



## Helpdesk Research Report

# Youth vulnerability to violent extremist groups in the Indo-Pacific

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## Question

*What factors make youth<sup>1</sup> more vulnerable to – or bulwarks against – recruitment to violent extremist groups? Focus on the Indo-Pacific region, in particular Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines.*

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## 1. Summary

This review of factors driving youth vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups in the Indo-Pacific highlights the variety of factors involved, and the importance of looking at each situation individually. It is impossible to generalize: youth recruitment is context-specific. In Bangladesh the political situation has created space for violent groups, with youth recruitment facilitated by the country's youth bulge, high youth unemployment and targeting of youth on social media. In Indonesia political and economic factors are less significant than the role of traditional Islamic study circles and recruitment through educational institutions as well as online. In the Philippines violent Islamist extremism is deeply rooted in the long-standing Mindanao conflict, Muslim grievances there and disillusionment with the protracted peace process. Perhaps the most significant common factors in the region are, one, that it is predominantly youth who are recruited by violent extremist groups and, two, the role of transnational movements (notably ISIS) in fostering radicalization.

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<sup>1</sup> This review draws on the UN definition of youth as persons between 15 and 24 years.

There is considerable literature on factors driving youth vulnerability to violent extremism but much of this is either generic, country-specific or covers smaller regions: this review found little literature looking at the Indo-Pacific region as a whole. A recent article by Gunaratna (2017) gives a useful overview of the challenges with regard to politico-religious extremism in the Asia-Pacific region. Gunaratna traces the first wave of politico-religious conflict back to the 1990s when veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war returned to their home countries re-joining existing violent groups and setting up new ones. He sees the diverse Islamist extremist groups operating in the region against the backdrop of transnational movements, most notably Islamic State (IS):

It has mounted an ambitious propaganda campaign worldwide to spread its ideology. IS has used its sophisticated social media propaganda campaign to recruit, radicalize and raise funds, and to garner the support of hundreds of thousands of Asians. The exploitation of social media technology to spread its narratives and the growth of operational capabilities by IS and likeminded groups have given these groups the capacity to threaten both Muslim and non-Muslim governments and societies in Asia (Gunaratna, 2017).

This review looks at violent extremism in three countries – Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines – and seeks to identify factors driving youth vulnerability to recruitment by extremist groups in each. Government and other initiatives to foster the role of youth in countering such recruitment were beyond the scope of the review. The available literature did not identify other factors acting as bulwarks against youth recruitment. The literature reviewed comprised a mix of academic papers, policy and programme documents, and media articles.

Key findings for the three countries examined are as follows:

#### Bangladesh

- Youth are a key target group for radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist groups: this includes youth from all socioeconomic backgrounds;
- The country's large proportion of youth in the population, high youth unemployment and high levels of internet and social media use by youth all facilitate radicalization and recruitment. Online radicalization is a major factor in Bangladesh;
- Bitter rivalry between the ruling Awami Party and opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) has created the space for violent extremist groups in Bangladesh to operate and expand, and is one reason for the government's muted response to violent extremism.

#### Indonesia

- Disillusionment with Indonesia's democracy, in particular due to corruption, and inequality are seen as factors in youth radicalization in Indonesia;
- Islamic study circles are widespread in Indonesia and a common pathway to joining extremist groups: people could start off in 'mainstream' circles but this could lead to them joining more radical groups. The circles allow recruiters to identify and groom potential members;
- The 40-odd pesantren (Islamic schools) affiliated to extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah certainly foster radicalization, but the literature differs on the role of the majority moderate pesantren. Universities, however, are seen as targeted by extremists, with 'success' evident from rising conservative ideology among students and the involvement of students/alumni in violent extremism;

- ‘Inherited jihadism’ is identified as a phenomenon distinct to Indonesia, whereby the involvement of parents/older siblings/relatives in extremist groups pushes young people to follow in their footsteps;
- Online radicalization is significant, particularly as ISIS has targeted Indonesia in its online propaganda, and reinforces radicalization through pesantren and in person contacts. Prisons and returning foreign fighters also promote radicalization and recruitment.

### The Philippines

- The roots of violent Islamist extremism in the Philippines lie in the over 40-year insurgency in Muslim Mindanao. Muslim grievances about marginalization by the centre are exploited by violent extremist groups to win support;
- There is also disillusionment with the protracted peace process and anger at the widespread destruction of infrastructure in Marawi city as a result of military operations against extremists;
- Financial incentives are a factor in Mindanao, both motivating some extremist groups and motivating individual membership of violent extremist groups. But financial incentives alone do not account for violent extremism;
- Social ties (family, kin, friends) are important in Mindanao and thus a driver of radicalization. The role of charismatic radical preachers is also significant;
- Violent extremist groups in Mindanao draw on online ISIS propaganda to mobilize support: ISIS has urged its followers to travel to the Philippines to undertake ‘jihad’ there.

The literature considered in this review was largely gender-blind, making extensive use of gender-neutral terms such as youth, jihadists and extremists, and not distinguishing between males and females. One study of violent extremism in Bangladesh made reference to women. In the case of Indonesia the review found a couple of reports focusing on female recruitment. The literature on violent extremism in the Philippines made virtually no reference to women specifically.

## **2. Bangladesh**

### **Violent extremism in Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>**

#### ***Rising violent extremism***

Bangladesh has traditionally been a tolerant, plural society. It experienced a period of extremist violence from 1999 to 2005, but this was curbed by a government crackdown on Islamist groups. However in recent years, despite showing strong and sustained economic growth, the country has seen a marked rise in incidents of extremism, violent extremism and terrorism (EVET). A major driving factor is the country’s political situation, specifically the long-standing rivalry between the ruling Awami League (AL) party and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and the former’s targeting of BNP ally Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). Government repression of all political opposition has created the space for extremist groups to flourish. The current phase of violent extremism in Bangladesh began in 2013, and has seen the brutal murders of a number of secular bloggers, liberal academics and LGBT activists. The targets have widened to include

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<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion of the rise of violent extremism in Bangladesh and the factors driving this, see Idris, I. (2017), *Drivers of Extremism, Violent Extremism and Terrorism (EVET) in Bangladesh*, K4D Helpdesk Report 139, Brighton, Institute of Development Studies.

religious/other minorities and, as seen in the July 2016 assault on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka in which 20 foreigners and non-Muslims were killed, the attacks have become more sophisticated.

### ***Violent extremist groups and youth involvement***

A recent International Crisis Group (ICG) report identifies two groups as dominating the jihadist landscape in Bangladesh: Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a faction of which is linked to ISIS, and Ansarul Islam, which is affiliated to Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) (ICG, 2018: i). While the latter portrays itself as the defender of Islam from those who explicitly attack the religion, JMB considers perceived symbols of the secular state and anyone not subscribing to Islam as legitimate targets (ICG, 2018: i). Another significant group is Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) which has carried out a number of assassinations of liberal writers and was banned in 2015. ABT is affiliated to AQIS but spreads both pro-ISIS and pro-al-Qaeda material. All groups are united by their desire to establish a state ruled by sharia (Islamic law) in Bangladesh. According to a 2018 ICG report, the Holey Artisan Bakery attack in July 2016 appeared to have involved a loose cooperation between different groups.

