAPAKADAPANAS O MGA BANGSA TANO A MRANAO KAGYA MYAGSORRY? EY! ANDA DEN MYATAGO A MARATABAT IYO INI KO INGED IYO, BANGSA NIYO A KCHATOMO IYO SO KAPANARIGI KO MYAKADAPANAS REKANO. DI TANO DEN NAE MARGA SA KYA AKALA NIYAN REKITANO? PAGNAW KANO MGA MRANAO. MALO KANO BO LAMBA KO MARATABAT IYO. SO ALLAH E SARIGI O MYAMARATIYAYA. KNABA SI DIGO.

Like · Reply · 50w

1,810 shares
1.5K comments

The President apologizes to the people of Mindanao for his declaration of martial law in the region, clarifying that it was declared to defeat the Maute Group. Duterte promised to bring normalcy back to communities affected by the siege. He also promised government assistance to rehabilitate Marawi City. One comment on this post claims that the destruction of Marawi could not have happened if the government allowed ISIS to enforce sharia law in Marawi and correct the 'bad habits' of the Maranao.



A network map of pages and groups in Facebook where researchers found conversations around hot-button issues identified by young Moro participants in this study.

Lines between nodes in the graphic above are drawn when same users share content from both. Most of the groups and pages are either dedicated to specific Moro communities or are devoted to issues relevant to these communities.

As the network map shows, these online forums (groups and pages on Facebook) are highly interconnected through shared content and common users. This raises the possibility that these messages could be shared across multiple groups by common users. This network could connect those supporting violent extremism or recruiting fighters with the larger communities of Moros.

These messages are commonly posted in local languages and seek to connect with local geographic and ethnolinguistic communities by equally drawing on both Moro and broader Islamic sentiments. In turn, they play a role in arguing for the acceptability of violence, advancing their cause, and providing some form of legitimacy to the correctness of what they propagate as the true “jihad.”

Chapter 4

Online Recruitment over Social Media in the Philippines

As mentioned earlier, the nature of violent extremism on social media in the Philippines limits the capacity for public examination of trends around recruitment.

In the Social Conversion Funnel developed by Rappler, recruitment efforts by individuals via social media are conducted in private channels, typically behind layers of private groups and encryption that limit the possibilities of open source analysis. This frustrates military and intelligence agencies charged with monitoring social media activity.²⁵



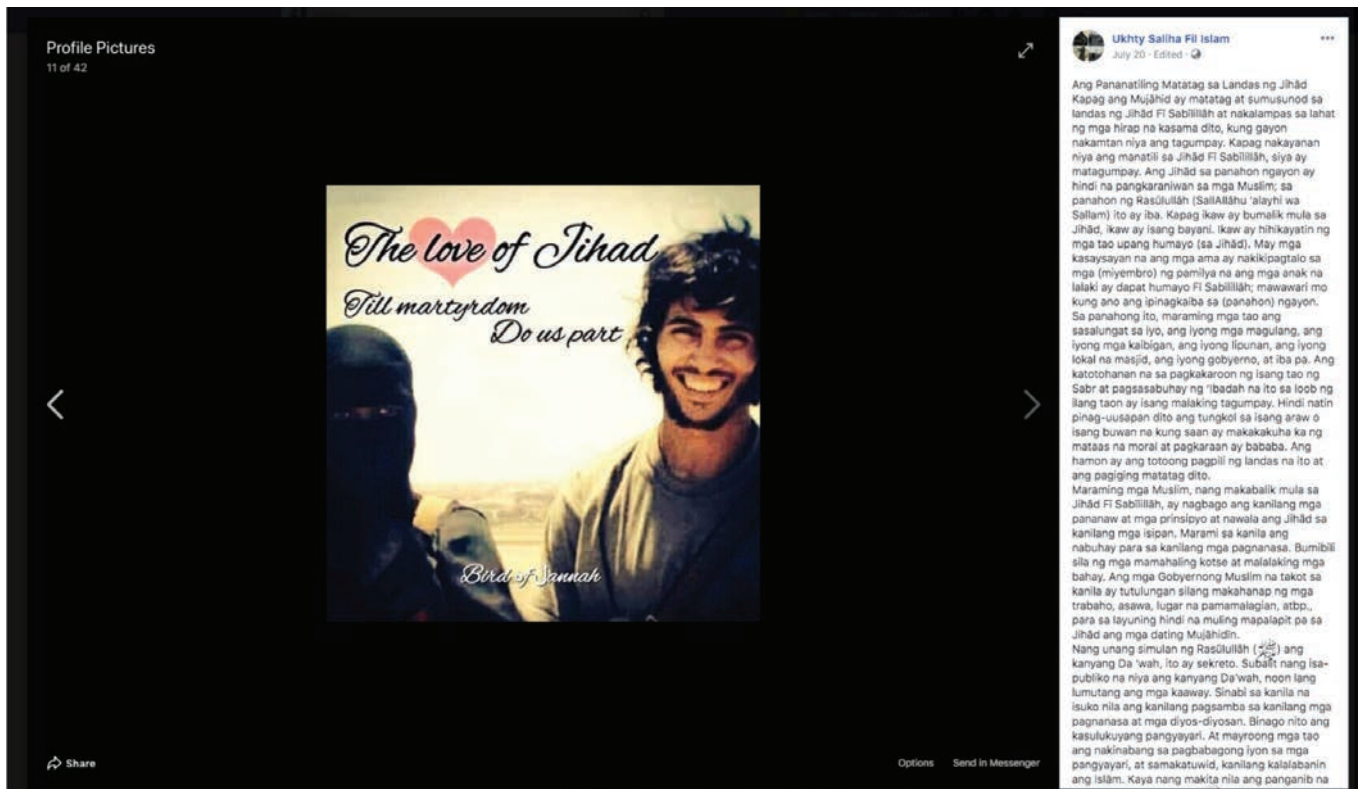
Facebook Messenger has become the most active online channel through which violent extremist groups approach and attempt to recruit local Moros.