There is little credible research on the profile of those recruited by violent extremist groups beyond approximate age group (15-35 years) and broad geographic location (heavy concentration in northern regions) (ICG, 2018: 22). As discussed below, youth are a primary target group for radicalization and extremist recruitment. However, this is largely for violent attacks within Bangladesh. The country is not a major source of foreign fighters. As of October 2015, fewer than 40 Bangladeshis were believed to have joined or attempted to join ISIS in the Middle East (CEP, 2017: 2). 'Instead, Bangladeshi Islamist groups primarily recruit members to engage in local Islamist activity or domestic attacks' (CEP, 2017: 2).

Riaz and Parvez (2018: 5) carried out an assessment of 150 alleged Bangladeshi militants, based largely on media reports from two periods: July 2014-June 2015, and July 2016-August 2017. Of the 112 militants studied in the first period, they found that only two were women – one was the wife of a JMB leader, the other a student. While they conclude that violent extremism in Bangladesh is still male-dominated they add that 'it would be misleading to assume that women's participation in violent extremism in Bangladesh is negligible. The women may participate in extremism as sympathisers, supporters, recruiters and safe housekeepers. The lack of visibility and low number of participants in direct attacks might be one reason for the apparent small number' (Riaz & Parvez, 2018: 6-7). Riaz and Parvez (2018) also cite a number of wives who accompanied their husbands to join Islamic State in Syria, though it is not always clear if they went for ideological reasons or just following their spouses. This review found that the remaining literature on violent extremism in Bangladesh was gender-neutral, referring only to youth, students, attackers, activists and/or extremists, and not making a distinction between males and females.

### **Factors driving youth vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups**

#### ***Targeting of youth***

A 2017 study of radicalization<sup>3</sup> by the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) concluded that the key focus of all violent extremist groups 'is to radicalise, recruit and use the youth for carrying out terror attacks' (BIPSS, 2017: 4). It gives a number of reasons for this: young people with no prior police records allow terrorist and violent extremist groups more operational freedom; they reduce

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<sup>3</sup> The study combined a literature review, survey, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. A total of 173 individual respondents were included from both public and private educational institutes in Dhaka Metropolitan Areas, aged between 15 and 30 years. (BIPSS, 2017: 15).

the likelihood of arrest of more senior leaders; if caught, youth would get lighter prison sentences due to their age; and youth are targeted because of the skills they possess, especially in relation to technology. It is estimated that youth between the ages of 15 and 18 years make up about 20 percent of all suicide bombers and terrorist groups (BIPSS, 2017: 14).

Counter-terrorism officials claim that JMB recruiters 'are attempting to attract youth in regions outside Dhaka that are politically volatile and have a large conservative base, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Noakhali, Lakshmipur and Chapainababganj' (ICG, 2018: 9-10). However, the literature highlights the fact that youth recruitment is not confined to poorer, less educated socioeconomic groups and traditional religious schools: rather educated, middle-class, urban youth are being targeted as well. '(E)ducation institutes especially universities and institutions of higher learning are also being turned into recruiting pools for terrorists' (BIPSS, 2017: 14). The 2018 ICG report asserts that jihadist networks 'now tap not only madrasa students and their families in deprived rural areas but also privileged students in wealthier quarters of the capital' (ICG, 2018: ii). It notes that three of the five alleged attackers in the Holey Artisan Bakery attack 'belonged to Dhaka's elite, not the madrasa sector more commonly associated with such jihadist militancy' suggesting that 'the appeal of jihadism has spread and that jihadists may be able to tap a new constituency from which to recruit, even if thus far only in small numbers' (ICG, 2018: 1). The fact that 'these suicidal young men had every reason to live... raises questions about the appeal of extremist ideology on an unlikely cohort' (Khan, 2017: 206).

Khan (2017: 200) stresses the diversity of those being targeted for radicalization: 'students of mainstream education, madrasa background, public and private universities, teachers of madrasa and university, affluent as well as marginalized population, common people of different professions'. The ICG report (2018: 22) echoes this: 'Overall, recruits to violent groups show enormous diversity: from madrasa students to upper middle-class youth at private universities'.

### ***Youth bulge and lack of opportunities***

Bangladesh has a significant proportion of youth, many of whom have little to do. Figures from the Population Reference Bureau reveal that in 2016 Bangladesh had a total of 46.7 million youth (aged between 10 to 24 years) - approximately 30% of the total population (Rashid, 2017: 8). An ILO assessment (Hasan, 2017) found that 40 percent of the country's youth were not in education, employment or training. Unemployment levels are high even among those with university education: a 2014 report found that nearly five out of every ten graduates in Bangladesh was unemployed (Hasan, 2017). 'It is very possible that some of these young people become frustrated and harbour anger towards society, making them ripe for recruitment by militant outfits' (Hasan, 2017). Khan (2017) also highlights lack of youth access to 'satisfactory levels of education, health and well-being, employment, political participation and civic participation' as leading to their radicalization and extremism.

### ***Social media and online radicalization***

The literature highlights social media and the internet as playing a significant role in radicalization of Bangladeshi youth. 'Police officers, lawyers and others who have interacted with jihadists contend that large numbers of militants are drawn to jihadist ideas online prior to joining violent groups' (ICG, 2018: 22). Rashid asserts that Bangladeshi terrorist groups are active on the internet, particularly Facebook and YouTube. As well as a means of targeting youth (see below), 'spreading propaganda through the internet is safer because it has a lower possibility of being tracked by law enforcement agencies' (Rashid, 2017: 27). Ansarul Islam started as an online community reportedly inspired by the sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen who joined al-Qaeda's Yemen branch; it gradually morphed into a group of young Bangladeshis following a fiery local preacher in Dhaka's Basila neighbourhood, and began identifying

itself in online posts as the Bangladesh chapter of al-Qaeda (ICG, 2018: 7). Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) spreads pro-ISIS and pro-al-Qaeda material both in person and online (CEP, 2017: 4). 'According to reports, the group has previously uploaded Bengali-language versions of ISIS's *Dabiq* magazine and al-Qaeda's *Inspire*' (CEP, 2017: 4). Videos reportedly uploaded by the group include specific references to potential targets in Bangladesh, such as the parliament building, and bomb-making instructions (CEP, 2017: 4).

Online radicalisation has been facilitated by the rapid urbanisation and – even more important - digitisation that have been taking place in Bangladesh (in part due to the government's Digital Bangladesh policy). One estimate put the number of internet users in the country at 21.4 million in 2016, up from just 93,000 in 2000 (Hasan, 2017). 'That more young people are connecting online is unlikely to have gone unnoticed by recruiters for militant groups' (Hasan, 2017). Rashid (2017: 8) argues that Bangladeshi youth are particularly vulnerable to online radicalization because, one, they form a large share of the total population, and two, many 'are tech-savvy and addicted to social media': 'research conducted on the youths residing in Dhaka City reveals that almost half of them spend long hours on the social media sites and believe it to be an important part of their lives'. Bangladesh has 21 million active Facebook users (Rashid, 2017: 17). Nonetheless, the threat of online radicalisation should be seen in the context of the country as a whole: Bangladesh has a total population of 161 million, so – while wide and growing – for now internet use remains limited. [Though, clearly, in future this will be a bigger threat.]