Research by the Institute for the Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) in Jakarta and others showed that the free and encrypted Telegram mobile app played an important role in the early days of the Marawi siege, allowing persons involved with the Maute group and other violent extremist activities to connect to a larger international conversation. IPAC detailed how encrypted group conversations exploded with the news of the outbreak of violence on May 23, with direct calls for ISIS leadership to declare a wilayah (region of the IS caliphate).²⁶

Generally, however, most Muslim Filipinos do not seek or are unable to access services such as Telegram or WhatsApp. None of the 122 participants in the focus group study were active on Telegram, while less than 10 used WhatsApp. On the other hand, all our FGD participants were active on Facebook Messenger, which, with the use of free data allowance on mobile phone networks, allows easy and continuous connection to the network. Thus, Facebook Messenger has become the most active online channel through which violent extremist groups approach and attempt to recruit local Moros.

²⁵ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/04/world/asia/isis-messaging-app-terror-plot.html>; <https://www.theverge.com/2017/9/20/16338128/whatsapp-reportedly-refused-request-uk-government-access-encrypted-messages>

²⁶ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict. "Marawi, the 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia." Jakarta, 2017.



The above post, shared by Moro women, speaks of the importance of staying true to the path of jihad. The caption reads: 'The love of Jihad till martyrdom do us part'.

The social media network analysis identified no evidence of open recruitment in public conversations monitored on social media. There was no particular post that guided potential recruits or linked them to particular groups. If anything, messaging by alleged propagandists mainly tried to stir up support for their so-called “jihad” or the Marawi siege. In particular, women were identified by key informant interviews as particularly active in this space on social media. These online activities were buttressed by active offline efforts by some women to join ISIS-affiliated groups in order to offer themselves as brides to the fighters. When asked about this, one of the research informants said that the women wanted to marry ISIS fighters before they died because there would be reward for them and the fighters “in paradise,” citing a misinterpreted hadith.

The FGDs and key informant interviews revealed three ways in which social media is used in the Philippines to target and approach people and recruit them into violent extremist groups. Echoing findings throughout this report, these tactics are often unsophisticated, awkward, and opportunistic, aligned with organic interactions with internet communications similar to the general population.

The research showed three primary recruitment methods in the Philippines:

- Online recruitment leveraging offline connections: Using social media to contact people already known to the recruiter in their local community networks;

- Online recruitment through digital communities: Using closed special-interest groups to spam group members, drawing on limited shared connections between the recruiter and their target, in order to expand networks; and
- Online recruitment targeting sympathetic strangers: Targeting public posts and comments that appear sympathetic to violent extremist ideas, in an effort to engage those persons in further private discussion and eventual offline contact.

The following section takes a look at these in depth.

4.1 Online recruitment leveraging offline connections

For many, social media is directly connected to their offline lives and communities; their “friends” on Facebook are direct connections to their everyday lives – family, school friends, and colleagues. Interviews and focus group discussions show that in Mindanao, peoples’ online networks are commonly connected with their local barangay and municipal communities, and more broadly at the provincial level. Depending on the duration and activity level of a person’s social media presence, people may count thousands of digital friends, ranging from diverse communities they are no longer closely connected with, including schoolmates, and other connections that may no longer feature prominently in a person’s day-to-day lives.

Regardless of the level of regular offline communication, these digital connections can remain active for years. Persons who are active or sympathetic with local violent extremist groups may seek to contact current and past connections via a private Facebook message, looking to engage with

them in discussion on themes associated with violent extremism, and test their targets’ receptiveness to further recruitment. Similarly, individuals can be added into private group conversations by benign contacts or otherwise – both on Facebook and other platforms like WhatsApp – where people are actively engaged in sharing violent extremist media. One key informant interviewee reported being added into two such groups on WhatsApp, where videos and messages pertaining to recruitment were shared in Tagalog, English, and Arabic. One such video was drawn from international ISIS media sources, featuring the terror group’s justification for burning the captured Jordanian pilot Muath Safi Yousef al-Kasasbeh in 2015.

Where active recruitment is the target, efforts are made in these private conversations to move digital discussions into personal offline interactions. Targeted persons are invited to gatherings, trainings, or other theological or promotional activities. These offline efforts, which fit the Social Conversion Funnel developed by Rappler, are aimed at convincing them about the merits of joining the group and its more violent activities.

These narratives of recruitment add an online dimension to the types of local recruitment observed in the lead-up to the Marawi siege. Islamic study groups, or halaqa, among students in Lanao del Sur educational institutions, including the Mindanao State University-Marawi campus, were said to be significant in attracting them to join the Maute Group.²⁷ Halaqa are a traditional way of da’wah or preaching, which per se is not an indication of extremist recruitment, though it may become a platform for recruitment if infiltrated by extremist recruiters. Evidence from this study showed that personal recruitment efforts continue, though their scale is difficult to ascertain due to their private and clandestine nature.

²⁷ The Asia Foundation. “Understanding Violent Extremism: Narratives of Radicalization and Recruitment in Mindanao.” Pasig City, 2017.; Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy. “Ramadi to Marawi: Proceedings of the Conference on Peace and the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia.” Quezon City, 2018.

Informant

Interview One: Acquaintances

Fulan²⁸ is active on social media, posting frequently on his Facebook wall regarding Islamic theology and teachings. His posts arise from his deep commitment to his faith, relating to his own personal beliefs in Islamic ideas of jihad (struggle). But he refrains from criticizing the government or the MILF.

Fulan was approached in relation to his posts by former classmates and contacts from colleges in Cotabato City through Facebook Messenger. The approach was aimed at starting discussions related to the topics which Fulan had been posting on, seeking to engage him in debate to enlighten him about their different interpretations of Islam. These contacts mostly come from people known to Fulan, but at times are also masked in aliases. But Fulan says he knew who they were.

The students and out-of-school youth in touch with Fulan were part of a group referred to by the informant as Ansarul Khelafa Islamia, or AKI. According to Fulan, AKI's motivation to propagate ISIS activities in Cotabato stems from the hadith of Al-Bukhari, which states: "The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fear."

The recruiters from AKI sought to convince Fulan that groups like the MILF were traitors, as they had made alliance with kufar, or those that don't believe in Islam. They engaged in written communication, and also shared pamphlets and other documents through Facebook Messenger. Once engaged in discussion, they invited Fulan, on several occasions, to join them in Islamic study groups, which he did on a few occasions. These events took place in mosques and in areas where local populations were relatively small. On one occasion, Fulan was invited to visit the AKI's headquarters in Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat, and was asked to join the group.

In the end, Fulan says he did not join them despite their insistence. Sometime later, during a military exercise in Palimbang, Fulan said some of the people who had contacted him and were in the area to watch the activities were arrested.

²⁸ Not his real name

4.2 Online recruitment through digital communities

The second form of online recruitment in the Philippines identified by the study shares a number of similarities with the first. As in the first form of recruitment, people tend to become members of online communities with which they share offline connections. Facebook, along with other social media platforms, allows for the construction of online spaces for dedicated communities that revolve around both niche and broad discrete themes and topics. These platforms allow any user (or a select group of users) to establish or join any number of individual communities that they wish. On Facebook, these come in the form of groups and pages, the types of micro-networks that were a core component of analysis for this study.

The previous chapter highlighted the capacity of both small and large digital communities to be spaces of discussion and contestation of ideas on violent extremism. Of added significance is the existence of private groups which are likely to draw controversial discussions away from the public eye, as well as the presence of government agencies interested in gathering intelligence on what they deem to be suspicious communications.

To be clear, the study did not identify any private group which directly engaged in violent extremism – including during the FGDs and key informant interview components of the research. This does not mean they do not exist. However, increased proactive response by social media networks to identify and remove violent extremist material would likely pose a challenge to their open existence. In many instances, private groups are not kept private from network operators, as is the case with Facebook. However, what were identified during the focus groups discussions and interviews is the tendency of a small number of violent extremist actors to take advantage of the nuanced networking capacity of social media to target groups of which

they are members of, or groups that they perceive to be potentially receptive to targeted messaging and recruitment.

In the case of the study, certain types of groups – particularly those featuring known socially-engaged Muslims with interests in broader community activity – were exposed to targeted approaches for messaging on violent extremism. These efforts differ from the previous form of violent extremism recruitment in that the recruiters are regularly unknown to the target, or are so loosely connected that they would not normally form a close offline community. Instead, their connections are either by mutual affiliation, or potentially shared, niche interests.

The study uncovers a small number of efforts to recruit sympathetic individuals by directly messaging members of a private group in order to engage them in conversation and convince them of further action. The lists of these members are often freely available to members of the group, and even without active engagement in the group's activity, an individual might simply be identified through this method and contacted privately. The niche nature of many of these groups means that the recruiter can have greater certainty of their target's geographical location or potential amiability to extremist messages.

The methodology adopted by this study means that it is uncertain how prevalent this form of approach is in the Philippines, but it doesn't appear that violent extremist groups have adopted these methods in any consistent or systematic manner.

It is assumed by the researchers that such efforts are only undertaken by particularly social media-savvy, enterprising individuals, who are reacting to opportunities commonly presented to them by the communities they have access to. Regular adoption of this tactic is also highly risky, as the recruiters expose themselves to being reported to the social

media network, leading them to be excluded from the community. Regardless, the research reveals how social media has enabled access to new and unique forms of community outside of typical social

interaction, and how these might be harnessed by violent extremist groups for messaging and recruitment.

Informant interview Five: Networks

Aboud²⁹ is a respected individual in his local community in Basilan. His work with the community while in college led him to become a high-ranking official in the Muslim Students Association (MSA), a student collective aimed at supporting and lobbying on behalf of Muslim students. After being a member of his MSA for a number of years, he joined a private MSA alumni Facebook group.

Living in Basilan and being an engaged member of the Muslim community meant that Aboud had interactions with local violent extremist groups. When he was an official in the MSA, recruitment by the Abu Sayyaf Group was prevalent, but rather than through the internet, students were targeted by members through school visits. He had received violent extremist material from friends, including audio recordings from friends of a da'wah of Yemeni Imam Anwar Al-Awlaki, who had been tagged as the "Bin Laden of Social Media," because of his charismatic prose delivered in fluent English. These recordings were not shared to him via the internet, but as files on removable disks.

It was through the connections in the private MSA alumni Facebook group that Aboud encountered social media recruitment. A former colleague who had access to the network was identified as sending private Islam, was reportedly married to an expatriate Islamic preacher who was residing in Zamboanga during the siege. While it is unknown how successful these efforts were, it was clear that persons with violent intent were seeking to leverage private networks to attract sympathetic people to their cause.

4.3 Online recruitment targeting sympathetic strangers

The third form of social media recruitment identified by the study focuses on participation in general interest public groups and pages. As identified in chapters two and three, there is the possibility for wide sections of the community to participate in vibrant online discussions on current events such as politics and violence in Mindanao. These posts can attract thousands of engagements – likes, comments, and shares – and provide an opportunity

for voices sharing sympathies with violent extremist groups to share materials and thoughts to a captive public audience.

A large number of participants in the FGDs reported encountering these conversations on groups and pages to which they subscribed. For a small yet digitally-savvy subset, they had been engaged in active discussion and debate with these profiles, either in a genuine manner or purposely seeking to argue or 'troll' these users. In some instances, focus group discussants reported the shifting of these

²⁹ Not his real name

conversations from public channels to private, where the person sends them a direct message looking to extend the debate further, or share supporting material including web links and otherwise.

In other instances, recruiters sought to exploit comments in public forums they deemed supportive

of their cause to privately contact individuals online. It is unclear from the research whether these efforts were coordinated, but gauging from the common thread in FGDs, interviews and data analysis, these were likely the operation of opportunistic, enterprising individuals.

Focus Group Discussion Four: Public target

Local extremist groups in Mindanao do not use social media as a means for massive recruitment. However, targeted, opportune efforts do take place, particularly aimed at those who are more socially engaged and seeming to share opinions amiable to persuasion, and potential recruitment.

Mohamad³⁰, during the FG D in Iligan City, admitted to an instance where he had posted a message online which expressed some support for the Maute Group at the height of the Marawi siege. The comment was on a post in a public forum, and therefore was seen not just by his local Facebook community but by the larger online diaspora that was tapped into the conversation.