One analyst noted that the online propaganda of extremist groups in the country had become more organized and appealing to their targets (Farooq cited in Rashid, 2017: 28). The same analyst further suggests that use of the internet is a way of targeting educated youth, since they are most likely to be on social media and accessing websites. This would appear to be confirmed by one study of 250 detained militants in Bangladesh which found that almost 82 percent of them were radicalized through various social media: only 22 percent of them had a madrasa background, the remainder being in general education (Rashid, 2017: 30).

### ***Lack of religious knowledge***

The literature identifies lack of knowledge about Islam, particularly about the use of violence, as making young people vulnerable to radical ideologies and groups. 'Ignorance of religious teaching opposed to violence makes youth more vulnerable and susceptible to recruitment. Religious institutions have the potential to capture the mind of the young people with misconstrued interpretation of religion. These youths are manipulated into believing that they are actually struggling for a nobler and worthier cause, with the assurance of victory in this world and in the Hereafter' (BIPSS, 2017: 14). Lack of government regulation of *quami* madrasas, which teach around 1.4 million students in rural and other economically deprived areas, 'allows for the promotion of sectarian intolerance and, in some cases, even incitement to violence' (ICG, 2018: 22-23).

A study by three Dhaka University professors, *Bangladesh: Facing Challenges of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism*, identified a number of factors driving violent extremism among university students. These included a lack of proper understanding of religion (Jamal, 2017). Other factors were frustration, loneliness, drug addiction, lack of proper vision and guidance, and at times affluence, as well as wider issues of weak governance, corruption, and absence of the rule of law (Jamal, 2017). Khan (2017: 197) echoes this, stressing that extremists were not endorsing terrorism in response to economic problems alone: 'they also exploit the public anxieties over perceived threats to their identity, values and ways of life and the sentiments towards Muslims suffering in Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir'.

### ***Political situation: democratic deficit***

As noted perhaps the biggest driver of extremist violence in Bangladesh is the Awami League government's determination to crush opposition from the BNP and its ally Jama'at-e-Islami (JI). Repressive measures have undermined democracy and facilitated the spread of extremist ideologies (ICG, 2018). The targeting of JI by the government has triggered an extremist backlash, while the habit of blaming political opponents for extremist attacks rather than going after those responsible has facilitated violent groups. Young people share the frustration and anger of ordinary citizens at the political situation, weak governance, corruption and failure to uphold the rule of law. Khan (2017: 196) states that, 'A growing number of Bangladeshis are disconnected from family and community, disenfranchised from the country's disproportionately divided wealth and resources, and resentful against the existing political practices and deteriorating law and order situation'.

Violent groups have exploited public alienation to push their extremist ideologies. 'In Bangladesh, radicalization and institutional dysfunction are closely connected. The increasingly authoritarian secular state provides radical Islamists a compelling grievance around which to recruit and mobilize. Political and social alienation have combined with government repression to push marginalized groups to violence' (Macdonald, 2016: 1). Ansarul Islam, for example, depicted the post-2010 trials of Jama'at leaders accused of perpetrating war crimes during the 1971 war of independence as 'an assault on Islam' and used the trials to recruit urban, educated youth, albeit in relatively small numbers (ICG, 2018: i).

### ***Government response to violent extremism***

Government efforts to tackle extremist violence are characterised by: a) implicit criticism of those targeted, especially secular writers; b) a tendency to blame political rivals and a failure to acknowledge the presence of transnational groups such as AQIS and ISIS in Bangladesh; and c) use of heavy-handed tactics against suspected extremists including mass arrests, human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings (Idris, 2017). In addition, "Enhanced methods" have been cleared through the courts, including tightening bail conditions of those accused of extremism, and increased monitoring of educational institutions to prevent radicalisation, and of imams to identify and prevent hate speech' (Comerford, 2017).

The heavy-handed approach, in particular abuses by the security forces, fuel anger and are exploited by violent groups for radicalization and recruitment. 'Circumvention of the criminal justice system...undermine the state's legitimacy, sows fear and mistrust between authorities and communities, and risks provoking a violent backlash....Extrajudicial killings feed jihadist propaganda about injustice' (ICG, 2018: 16). Nonetheless, the state's approach has been effective: 'Bangladesh has neutralised the IS threat operationally, though it remains a work in progress. Bangladesh has busted several dozen IS cells across the country along with killing 100 IS militants and capturing another 1500 including its key leaders' (Bashar, 2017: 5). The state's use of 'blunt and indiscriminate force, including alleged enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings....have eliminated large numbers of jihadists and weakened militant groups...the past year has seen a lull in attacks' (ICG, 2018: ii).

### ***Impact of Rohingya influx in Cox's Bazar***

Following a brutal military campaign against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar's Rakhine state, close to 700,000 Rohingyas were forced to flee to the Cox's Bazar area of Bangladesh (ICG, 2018: 13). There is little prospect of the Rohingyas returning to their homes in Myanmar. The massive influx poses a number of potential threats for Bangladesh in relation to radicalisation and violent extremism. The first is that the refugees could become radicalised and engage in violent acts. The literature generally depicts refugee

'jihadist recruitment' as a minor threat (Bashar, 2017; ICG, 2018). However, there is a history of violent acts among Rohingyas who entered the country earlier<sup>4</sup> (Ullah, 2011). Fair and Oldmixon (2015: 5) claim that militant groups related to Jamaat-e-Islami have been actively recruiting from Rohingya refugees in the past, and warn that, 'As the Rohingya crisis continues to deepen, Bangladesh will become ever more attractive to an array of Islamist militant groups seeking to recruit the hapless victims of the Burmese government'. Cookson (2017) sees militancy among Rohingya refugees as inevitable: 'Why would you think otherwise when the young men have seen their families abused and killed? Young men will seek outlet for their anger. Most Rohingya will find solace in God and in prayer. ISIS agents and promoters of fundamentalist views will try to corrupt the Rohingya and lead them towards violence'.

The second is that it could fuel radicalisation among Bangladeshis. There is some evidence that radical Islamist parties within the country are using the crisis for this purpose. Hefazat-e-Islam (generally a non-violent group) has its headquarters in Chittagong, in the area of Bangladesh adjacent to Rakhine in Myanmar, from where the Rohingya have fled. The movement has called for the liberation of Rakhine, and has threatened to wage 'jihad' on Myanmar 'if the army and its associates do not stop torturing the Rohingya Muslims' (Felix-Joehnk, 2017). Felix-Joehnk (2017) argues that the Rohingya crisis is giving Hefazat-e-Islam a greater role in Bangladeshi national politics, and putting liberalism under threat. Bashar (2017) notes that some Bangladeshi militant groups, notably JMB and Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh, see it as their Islamic duty to protect Muslims who are in trouble in the region.

The third is that the Rohingya crisis could be exploited by transnational groups such as ISIS to mobilise support both within the country, and in the wider region (BIPSS, n.d.). Al-Qaeda has urged Muslims in Southeast Asia (including Bangladesh) to support the Rohingya in Myanmar 'financially, militarily and politically' (Bashar, 2017: 6; BIPSS, n.d.). The plight of the Rohingyas has been regularly highlighted in various ISIS online publications, particularly in *Dabiq*, which has also stated that the group will eventually focus on Myanmar (Bashar, 2017). ISIS has also announced its intention to develop a stronghold in Bangladesh and use it as a platform to launch attacks on Myanmar (Bashar, 2017).

One analysis sees the Rohingya crisis as fuelling jihadist sentiments in other countries in the region, notably Indonesia and Malaysia (Singh & Haziq, 2016). Calls for 'jihad' in Myanmar were made by extremist groups in all these countries following the 2012 Rohingya refugee influx into Bangladesh, and the authors claim 'a similar jihadist flare-up is now developing in the wake of the latest atrocities reported' (Singh & Haziq, 2016: 2).

### 3. Indonesia

#### Violent extremism in Indonesia

##### *History of periodic violent extremism*

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country and has long had a reputation for religious tolerance (Chalmers, 2017). However, Liao (2016) argues that 'while Indonesia is often touted for its "moderation" in Islamic thought and practice, a radical Islamic fringe has been part of the Indonesian social and political landscape for a long time'. Jihadism can be traced back to the country's independence struggle in the

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<sup>4</sup> The Rohingya refugee influx into Bangladesh dates back to 1978, with big waves of refugees coming in 1991-92, and then in 2012 and 2015 (BIPSS, n.d.: 1).

1940s. Post-independence such elements, notably the Darul Islam movement, were suppressed under the Suharto regime and the focus of Islamist groups was on proselytization (da'wah). The fall of Suharto in 1998 and the introduction of democratic freedoms allowed extremist groups to organize and operate.

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a successor of Darul Islam and linked to al-Qaeda, carried out a number of terrorist attacks in the country in the 2000s, largely targeting tourist sites and areas frequented by foreigners. Most notable was the 2002 Bali bombing that killed 202 people, many of them foreigners (Liao, 2016). Other attacks included the 2003 Marriott hotel bombing in Jakarta (12 dead), a car bombing outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta (10 dead), further bombings in Bali in 2005 (26 killed) and the 2009 bombings of the Marriott and Ritz-Carlton in Jakarta (at least 9 killed) (Jawaid, 2017). A crackdown on Jemaah Islamiyah by the Indonesian government led to a period of relative quiet. This ended in January 2016 with multiple explosions near the Sarinah shopping mall in Jakarta, killing 8 – this was the first attack in Indonesia to be claimed by ISIS (Jawaid, 2017). In May 2018, the country experienced a spate of terrorist attacks in Surabaya, East Java, targeting churches and police stations. These marked a new phase in extremist activity in Indonesia in that they were carried out by whole families – including women and children (CEP, 2018).

### ***Violent extremist groups and youth involvement***

The main violent extremist groups operating in Indonesia are Jemaah Islamiyah, Jamaat Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and, increasingly, ISIS. As noted, JI has been relatively inactive since the government crackdown on the group, but it is a significant source of resources and fighters for other terror networks (CEP, 2018). Though originally affiliated to Al-Qaeda, its co-founder Abu Bakar Bashir, pledged loyalty to ISIS in July 2014 (CEP, 2018). Jemaah Islamiyah still has the biggest following in Indonesia, but ISIS is making inroads and expanding recruitment in the country.

ISIS has been working actively to raise its profile in Indonesia: it sees the country both as a source of fighters to join it in Syria and Iraq, and as an arena for extremist violence – for which it has also been recruiting locally (CEP, 2018). As noted, the group has been responsible for a number of attacks in the country since January 2016. Indonesia has also been a major source of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. As of December 2015, official government estimates put the number of Indonesians who had left to fight at 800; most joined ISIS, while some joined the Nusra Front (CEP, 2018: 5). Between December 2016 and May 2018 Turkish authorities repatriated more than 220 Indonesian citizens, detained while attempting to enter Iraq and Syria to join ISIS through Turkey (CEP, 2018: 5). Jawaid (2017) writes that the sheer number of Indonesians and Malay-speaking foreign fighters has been enough for ISIS to form their own fighting unit in Syria, known as Katibah Nusantara, and formalized in September 2014. Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) is an ISIS-linked group believed to have been formed in 2015, and involved in the January 2016 attack in Jakarta. Indonesian police believe that the three families who carried out the May 2018 attacks in Surabaya, East Java, were all members of the group (CEP, 2018).

The literature does not give a profile of those recruited to violent extremist groups, but from those who have carried out attacks or been caught planning such acts, it is clear that they are predominantly young. The 2009 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta was carried out by an 18-year old (Mohanty, 2018). The May 2018 suicide attackers included two teenage boys, aged 16 and 18, as well as two young children, aged 9 and 12 (Ramakrishna, 2018). Zahid (2017) cites a number of surveys which indicate an increase in extremist ideology among youth, 'who are idolizing radical figures'. In 2011 a series of book bombs sent to leading Indonesian figures and bombs planted at a Chinese church in Jakarta were both conceived and designed by a group of young Indonesian Muslims, suspected of being associated with ISIS

(Afrainty, 2012: 138). Several of those responsible for violent extremism in Indonesia have been students/alumni of educational institutions.

The literature indicates that Indonesian women (and children) are increasingly becoming radicalized and joining violent extremist groups. The Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) has flagged 'increased activity on the part of women, and increased intention to get involved in a more active combatant role' for some time (Hincks, 2018). An estimated 45% of Southeast Asians who have travelled to ISIS-controlled territory are women and children who have accompanied the men to fight there (this figure includes those joining groups other than ISIS, e.g. Jabhat Nusra) (Jawaid, 2017). Reference is also made to women and children involved in recent attacks carried out by whole families in East Java (CEP, 2018). However, with the exception of a few reports focused on female recruitment, the literature on violent extremism in Indonesia is gender-neutral, using terms such as youth, students, alumni, fighters, militants, jihadists and extremists, and not distinguishing between males and females. For example, a study by Hwang and Schulze (2018) of 106 Indonesians who joined militant Islamist organisations, gives a breakdown of them by geographic location and violent extremist group, but not by gender.

## **Factors driving youth vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups**

### ***Economic and political factors***

The literature does not highlight economic factors as playing a significant role in youth recruitment. One of the families involved in the May 2018 bombings, for example, was relatively well-off with their own business and living in a comfortable, middle-class district of Surabaya. They were motivated by ideology, in particular 'that the Indonesian state, the police and non-Muslims, were intractable enemies of Islam and that violence in pursuit of a caliphate was religiously legitimate' (Ramakrishna, 2018).