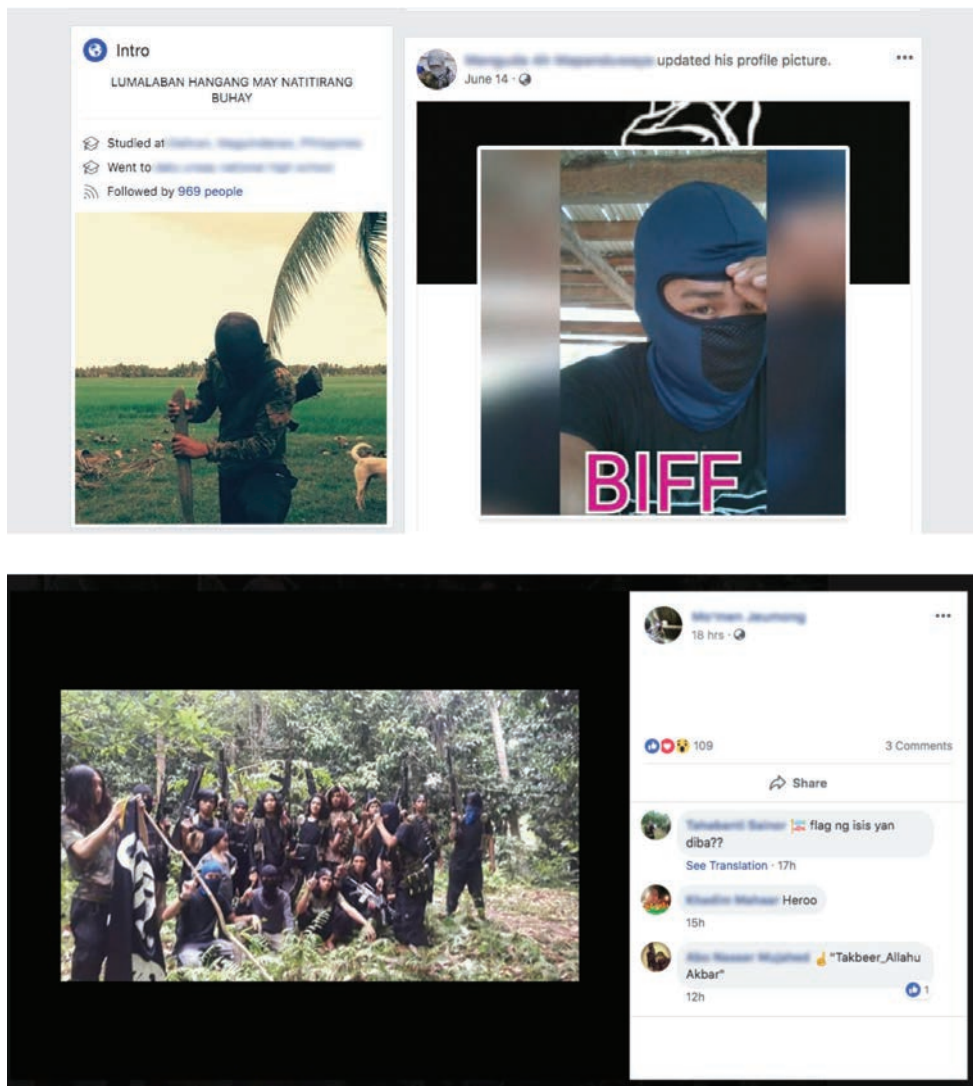
After his post, Mohamad received a direct message from a stranger, asking him to support the Maute Group and join the fight. While the message sender did not provide any details of how he can support the fight, the attempt showed a proactive if unsophisticated approach by some members of violent extremist groups to randomly contact sympathetic individuals online.

4.4 Additional forms of online violent extremist activity in the Philippines

The study identified another form of violent extremist activity by a substantial number of accounts in the Philippines that posted words and images associated with violent extremism. Many of these accounts carried the “Black Standard” flag used by Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, an insignia that’s gained a somewhat global branding for these two groups. The other content in these

Facebook profiles – both from the Philippines and other areas such as in the Middle East – included pictures of people showing themselves holding one pointed finger raised upwards, in a pose now synonymous with indicating belief in the oneness of Allah (tawhid), often accompanied by a verbal pledge of allegiance (bay’ah). Similar posts often included Islamic verses, proclamations to the sanctity of Allah, verbal denunciation of the infidel or unbeliever, kafir, and graphic images of military encounters or terrorist attacks.

³⁰ Not their real names



Screengrabs from public Facebook profiles reveal the relatively simple and authentic method through which some users promote their violent extremist actions.

The ways in which some Moros adopt naming conventions linked with violent extremism is notable. Many adopt the prefix “Abu” (meaning “father of” in Arabic) as a way of projecting their connections with violent extremist activity in the Philippines. While the prefix is common throughout the Muslim world, in the Philippines it might be unduly linked to the extremist Abu Sayyaf Group. But this is wrong since many of the posts by users with Abu-prefixed aliases were in various languages, such as Tagalog, that are not associated with the terror group.

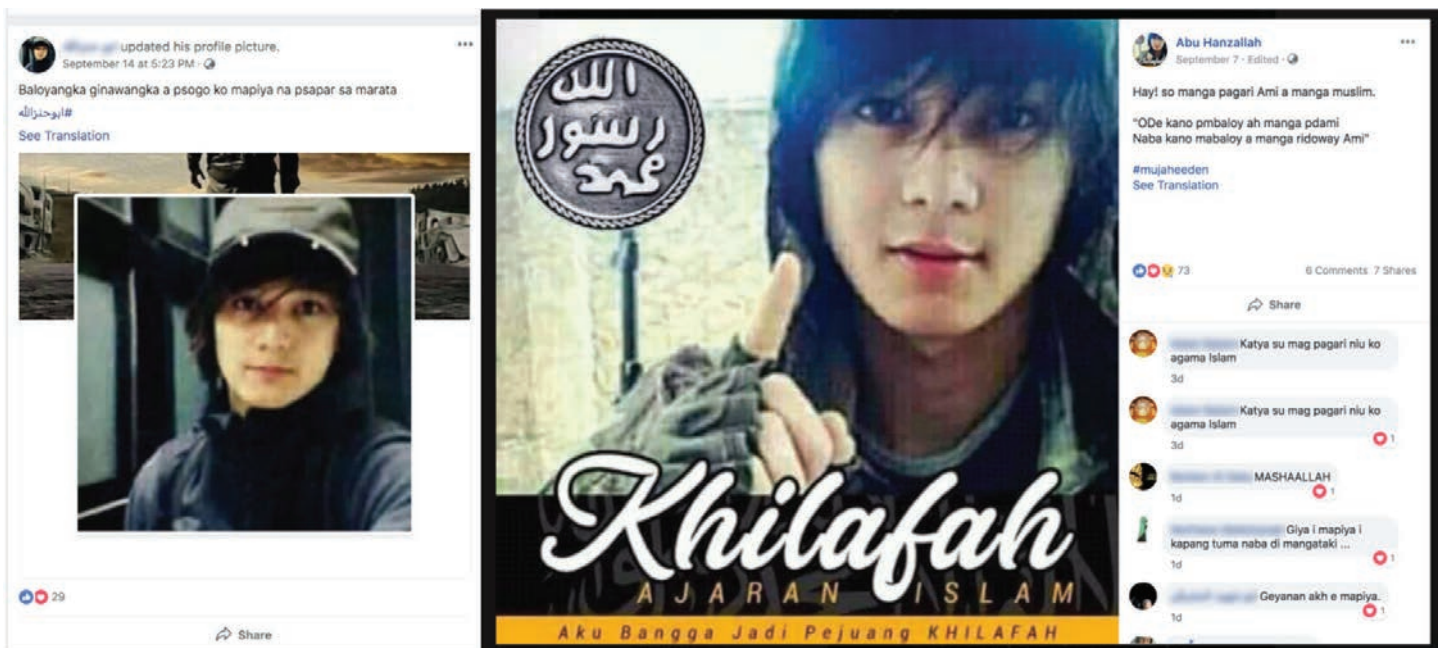
The proliferation of these profiles and their direct links to extremist messages was identified during

the interview component of the research, and verified on numerous occasions by the research team. Many of these pages can attract thousands of friends, though are also regularly deleted.

Due to limitations, the study has been unable to pinpoint in greater detail the exact operations of these Facebook profiles. There is evidence that some profiles mimic ISIS tactics by referencing the Amaq news agency – the news agency of ISIS – in reporting on violent extremist activities in Mindanao. The mimics appeared rudimentary with minimal impact.



The above screenshots depict some Facebook users appearing to adopt methods which more directly link them with the Islamic State and global trends of violent extremism. The low number of engagement reveals their relative ineffectiveness.



The above posts show two screenshots of two different Facebook profiles, both using images of the same person. Both accounts are under the name 'Abu Hanzallah', though one is in Arabic characters. It is unknown whether the pictures are of the person(s) in charge of the accounts, but both accounts clearly originate in Mindanao.



A coordinated community among violent extremists exists on Facebook.

Some of the posts seemed to adopt tactics associated with messaging patterns of violent extremism globally, such as when Twitter was used to create a large number of secondary accounts, many of which lay dormant and were activated only when the primary accounts have been detected or deleted upon request from authorities. The extent to which this is prevalent in the Philippines is not clear.

At the minimum, the research established that members of violent extremist groups use social media in a way that most online individuals do. Facebook accounts of violent extremist group members regularly share text, images, and videos that they've taken or received – of people pledging allegiance to Islamic State or a particular group, of them posing with weapons, or of their comrades in training camps. These images allow them to easily connect with a digital community of people who share their views or commitment to violent extremism.

Beyond this, we know from the study that a coordinated community among violent extremists exists on Facebook – through the use of recognizable profile names and nom de guerres, the gathering of a large number of “friends,” and sustained online presence of extremist messages and images. This does not mean that the same online communities are also engaged in violent extremist activities on the ground, or are recruiting people outside their networks to the violent extremist cause. What it tells us is a continuing, if not evolving, phenomenon on social media in the Philippines, and across the world.

Chapter 5

Findings and Recommendations

Violent extremism on social media in the Philippines is largely characterized by disorganized and opportunistic forms of communication that reveal the largely organic nature of local violent extremist activity in Mindanao.

Throughout the course of the study no organized network of messaging or recruitment was identified, with the vast majority of observable activity undertaken by individuals in a manner that appeared to reflect patterns of engagement that mirrored recruitment activities familiar among offline communities.

These findings are surprising considering the proactive nature of violent extremist groups in the way they used the internet prior and during the siege in Marawi. Images and videos from Mindanao of militants declaring allegiance to the Islamic State, posted in the weeks and months following the claimed establishment of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria, circulated widely across Facebook and YouTube. These posts appeared to mark the first coordinated use of social media as a platform for publicizing the activities of homegrown violent extremist groups. When the siege in Marawi began on May 23, 2017, a new breed of online activity featuring sophisticated use of modern technology, including video footage of combat and drone surveillance of damaged buildings and infrastructure, was shared among violent extremist networks in the Philippines and internationally. Many of these digital outputs were picked up and used by the Islamic State in its Al Amaq news outlets, as part of the terror network's campaign to inspire insurgence, and motivate non-Filipinos to consider traveling to Mindanao as an alternative battlefield to the Middle East.

However, in the months following the end of the siege, these activities slowed down significantly, and the remaining content on Facebook began to more closely represent the types of opportune, incoherent outreach activities identified in this report. Much of the content that persisted at the time of the completion of this research was coded in a manner that makes detection and disruption by security agencies and social media organizations difficult, particularly where the activity had shifted into private channels of communication.

The risk remains. Violent extremist actors in the Philippines continue to use social media, spreading content and attention-grabbing images. They are active on Facebook, fast and creative in their posts. And there is significant



There is significant evidence to show that violent extremists continue to use online channels to recruit adherents.

evidence to show that they continue to use online channels to recruit adherents.

At its core, the Philippine experience highlights the need for niche, timely interventions in response to the opportunistic approach that extremists have taken online.

For one, the tactic of simply removing the offending content from social media sites has its own limitations. What needs to be pursued are more proactive measures that prevent and counter violent extremism in both online and offline environments. The absence of structured, positive messaging on core topics of discussion among these online communities highlights the opportunity that exists for organizations to experiment when implementing programs providing peaceful responses to violent extremism.



A cookie-cutter response to extremist posts has minimal impact compared to locally-driven responses unique to each comment and environment...

The findings of the report suggest that a more formal approach—such as an outright social media campaign with explicit and standardized processes, executed by outsider moderators—would not be a sufficient match to the extremists’ more haphazard, casual technique of finding possible recruits. A cookie-cutter response to extremist posts has minimal impact compared to locally-driven responses unique to each comment and environment, and made directly by a community member.