However, evidence from many parts of the world indicates that lack of job and income security among young people increases their risk of joining radical religious groups (Yasih, 2016). The Indonesian labour force is characterised by low income, unstable jobs. In 2013 informal workers accounted for 54% of total employment (or more than 60 million people) (Yasih, 2016). Many Indonesian workers 'are stuck in short-term and temporary contract work, with little hope of progressing in their careers and income' (Yasih, 2016). Yasih (2016) argues that the anxiety and anger many young people feel because of the socioeconomic problems they face makes them prone to falling for extremism and joining radical religious groups.

Kurlantzick (2018) identifies rampant corruption and high inequality rates as the major economic factors fuelling the rise of Islamist groups in Indonesia. This is echoed by the findings of a 2017 International Republican Institute (IRI) study of vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in West Java (IRI, 2017). Among potential sources of vulnerability participants identified the disillusionment with the state of Indonesia's democracy, specifically the continued elitism and lack of representation and the role of corruption and 'money politics'. Criticism of the government's performance centred on corruption, insecurity, economic hardship and (lack of) freedom of expression; local governments were seen as inaccessible, with social media and street protests considered a better way of addressing grievances than formal government channels (IRI, 2017: 8-11). The report concluded that 'recruiters can draw on poor democratic performance to justify the violent pursuit of alternative systems of governance' (IRI, 2017: 13).

Hwang and Schulze (2018) identify four pathways into Indonesian militant Islamist groups: Islamic study circles, schools, kinship and local conflict. The first three are described below. The fourth, local conflicts, entailed Indonesians from other parts of the country being drawn into local, communal conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Poso and Ambon (erupting in Dec. 1998-Jan. 1999). These people formed strong bonds and went on to fight in other conflicts (Afghanistan, the Philippines, Syria and Iraq) and/or form their own militant groups.

Hwang and Schulze (2018) argue that within all four of these pathways the common thread encouraging entry and fostering commitment was social bonds and relationships. '(T)hese relationships contributed to the formation and eventual consolidation of a group-specific jihadi identity through regular participation in activities, attendance of meetings, narrowing the circle of friends to those within the group, cooperation with other group members, and embracing an increasingly risky and possibly violent trajectory' (Hwang & Schulze, 2018: 2).

### ***Islamic study circles***

Islamic study circles are common across Indonesia, and cover the full religious spectrum from traditionalist to modern and from moderate to radical Islam (Hwang & Schulze, 2018). A 2018 study of 106 militant Islamists found that 87 had joined extremist groups through radical Islamic study circles (Hwang & Schulze, 2018: 4). Rohmah (2017) highlights the fact that study circles can be run by groups which are non-violent, e.g. Hizbut Tahrir which propagates the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia. But participation in the circles can lead to people being exposed to and recruited by more radical organizations.

Hwang and Schulze (2018) describe the pathway taken by one militant to join Jemaah Islamiyah. It entailed a gradual process of indoctrination and socialization which ensures that only the most committed recruits become members. As well as enabling a careful assessment of the individual's character, 'it assured that by the time he became a member, his circle of friends and mentors had narrowed and become focused on the on-group' (Hwang & Schulze, 2018: 4-5). While the process is less rigorous in the extremist groups that have been established more recently, the basic principle of starting in a public study circle and gradually being drawn into a more selective, more radical one persists. Moreover, even with the rise of the internet and social media, Islamic study circles remain a key pathway to joining violent extremist groups.

The families involved in the May 2018 bombings in Surabaya are believed to have met every Sunday for an Islamic study group, where they viewed extremist propaganda (CEP, 2018: 4). 'Not only were some of the youth home-schooled to limit outside exposure, at Sunday religious gatherings following noon prayers, the families were reportedly exposed to films on violent jihad in Iraq and Syria, including suicide bombings, and were even instructed in bomb-making' (Ramakrishna, 2018).

### ***Education: pesantren and universities***

Pesantren or Islamic schools have served as sites of recruitment and radicalization (CEP, 2018). This is particularly true of pesantren set up by Darul Islam and Jemaah Islamiyah. While 'the purpose of these schools has been the cultivation of a network of graduates sympathetic to the salafi-jihadi worldview and understanding of Islam' a small proportion of students could end up as members of violent extremist groups (Hwang & Schulze, 2018: 15). Jemaah Islamiyah pesantren have produced jihadists who have gone to fight in either Syria or Iraq with ISIS or other groups such as Jubhat Nusra (CEP, 2018: 2). An expert at the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), Jakarta, estimated that 40 pesantren have terrorist connections (CEP, 2018: 2).

A number of researchers have argued that the majority of pesantren in Indonesia are not disseminating radicalism – not least because most are owned by two mainstream, moderate Muslim organizations (Afrainty, 2012: 139). Afrainty (2012) cites a study carried out at the end of 2010 in ten areas surrounding Jakarta. While it found that over 50% of high school students agreed that the use of violence was justified on behalf of Islam, it ‘suggested that a radical tendency among students and teachers is driven not by religious instruction in schools but by information disseminated by social media on the Internet and social interaction with the wider community’ (Afrainty, 2012: 139).

Afrainty (2012) argues that young people who have gone through pesantren and madrasas have a better understanding of the Quran and the history of Islam than those who have graduated from public and secular schools. The latter’s lack of knowledge about religion makes them more vulnerable to radicalization. Secular education leaves ‘students with such minimal knowledge of religion vulnerable to being influenced by radical teachings, which often use Quranic verses to justify their claims...students unequipped with adequate religious skills and understanding are easily influenced by the radical ideologies that penetrate campus life’ (Afrainty, 2012: 142).

Indonesian universities are targets for conservative religious ideology, with ‘a worrying number of Indonesian youth ...exposed to radical political and religious orientation’ (Mohanty, 2018). Some of those involved in the 2011 book bombings and other attacks were students/alumni of the prestigious State Islamic University (UIN). UIN and a number of other state Islamic institutions (IAIN and STAIN<sup>5</sup>) are known for their pluralist and liberal views: the fact that students/alumni from these places could be influenced by conservative ideas and radical ideologies was therefore a shock for moderate Indonesian Muslims. However, growing conservative thinking among Indonesia’s students is confirmed by various surveys. A 2017 survey of 4,200 Muslim students in the top high schools and universities on Java island, conducted by the Jakarta-based Alvara Research Centre and Mata Air Foundation, found that nearly 20% of students supported the establishment of a caliphate in the country (Rohmah, 2017). In another study approximately 39% of university students confessed their support for radical organizations; fifteen provinces have been categorised as ‘high risk’ meaning their students are easy prey for radical groups (Mohanty, 2018).

Indonesia’s democratisation after the fall of Suharto is seen as one factor paving the way for radical groups such as Hizbut Tahrir to penetrate university campuses. Such groups are often more proactive in recruiting new members than more moderate Islamic organizations. In a survey conducted by UIN faculty, over 25% of students said they had been approached by either Hizbut Tahrir, ISIS (through local affiliates) or Front Pembela Islam (FPI) (another hardline Islamic group) (Afrainty, 2012: 144). An editorial on Indonesia’s problem with youth radicalization highlights outdated teaching techniques as leaving students vulnerable to radicalization. ‘An emphasis on memorisation leaves students without critical-thinking skills. Raw memorisation requires no thought. It does not equip Indonesia’s children with the tools to resist radical ideology...Indonesian students are taught to accept facts without question. This makes them prime targets for radical groups’ (Asean Today, 2018).

### ***Kinship – ‘inherited jihadism’***

Hwang and Schulze (2018) list the many benefits of kinship for violent extremist groups: unmatched loyalty, unconditional support, reduced likelihood of infiltration, and of disengagement ‘as one risks severing ties with parents, children, spouses, and siblings, should one depart the group’ (Hwang &

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<sup>5</sup> IAIN – State Institute for Islamic Studies; STAIN – State College for Islamic Studies.

Schulze, 2018: 11). In Indonesia, kinship has been particularly significant for recruitment to Jemaah Islamiyah, which was built on kin networks of Darul Islam members (Liao, 2016).

Due to the longstanding history of Indonesian jihadi groups, there are multigenerational jihadi families, where the parents were members of Darul Islam, who subsequently joined JI following the split. Some sent their children to JI schools. When they married and had children themselves, they followed the same path. The multigenerational jihadi tradition and its intersection with a radical Islamic education in a handful of boarding schools is possibly unique to Indonesia. It has also been largely unique to Jemaah Islamiyah, which is the only salafi-jihadi organization in Indonesia that has an extensive school network (Hwang & Schulze, 2018: 11).

Ramakrishna (2018) identifies the strong culture of respect for elders, particularly fathers, as one of the factors driving indoctrination of children into Islamist networks: 'Indonesia is a patriarchal, collectivist society, where respect for elders is expected and individual opinions must be subordinated to that of the group....in such a cultural milieu, "it is very difficult for a child to escape a father's influence"'. Thus if parents, older siblings or others are involved in radical groups and jihad, it is likely that younger family members will be drawn in. Another example of this 'inherited jihadism' seen in Indonesia is the children of those who fought in the Afghan 'jihad' going to fight in Syria (Hwang & Schulze, 2018).

### ***Social media and online radicalization***

'Terrorist groups have made the internet the primary means of spreading propaganda' (Rohma, 2017). Kurlantzick (2018) notes that Indonesian Islamist groups have become skilful organizers on social media. According to the US Dept. of State's 2016 Country Terrorism Report, 'Indonesian violent extremists continued to use websites, social media and private messaging to spread their radical ideology, raise funds, recruit and communicate with new followers' (US DoS, 2016). Use of the internet to win supporters is not confined to violent extremist groups; others such as Hizbut Tahrir, which do not engage in violence but share the same goals of Islamic rule in Indonesia and can serve as pathways linking people to more radical groups, are also active on social media and the web. A 2009 study noted that Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia often produced high-quality videos of its activities which it uploaded on YouTube: many of the videos focused on the failings of the Indonesian government and the need to implement Shariah law and establish an Islamic caliphate (Perry, 2009).

ISIS propaganda online has singled out Indonesian Muslims for recruitment (CEP, 2018). The group uses social media, propaganda and recruitment videos released by its media wing, Al-Hayat Media Centre, to persuade Indonesians (and others from the region, including Malays and Filipinos) to travel and join the group (Jawaid, 2017). ISIS' Indonesian and Malay fighting unit in Syria, Katibah Nusantara, actively recruits in the region, and provides a social platform for recruits looking to settle in and connect with other ISIS members, as well as tutorials for logistical and tactical training (Jawaid, 2017).

Widespread internet use, especially by the young, facilitates online radicalization. A 2009 report found that internet usage in Indonesia had risen from 2 million in 2000 to 20 million by 2008; the country represented 80-90% of visitors to ten radical and extremist websites in the region (Perry, 2009). The head of the National Agency for Combating Terrorism claimed that young people were more easily affected by radicalism and terrorism, partly because of easy access to the information on the internet and social media, coupled with a lack of critical thinking (cited in Rohmah, 2017).

In August 2016 Indonesian police uncovered a plot to launch a rocket attack on Singapore from the Indonesian island of Batam. Both the ringleader and his five accomplices were reportedly radicalized over

social media (CEP, 2018). Similarly one of the suspects arrested in December 2016 for allegedly plotting to bomb the presidential palace in Jakarta, a 27-year old maid, said she had initially been exposed to radical Islam over Facebook (CEP, 2018).

The latest Counter Extremism Project (CEP) report on extremism in Indonesia highlights the links between different recruitment approaches: 'Extremists have used social media to disseminate extremist propaganda and target Indonesian Muslim youth for radicalization... potential Indonesian ISIS recruits can become exposed to extremism via social media. Interested recruits then attend religious education courses or lectures where they are connected to in-person recruiters and facilitators in the country' (CEP, 2018: 2).

### ***Prisons***

Jawaid (2017) notes that ISIS and pro-Jemaah Islamiyah arrested ideologues openly recruit in prisons amongst gang members, petty criminals, and disgruntled youth looking for a form of employment, security, adventure, or acceptance into a community. Liow (2016) echoes this: 'corruption, incompetence, poor monitoring, and poor supervision of visits have all contributed to the ease with which radical ideas propounded by jihadi ideologues and recruiters are allowed proliferate among "gen pop"'. Poor prison management, over-crowding and lax vigilance allows not only for recruitment and radicalization within cells but also for potential coordination of terrorist activity conducted through social networks and the use of information technology, such as smartphones that inmates can readily access (Jawaid, 2017).

### ***Factors driving female recruitment***

The literature highlights the increasing participation of women in violent extremist groups, in particular joining ISIS. With regard to motivation, a study of 25 pro-ISIS Indonesian women found that they were prompted by a mix of personal crises and personal grievances to learn about Islam, 'actively experimenting with different Islamic interpretations and groups – both online and face to face – before making a conscious decision to join IS' (Nuraniya, 2018: 2). They were initially drawn to join a radical group less by ideology than emotional considerations such as a feeling of acceptance, empowerment and the development of interpersonal bonds with members of the group. However, 'as they learn more about IS ideological tenets and socialise (with other members) on-and off-line, the women gradually adopt the group's norms as their own, changing their lifestyles and goals, often against their family's will' (Nuraniyah, 2018: 2). The study concludes that counter-terrorism agencies should abandon the binary view that women are either just brainwashing victims or terrorist provocateurs, and try to understand the gendered nuances of radicalization in order to formulate suitable preventive measures.

## **4. The Philippines**

### **Violent extremism**

#### ***Mindanao conflict***

The main site of violent Islamist extremism in the Philippines is the southern island of Mindanao.<sup>6</sup> While Muslims form only about 11% of the total population of the Philippines, on Mindanao that figure rises to 23% (ICG, 2018). The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was the first Islamist extremist group in the country, set up in 1971. Violent insurgency has been underway in Mindanao since 1972. After years of conflict, in 1996 the MNLF signed a peace agreement with the government under which the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was formed from four provinces of Mindanao. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) split from the MNLF in 1978, unhappy that Mindanao had not been granted independence. It has been in (on-off) peace negotiations with the government for the past two decades. The Abu Sayyaf Group split from the MNLF in 1991, disagreeing with the latter entering into peace negotiations, and other violent extremist groups have followed (see below).