Indeed, organic violent extremist messaging and strategies may well require organic responses.

The community must therefore understand that prevention is imperative. The simple act of encouraging a contestation of ideas led by the overwhelming majority of more moderate local voices has the potential to significantly diffuse the propagandists’ momentum.

In light of these findings, the report has collated a number of specific recommendations which suggest areas for action by national agencies, local governments, international and local NGOs, the Moro fronts, religious leaders, universities and academia, and social media companies more broadly:

NATIONAL AGENCIES

- **Balancing censorship and information:** There is a need to balance the necessity of preventing the spread of violent extremist messaging online and the need to build knowledge on extremists’ online presence and behavior. While it is important to take down social media posts and accounts espousing violent extremist messages, it is just as significant to be able to track the social media reach of these posts and accounts. Data from this

exercise would be valuable for insight and deeper understanding of violent extremism online. The government should push for an exhaustive and data-driven analysis of violent extremist groups' behavior and social networks. The forthcoming National Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism might be the appropriate opportunity to outline a clear strategy for national agencies in dealing with online violent extremism.

- **Cybersecurity:** The Department of Information, Communications and Technology should begin reviewing government capacity to respond to violent extremist activities on social media, especially with regards to existing laws and institutional capacity. At present, cyber resiliency measures appear insufficient to respond to this, particularly surrounding major conflicts such as the Marawi siege in 2017. For an informed and effective approach, the Philippines can draw good practices from other countries. Any proposed changes to the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 (R.A Act 10175) or other legislation should also be considered within the context of citizen rights to communications and technology.
- **Engaging with online communities:** Relevant government agencies such as the OPAPP, AFP, and PNP should build the capacity to effectively engage with the large Bangsamoro online communities in organic online conversations and online channels on issues that are relevant to them. Efforts in this space should build on current engagements, with the aim of creating a positive two-way dialogue, as opposed to just information downloading.
- **Rapid change requires collaboration:** The use of online communication by extremist groups will continue, and security forces will find it challenging to keep up with rapid advances in technology and practices. While efforts should be made to improve skills and expertise in these areas, it is important for

security agencies to engage with the broader peacebuilding community and take advantage of the diverse range of voices that can help shape positive messaging.

- **Opportunities for positive influences:** Security agencies need to see online exchanges and conversations not just as an intelligence source, but also as an opportunity to influence meaningful conversations on issues that are relevant to marginalized communities and people.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- **Digital literacy of LGUs:** The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) should consider a digital literacy program to support local governments in improving interactions with local communities. The DILG has initiated awards for digital cities in 2018, which may provide one avenue for future recognition of cities that are trialing new approaches, but provinces and municipalities have less resources and capacity and would benefit from access to tools for engaging in online discussions about local issues.
- **Online engagement with constituents:** Online spaces should not be seen as removed and distinct from local offline communities. Local strategies for online engagement should complement and be enmeshed with CVE strategies undertaken at the local level. Failure to do so risks ceding the online space to extremist groups, and may lead to misunderstanding and willful misinformation.

CIVIL SOCIETY, INTERNATIONAL NGOS, AND AID AGENCIES

- **Integrate offline and online activities:** The study illustrates how online interactions closely mirror offline communities and relationships. Online P/CVE programs should



Online-focused programs should be sustained even after the plebiscite on the BOL.

not be considered as separate. Incorporating online activities with current programming should be considered as a potential force multiplier for offline interventions.

- **Harness the plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law:** CSOs and International NGOs have already begun the process of building and strengthening communications around the January 21, 2019 plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Care should be taken to ensure that online efforts are aimed not only to promote activities but also to engage online communities on relevant issues. In addition, online-focused programs should be sustained even after the plebiscite on the BOL.
- **Soft interventions:** Much of the online activity in the Philippines linked to violent extremism comes from personal accounts, where people share materials and engage in conversations which appear to support terrorism and other violent activities. Local CSOs are well-positioned to conduct soft interventions in an effort to reorient “at-risk” persons away from violent extremist groups. For these interventions to succeed, they have to be creative, as well as supported financially so that they can be sustained over a period of time.

MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT AND MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT

- **Create a specific MILF and MNLF team for Facebook:** Facebook is the online platform of choice for the vast majority of Moro youth. While the MILF has invested in recent upgrades to its website, social media pages and general communication capacity, there could be much greater engagement and presence on Facebook to disseminate positive messages on key issues. The MILF and MNLF should each consider engaging specific teams of young “influencers” who can ensure that relevant, timely and accurate information is disseminated on Facebook, particularly through the transition to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.
- **Partnerships:** The MILF should take advantage of CSOs and other organizations that have greater capacity and skills in online engagement to strengthen their information campaigns. The focus group discussions highlighted the MILF as an influential voice among Moro youth, particularly in Maguindanao and Lanao, which provides a constructive platform for guiding online discussions.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS

- **Amplifying voices of authority:** Religious leaders from all faiths in the Philippines are voices of authority who can be influential in shaping information for vulnerable youth who are searching for guidance and meaning. However there was no clear Philippine voice of authority on the core tenets of Islam that were most commonly misused and misrepresented by the groups identified under this study. There is an opportunity for Islamic religious leaders to become more active online, and for a group such as the National Council of Muslim Filipinos, or the National Ulama Council of the Philippines, to trial an active engagement mechanism to help guide online engagement and share accurate information on Islamic practice and teachings.

UNIVERSITIES AND ACADEMIA

- **Digital literacy training:** Universities are in a unique position to improve digital literacy among youth, including increasing awareness of the power and influence of social media. These skills will become increasingly relevant in the coming years. Universities should review the small number of current courses that provide digital literacy tools and strengthen and/or integrate these into ongoing programs on computer literacy and media and communications.
- **Comparative studies:** There's a renewed need for research that compares the experiences of countries struggling with violent extremism activity on social media, both in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. In particular, qualitative research that compares the local dynamics of online violent extremism offers an opportunity to test and strengthen the findings from numerous quantitative and "big-n" studies. Rather than viewing social media as one globally interconnected

network, research could benefit from analyzing the local connections that online networks sustain. Studies comparing local dynamics have the competitive advantage of being able to provide evidence to support interventions aimed at reaching communities and individuals.

- **PVE activities:** While studies like this one are useful for understanding violent extremism in the Philippines, there is little to no empirical data on the effectiveness of PVE programs. This is particularly the case for programs targeting social media, where there is little authoritative information on the effectiveness of online PVE activities. Future research would be strengthened by seeking to understand what impact offline interventions have on online extremism, and vice versa.
- **Women and Violent Extremism on Social Media:** The study reveals limited evidence of the highly engaged role of women in violent extremism messaging and recruiting on social media in the Philippines. While women's engagement with violent extremist activities is an ongoing focus in the Philippines and internationally, a sophisticated understanding of the unique role of women on social media is generally lacking in the larger national discourse. While civil society's ongoing work with women's groups is essential, academia is well-placed to engage in more in-depth, macro analysis of the phenomena. Such research would seek to understand the gender dynamics surrounding online violent extremism, and their impact on women and girls in particular—both in the Philippines, and comparatively across the region and globally.

SOCIAL MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

- **Organic content:** While policies by social media organizations to directly target



The large number of posts in Maranao, Maguindanaoan, Bisaya, and Tausug illustrate that much of the content is escaping any built-in filters or detection mechanisms that are in place.

nefarious violent extremist content have shown some qualified success, it is clear from this study that a larger risk in regions such as Mindanao is that much of the violent extremism activity is organic. This type of content poses significant challenges, as it is often more subtle, nuanced, and difficult to detect. Clearer policy frameworks need to be developed in order to provide guidance on what constitutes appropriate material, and procedures for detection need to be strengthened where possible.

- **Languages:** A unique feature encountered by the study is the large number of local languages in the Philippines, which allows for the publishing of violent extremist that is not easily accessible to national or international audiences. While posts in English and Tagalog may prove easier to track and delete, the large number of posts in Maranao, Maguindanaoan, Bisaya, and Tausug illustrate that much of the content is escaping any built-in filters or detection mechanisms that are in place. The failure of Facebook's inbuilt translation features to translate these languages is indicative of the larger problem. A framework for how Facebook and others might meet these challenges is necessary.
- **Deletion versus other responses:** There is an argument that strict policies on the deletion of violent extremist material may serve greater harm than good, as it pushes individuals engaged in such conversations to adopt tactics to hide and subvert their activities. As such, there is a risk that individuals engaged with violent extremism might become disconnected from their native digital and offline communities, limiting the effectiveness of local detection and de-radicalization activities, and instead pushing individuals towards greater isolation and seclusion. While content policies are necessary, it might be valuable for social media companies to increase investments in soft interventions linked with local CSOs and youth programs.
- **Demonstrate proactive engagement:** Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms have made efforts to respond to the concerns of violent extremist messaging. There has been some input to help CSOs design appropriate responses in Mindanao, but there is an opportunity for the major social media platforms to engage proactively on these issues, to work with committed peacebuilders in Mindanao, and to contribute positively to changing the nature of these challenges in a way that will help all actors.

Annex 1:

Methods and Research Program

Violent extremist activity on social media in the Philippines is a relatively new phenomenon in the complex conflict environment which exist in the south of the country. Traditionally, terrorist activity or violent extremism was linked with community groups engaged in local activities against the state. However, following the proclamation of the Islamic State, currents of violent extremism began to appear to shift to adopt global messaging, particularly online, where Filipinos were able to associate them with a new expression of community and jihad. Following the widespread publicity of extremist activity during the Marawi siege on Facebook, the research was focused on understanding this new phenomenon, and how it relates to other expressions of violent extremism among Moros in the Philippines.

As such, the project sought to address three primary research questions:

- [1] What are the primary platforms through which Moros and Muslim youth access information through the internet?
- [2] How do proponents of violent extremism disseminate their views, publicize their actions and promote their ideologies online?
- [3] How are members of violent extremist groups recruited online in the Philippines and what narratives and techniques do they use?

In pursuit of this, the project team used both quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct the research, over a period of four months between late March and June 2018. Project teams from The Asia Foundation and Rappler developed the research program involving three research components—focus group discussions, a social media network analysis, and key informant interviews.

1. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions, styled as ‘workshops’, were planned and held across four key sites on the following dates:

- Metro Manila – 17-18 March
- Zamboanga – 26-27 March
- Cotabato City – 7-8 April
- Iligan City – 10-11 April

A minimum of 25 participants in the age range of 18-30 were sought for each workshop, but in practice each workshop had more than 30 participants. The demographic of each event varied, depending on the ethnic and socio-economic profile of the local populations from which participants were drawn.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORK ANALYSIS

Led by Rappler, the social network analysis took place for a 12 week period from April-June 2018, working to analyze posts and comments publicly available across Facebook. The team drew from data collected during the FGD stage of the process to identify key issues and themes, as well as popular pages and profiles followed by workshop participants. The research team then undertook the following:

1. Using a combination of methods and tools, groups within Facebook where these relevant topics and conversations were discussed were shortlisted.
2. Using data scrapers, the team then automated the gathering of data on posts and comments to these groups through Facebook's application programming interface (API). The data was then deposited in a data library or a data lake³¹ for analysis;
3. The team then searched this database for posts and comments that contain the "hot button" topics.
4. Researchers then manually examined, confirmed, and identified specific posts that are clearly supportive of violent extremist groups, ideology, and personalities.

The research identified 255 pages and groups of interest, selected based on their general topics, the communities they represent, as well as the presence of "hot button" issues identified by participants in the FGDs in group or page posts and comments. Altogether, these groups and pages had a total of 1,061,254 members as of April 2018. Memberships in these groups range from as low as 73 users to as high as 124,900 users. While there are significant duplications in membership (up to 20 per cent of members of the top groups are also members of other groups), this number is roughly equivalent to 1.58 per cent of the total number of Filipino Facebook users. It is also roughly one-sixth (17%) of the total number of Muslim Filipinos.

It was necessary to go through this approach because, unlike Twitter, which operates well documented public APIs, Facebook's Public News feed API is restricted. Some social network researchers have pointed out that Twitter's relative accessibility (compared to Facebook), leads to it being over-represented in social media research.³² APIs allow researchers to access large-scale data for analysis. Without such mechanisms, the process of data collection is labor and resource intensive.

³¹ A data lake is a method of storing data within a system or repository, in its natural format, that facilitates the collocation of data in various schemata and structural forms, usually object blobs or files.