Between 2000 and 2007 Islamic extremists carried out bomb attacks that killed over 400 Filipino citizens and injured over a thousand more (CEP, 2018: 4). Major incidents in recent years include the launch on Christmas Eve 2015 by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) (a group which pledged allegiance to ISIS that year) of eight simultaneous attacks which left 16 people dead and displaced up to 6,000 (Loesch, 2017: 96). In April 2016 the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) beheaded a Canadian hostage hours after its ransom deadline expired, and followed this in June with the beheading of a second Canadian hostage (CEP, 2018: 5-6). In September 2016 a bomb attack in Davao claimed by the Maute Group (affiliated to ISIS) killed 14 and wounded 60 others (Loesch, 2017: 96). In May 2017 the Maute Group seized the city of Marawi on Mindanao, the second largest island in the Philippines. The Filipino military laid siege to the city but it took them five months to regain control, during which time over 1,100 fighters and civilians were killed, at least 400,000 residents displaced and much of the city's infrastructure destroyed (ICG, 2018; CEP, 2018: 5).

### ***Violent extremist groups and youth involvement***

The main violent extremist groups identified in the literature are the Abu Sayyaf Group, (ASG), the Maute Group and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) [The MNLF and MILF have largely given up violent action.] The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) was formed in the early 1990s by radical preacher Abdurajak Janjalani; after his death in 2006 it became infamous for kidnapping-for-ransom activities under the guise of jihad (ICG, 2018). Abu Sayyaf leaders have long been connected to jihadist movements elsewhere, particularly to Al-Qaeda, but since mid-2014 ASG factions, particularly in Sulu, have used ISIS-associated iconography such as black flags to promote a more ferocious image - in part to extract larger ransoms from foreign governments (ICG, 2018). In 2014 both the ASG and the closely aligned BIFF pledged allegiance to ISIS (CEP, 2018). Abu Sayyaf is known for its brutality and targeting of civilians (CEP, 2018).

The Maute Group was in effect a private militia for the Maute clan, using coercion to mobilise votes in local elections and extort contractors. After its candidates suffered losses in 2016, the group 'appeared to adopt ISIS-related imagery, less because of any particular affinity for ISIS's ideology than to burnish its fading image as a tough enforcer' (ICG, 2018). The Maute Group has pledged allegiance to ISIS. Seizing Marawi city in 2017, the group comprised of largely college-aged and, in some cases, particularly among the leadership, college-going militants (ICG, 2018). In recent years other extremist groups coming out of Mindanao have included Jamaah al-Tawhid Wal Jihad Philippines (JaTWJP), Ansar Khalifah Sarangani (AKS), Khilafa Islamiyah Mindanao, and Al Khobar Group (IAG, 2017: 25).

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<sup>6</sup> The area is also plagued by violence stemming from the drug trade, crime and ethnic conflicts. For an analysis of conflict in Mindanao see Strachan (2015).

The literature about violent extremism in the Philippines says little about the profile of those involved – and about youth specifically - but the descriptions of those arrested/killed in such acts points to a generally young membership of violent extremist groups.

### ***Gender dimension***

This review found that the literature on violent extremism in the Philippines was almost completely gender neutral. The only reference specifically to women was the arrest of a Filipino maid in Kuwait, suspected of allegiance to ISIS and of planning to launch an attack (CEP, 2018: 4). Other than that, the literature either referred to men only or used gender-neutral terms. For example, a report detailing the findings of research into youth vulnerability to violent extremism in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao used the terms youth, young Muslims and respondents, but made no mention of women (IAG, 2017).

## **Factors driving youth vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups**

### ***Marginalisation of Mindanao Muslims and disillusionment with peace process***

The literature highlights that the main factor driving violent extremism in Mindanao is the historic marginalisation of the region. This is exploited by violent extremist groups to win support. ‘The historical background of the Moro conflict – socioeconomic marginalization, ethno-religious discrimination, lack of political representation – clearly establishes conditions conducive to the rise of violent extremism’ (Loesch, 2017: 97). One analysis sums up Muslim grievances as stemming from the historic sense of separation of the Muslim community there from the Catholic polity:

This sense of separation has been exacerbated by blunt attempts to alter the historically Muslim centric demographic balance in the southern Philippines through Christian transmigration as well as by economic neglect and crushing poverty. Combined, these factors have ingrained a sense of victimization and oppression that has fuelled violence in the region since 1972 (IAG, 2017: 23).

Governance failings in Mindanao, seen in poor delivery of services and lack of security provision, contribute to disillusionment among the local population and are exploited by extremist groups to their own advantage (Rood, 2017; Reed & Piercey, 2018). By highlighting the disparity between government commitments and what is actually done in practice, such groups ‘undermine trust in the government and can then present themselves as a credible alternative source of governance, providing services and dispensing Islamic justice and dispute resolution’ (Reed & Piercey, 2018). The ICG stresses that the roots of ‘jihadism’ in Mindanao do not lie in ideology: ‘Jihadism in Mindanao should be understood against the backdrop of the 40-year Moro separatist conflict that has killed more than 120,000 people and displaced millions, and faltering efforts to find a political solution to that conflict’ (ICG, 2018).

The second related factor stressed in the literature is the protracted peace process. ‘Disenfranchised youth frustrated with the protracted Mindanao peace process and local clans who take an adversarial stance toward Manila-imposed policies provided a permissive environment for the Maute Group’ (ICG, 2018). Repeated failed peace agreements have left ‘many Muslims in the south believing they have been serially deceived by Manila. For them, the failure last year (2015) to pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law, as the enabling legislation was called, fits a cynical pattern of undelivered promises’ (ICG, 2016). The ICG warns that ‘the real potential problem lies... with disaffected youth who could lose hope the negotiations will deliver peace and prosperity. There is a real danger of accelerated criminalisation or radicalisation’ (ICG, 2016). It notes that, prior to the Marawi siege in 2017, ‘MILF commanders had warned that the longer the peace process remained mired in the legislature, the more receptive their junior cadres could

grow to ISIS propaganda. Indeed, the Maute Group appears to have recruited former MILF fighters' (ICG, 2018). The Bangsamoro Basic Law, providing for the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, was finally passed by the Philippine parliament and signed into law by President Duterte in July 2018 – but it has yet to be implemented and the region remains under martial law.

The large-scale destruction of Marawi city as a result of military operations against extremists has been used by violent groups to support their narrative of neglect of Mindanao by the centre. They 'point to what they consider as the Philippine military's disregard for civilian infrastructure and livelihoods as evidence of the central government's contempt for the people of Mindanao. This in turn could drive the next round of recruitment for those groups and shore up their popular support' (Reed & Piercey, 2018). The ICG (2018) warns that a botched reconstruction of Marawi could amplify the idea, pushed by the Maute Group, that Islam is under attack in Mindanao, 'potentially driving more of its younger members toward jihadism'. Franco (2018: 367) warns that: 'The use of force does not resolve the underlying issues that have allowed for the emergence and resilience of a violent extremist organisation such as the Maute Group'.

### ***Financial incentives***

The literature identifies financial incentives as playing a role not just in recruitment of individuals, but in the actions of some violent extremist groups, in particular, factions of the Abu Sayyaf Group (Jones, 2018) and even the Maute Group. For such groups ideology plays a role, but their motives tend to be more material (ICG, 2018). It points to the fact that not a single Filipino Muslim has attempted a suicide bombing in nearly five decades of the Mindanao insurgency: 'The rewards in the afterlife promised by jihadist ideology have yet to trump the real-world needs of militants and their kin' (ICG, 2018). Further indications that ideology is less a priority in Mindanao than other (worldly) considerations comes from the relative lack of locally produced ideological texts: 'compare it to jihadists in Indonesia, who have long produced original vernacular material in various formats including books, pamphlets and DVDs. No such material exists in the Philippines' (ICG, 2018).

With regard to individual recruitment, Rood (2017) notes that, 'In the poorer areas of the Sulu archipelago, the appeal of such groups, particularly among vulnerable youth, comes from economic struggles and the search for a better livelihood'. Loesch (2017) argues that Mindanaoans join violent extremist groups because of financial incentives (she actually identifies three pull factors, the others being family or clan ties, and recruitment by extremist preachers – see below). 'The monthly salary paid by the ASG (*Abu Sayyaf Group*) to its members is indeed an incentive for the numerous youth and poor people of Mindanao. Some may even have no other alternative for surviving than joining the ASG' (Loesch, 2017: 97). In a study investigating the vulnerability of Muslim youth in Mindanao to radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist (VE) groups, which focused on four conflict-affected provinces, youth respondents in the two island provinces of Basilan and Sulu saw poverty as the major driver of people joining VE groups (IAG, 2017: ix). This was reflected in the recruitment practices in the island provinces where 'respondents highlighted that "signing bonuses" were paid to new members immediately after they joined the Abu Sayyaf. Such financial incentives thus made VE groups particularly attractive to those with limited livelihood opportunities' (IAG, 2017: ix).

Franco (2018) describes how Mindanao State University, on the western fringes of Marawi city, was exploited by the Maute Group (MG) as a recruiting ground for disaffected youths. Financial incentives were a major factor in bringing them on board: 'When the Battle started (*May 2017 takeover of Marawi by MG and subsequent siege by armed forces*), reports emerged of how the MG enticed future recruits

with promises of cash. Given the limited opportunities in the city and the province as a whole, membership with the MG promised economic mobility and substantial financial gain' (Franco, 2018: 365).

### ***Social and kinship networks***

Loesch (2017) notes the importance of family or clan ties in Mindanao: 'Family is the first circle of allegiance in Mindanao, and many individuals are related by either blood or marriage'. As a result 'it is common to see a person providing support to a violent extremist group, because s/he counts relatives among its members' (Loesch, 2017: 97). The ICG (2018) echoes this, asserting that 'among the rank and file, involvement in jihadist militancy is often the result of a vocational decision within a family or a village, rather than an individual's epiphany'. Rood (2017) writes that one of the most fertile sources of recruitment in Mindanao is among those who have lost relatives in fighting: the 'clan organization' of fighting has been exploited by violent extremist groups and leads to many people joining them despite not previously having been members of such groups.

Debriefing of suspects arrested for the 2016 Davao bombing identified four factors that drove their entry into the Cotabato cell (part of a pro-ISIS coalition). As well as disillusionment with the Mindanao peace process, interaction with ISIS propaganda and promotion of the caliphate by charismatic religious scholars (see below), the fourth factor was social ties. 'The Cotabato cell, that at its height had some 30 to 35 members, was largely drawn from three overlapping networks. These were not men who lacked schooling or economic opportunity, nor did they merely cross over from existing armed groups. They were friends, neighbours, work colleagues and sometimes all three' (Jones, 2018: 7).

### ***Extremist preachers***

The literature highlights the role of radical extremist preachers in drawing people in Mindanao towards radical groups. Rood (2017) writes that recruitment into violent extremist groups often 'begins with an offer to provide an education into Islam – and "grooming" can take place via social media or in person'. In the IAG<sup>7</sup> study of vulnerability of Muslim youth in Mindanao to radicalization, youth respondents affirmed the presence of recruiters from such groups in their community who drove people to becoming radicalized: 'Many respondents explained that they knew recruiters and that these were active in local educational institutions (Madaris) and in mosques after the Friday prayers. Even those not involved in the VE groups conceded that the recruiters were often charming and persuasive' (IAG, 2017: viii). While individuals took different pathways to joining violent extremist groups, 'Most individuals gradually adopted radical views through listening to radical preachers, attending prayer groups, and having regular contact with the recruiters' (IAG, 2017: ix). Charismatic preachers played a major role in drawing recruits to the Cotabato cell: these 'were attracted by or pulled in by young radical clerics in the neighbourhood. By themselves, these recruits might not have joined ISIS, but men they looked up to had made that choice and were seen as having the religious knowledge to justify it' (Jones, 2018: 5).

### ***ISIS propaganda and online radicalization***

Violent extremist groups in Mindanao draw heavily on ISIS propaganda, much of it spread online. Rood (2017) writes that the assertion of military prowess by violent extremist groups linked to ISIS inspires those who are susceptible to recruitment. While earlier generations of radicals in the Philippines might have turned to communist or ethno-nationalist groups, 'now the Islamic State has provided a compelling vision of a worldwide caliphate as a possible ideology'. The leader of the ISIS-affiliated Cotabato cell, responsible for the 2016 Davao bombing, appeared to have been radicalized solely by ISIS propaganda

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<sup>7</sup> Institute of Governance and Analysis, Notre Dame University, Cotabato, Philippines.

material seen online, notably on Facebook and YouTube. A police report noted that, ‘The filming and showing of killings, rape of Islam believers/communities in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Libya) and burning of mosques and houses and killings in Burma motivated the subject to heed the call for jihad’ (Jones, 2018: 4-5). He in turn reached out through social media to a local radical cleric, who helped him set up the cell.

ISIS has promoted Mindanao as a site of jihad for extremists elsewhere in the Philippines and in other countries. In June 2016 ISIS posted a video featuring an Indonesian, a Malaysian and a Filipino: in it the group called for those (extremists) who could not make it to Syria or Iraq to go to Mindanao (Rood, 2017). The US Dept. of State Country Terrorism Report for 2016 also notes that numerous groups – including parts of the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Maute Group, and Ansar al-Khalifah Philippines – had pledged allegiance to ISIS, and ISIS had called on its supporters in Southeast Asia to join those groups and attack targets in the Philippines (US, DoS, 2017). According to Philippine intelligence, as many as 40 of the 400-500 ISIS-linked fighters in Marawi travelled from abroad to support the jihadists in the city (CEP, 2018: 1). The Philippine military chief asserted that ISIS sent at least USD 1.5 million to finance the seizure of Marawi; fighters used ISIS’ takeover of Mosul in Iraq as a blueprint (CEP, 2018: 4).

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