³² Facebook's data lockdown is a disaster for academic researchers. <https://theconversation.com/facebooks-data-lockdown-is-a-disaster-for-academic-researchers-94533>, April 11, 2018

Until recently, the Facebook API for groups and pages are able to share rich information related to publicly posted conversations, making them a significant observation area for studies such as these. They also typically represent key communities and interest groups (e.g., a Muslim community in a particular region), making it possible to use them as proxies to meager and untrustworthy Facebook demographic data.³³

The groups identified for monitoring in this study were selected based on their general topics, the communities they represent, as well as the presence within content circulated within these groups and pages of “hot button” issues identified by participants in the FGDs in group or page posts and comments. Not all of the members of the groups are necessarily Muslims or living in Mindanao. But given the issues they represent and the languages used, it is safe to assume that a significant majority are. The network map in chapter three shows how interconnected these groups are.

In terms of content, the study focused on conversations triggered by the Marawi siege, which figured significantly as well in the FGDs. The study also compared local dynamics with known incidents of recruitment in the Philippines identified by security analysts as well as related studies on social media recruitment.

The Facebook data privacy scandal involving the firm Cambridge Analytica broke while the team was in the middle of implementing this study.³⁴ Reacting to that scandal, Facebook imposed restrictions to its application program interface (API) which allows researchers to access data posted to public groups and pages. These restrictions created further complications for researchers to determine unique accounts participating in conversations in an automated manner, making it difficult to closely map some conversations.

3. Interviews

The third component of the project focused on the conduct of key informant interviews with persons known to have had interactions previously or currently with violent extremist networks, as well as local experts on extremism and social media activity.

TAF staff undertook 13 strategic interviews in Cotabato City, Zamboanga City, Marawi City and Iligan City during the period of 8 May–12 May.

³³ Simon Kemp, “Facebook demographics analysis reveals several startling truths,” <https://thenextweb.com/facebook/2017/03/22/facebook-demographics-analysis-startling-truths/>, March 22, 2017

³⁴ Kyle Chua, “Cambridge Analytica used other quiz apps to harvest Facebook data, says ex-employee,” <https://www.rappler.com/technology/news/200508-cambridge-analytica-other-facebook-quiz-apps-brittany-kaiser>, April 18, 2018

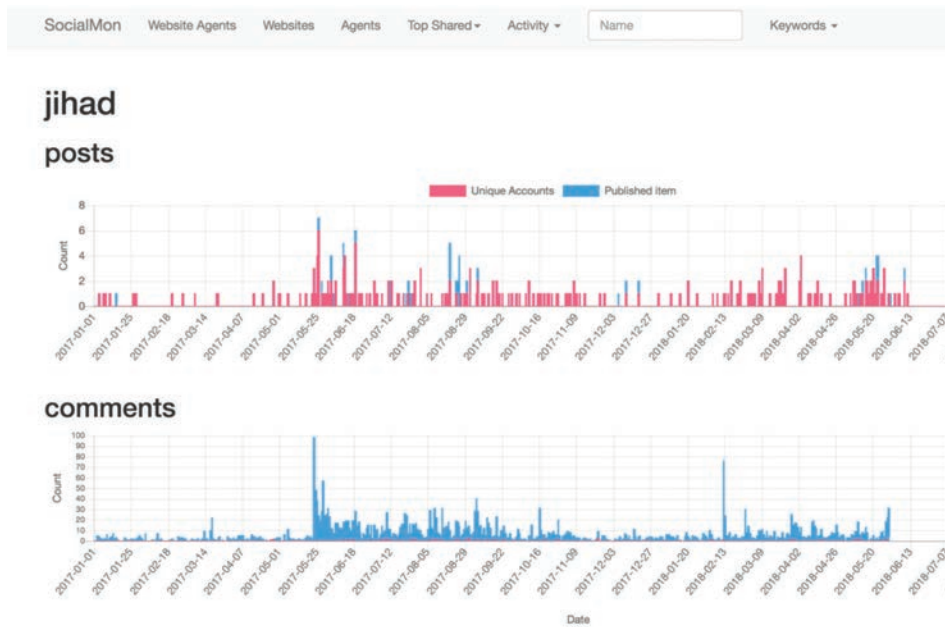
Annex 2:

Keywords and Hot Button Topics

Focus Group Discussions and preliminary searches on social media revealed 16 ‘hot button’ topics which were used to drive the Social Media Network analysis. These topics were identified because of their propensity to attract commentary that aligned with violent extremist messaging—with each of these either being distinctly topical or newsworthy to drive significant online engagement. For each topic, main keywords and other relevant or sub keywords were identified to create a watchlist of groups and pages for the study. These hot button topics were:

- Abdullah Maute’s call for Maranaos to fight
- Abuses against Rohingya
- Airstrikes in Marawi
- Attacks on MILF legitimacy
- Beheadings and city capture
- Black flag in the Philippines
- Dawah*
- Death of Isnilon Hapilon
- Filipino fighter Kiram joining ISIS
- Local terror groups (ASG, Maute)
- Looting in Marawi
- Martial law in Mindanao
- MILF and the peace process
- Soldiers killing Muslims / Human rights abuses
- Theological contest between Sunni and Shi’a
- True mujahideens

From these hot button topics, the analysis tracked the usage of certain keywords across social media, looking back over an 18-month period. The frequency and timing of these postings were then further used to refine the focus of the network analysis.



For example, the use of the term *jihad* before May 23 was low, peaking at less than 10 posts a day. However following the outbreak of fighting in Marawi the term peaked on May 25, 2017—the day President Rodrigo Duterte submitted his report explaining his Martial law declaration over Mindanao.

The term was more prominently used in post comments, peaking at almost 100 comments in groups and pages monitored on May 25, 2018. This supports the thesis that, rather than overt campaigns, those supportive of *jihad* tend to hijack conversations around certain issues. Some of the screenshots show debates on whether what the Mautes are doing can be considered *jihad*.



Comparisons with other terms show a much more scattered online debate. For example, terms surrounding 'mujahideen' were of a much fewer propensity than jihad, yet still spikes were seen in similar time periods. Conversely, direct mention of Isnilon Hapilon, while present during the duration of the siege, reached their pinnacle at the time of his death in October and the end of the battle.



The Asia Foundation
Rappler
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