



Reframing Radicalization: A Structured Literature Review of Islamist Militancy in the Philippines (2000–2024)

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Abstract

This study reexamines predominant interpretations of Islamist militancy in the Philippines through a structured literature review and thematic synthesis of empirical research from 2000 to 2024. Drawing on 38 qualitative (including 7 mixed) + 14 quantitative = 52 studies, the analysis identifies four interrelated factors driving militant mobilization: socioeconomic marginalization, kinship-based recruitment networks, ideological framing, and governance fragility. The study produces a conceptual framework demonstrating how these factors interact to produce context-specific pathways to radicalization, rather than operating as independent variables. This approach challenges predominantly linear and ideology-centric models of radicalization by emphasizing the relational and structural dynamics underlying militant recruitment. The findings highlight the central role of social embeddedness and institutional conditions in shaping extremist trajectories, especially in conflict-affected regions such as Mindanao. The study provides a coherent explanatory framework and offers context-sensitive insights for more effective and sustainable counter-extremism strategies.

Keywords: *Islamist Militancy; Thematic Synthesis; Radicalization; Political Violence; Governance Fragility*

1. Introduction

Islamist radicalization is a global issue and is presently a significant cause for concern (Ohls et al., 2023). The southern Philippines has been consistently impacted by enduring insurgency and militant violence, especially in Mindanao, where numerous Islamist armed factions have arisen over the previous decades. Existing research consistently demonstrates that

the menace of terrorism did not emanate from distant nations but arose from individuals residing as relatively well-integrated citizens, whose radicalization prompted their actions (Veldhuis et al., 2009). The most notable include the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and the Maute Group. These groups have profoundly influenced the nation's security framework and persistently garner extensive academic interest in terrorism studies, insurgency research, and Southeast Asian security. In this research, radicalization is typically understood as a complex process influenced by individual traits, social networks, and overarching environmental factors (Sageman, 2008).

A significant body of research has delineated primary factors influencing militant mobilization in Mindanao, encompassing socioeconomic marginalization and deficient governance institutions (Banlaoi, 2010), historical grievances and ideological narratives (Abuza, 2003), and clan-based conflict systems or *rido* (Torres, 2007).

Recruitment processes frequently take place in contexts marked by constrained economic prospects, feeble governmental presence, and persistent political marginalization. Simultaneously, transnational terrorist movements have shaped the doctrinal and strategic development of local militant factions. Consequently, radicalization is increasingly perceived as a dynamic and relational phenomenon that develops through encounters within particular conflict contexts (Schmid, 2013). Radicalization is often associated with leftist groups in the Philippines and student activities that engage in radical movements. Sirry (2020) argues that there is no direct correlation between religious radicalism and violent terrorism, and that radicalized youth possess the capacity to critically evaluate the effects of their participation in radical networks on themselves and others, enabling them to deradicalize without necessarily adhering to the religious interpretations endorsed by the state.

Lafree et al. (2016) refer to the process by which extremist ideas and behaviors emerge as radicalization. The rising prevalence of extremist Muslims is becoming evident, attributed to social media platforms. Kruglanski et al. (2019) mentioned that radicalization emerges from individual needs, ideological frameworks, and support systems. The desire for significance, when combined with promoting violence as a means to achieve importance and a social network that generates a volatile psychological condition that endangers social stability and peace.

The 2017 Marawi siege is a crucial event in the Islamist militancy in the Philippines. It demonstrated the capacity of local factions to sustain urban warfare while obtaining both symbolic and practical support from international terrorist networks (Franco, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2018). It unveiled the intersection of localized complaints and transnational ideological influences, highlighting the inadequacies of current explanatory models. In advance of most lone-actor terrorist incidents, individuals typically have knowledge of the perpetrator's grievances, extreme ideologies, perspectives, and/or intentions to commit acts of violence (Gill et al., 2013).

Völker (2023) stated that ideology behind terrorist attacks influences political responses and the characterization of primary security threats. Structural, social, and ideological drivers of radicalization are frequently analyzed in isolation, which hinders the creation of comprehensive frameworks that can elucidate militant recruitment in intricate conflict settings like Mindanao.

This fragmentation limits theoretical progress and the development of evidence-based policy responses.

The study addresses the gap by carefully integrating empirical evidence to demonstrate how militant mobilization is best understood as a consequence of interconnected structural, social, and ideological dynamics rather than isolated causal factors. Neumann (2013) advances radicalization theory by presenting a unified explanatory framework that integrates various psychological and social factors, thereby providing context-specific insights for more effective counter-extremism strategies.

2. Literature Review

Academic focus on Islamist militancy in the Philippines has markedly increased over the last twenty years, propelled by the need to comprehend the historical, political, and socioeconomic factors influencing insurgency and extremist violence in Mindanao. Initial contributions, notably by Abuza (2003), offered essential insights into the rise of militant organizations and their affiliations with regional jihadist networks in Southeast Asia. Abuza (2003) illustrated how entities like the Abu Syyaf Group evolved via ideological interactions and operational connections with transnational actors, notably Jemaah Islamiyah. Banlaoi (2010) highlighted that governance deficits, political marginalization, and socioeconomic inequality contribute to the persistence of militant activity, asserting that a weak state presence in peripheral areas allows armed groups to strengthen their influence and recruit from at-risk communities.

Consequent study redirected focus from structural explanations to include organizational and ideological aspects of militancy. Research on insurgent movements in Mindanao indicates that political aims—especially concerning autonomy and self-determination—frequently converge with religious narratives, resulting in hybrid motivations for mobilization. Franco (2017) analyzed the Marawi siege, highlighting how local militant organizations effectively merged global jihadist iconography with regional conflict dynamics, indicating a shifting strategic and ideological landscape.

Modern scholarship increasingly views radicalization as a complex process influenced by structural constraints, social networks, and ideological narratives. Sageman (2004, 2008) proposed a network-based perspective, contending that recruiting often transpires inside intimate, cohesive social circles rather than through hierarchical organizational frameworks. McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008, 2017) formulated a multi-tiered paradigm that synthesizes individual, group, and societal causes, emphasizing processes such as group polarization, identity construction, and perceived injustice as catalysts for radicalization.

Shafieiou and Haq (2023) states that it is vital to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the societal structures that render an individual vulnerable to radicalization first. Psychological methodologies enhance this comprehension. Moghaddam (2005) formulated the notion of the radicalization using the “staircase model,” which delineates a progressive transition from perceived hardship to moral disengagement and ultimately to engagement in violence. Horgan (2005) augmented this perspective by underscoring the significance of extended socialization inside militant networks, whilst Bjørge (2011) elucidated how identity

formation, social affiliation, and group dynamics influence both participation in and withdrawal from extremist activities.

Hoffman (2006) emphasized the adaptive potential of terrorist organizations, highlighting their capability to alter plans, recruitment methods, and propaganda in reaction to evolving political circumstances. Kilcullen (2009) established the notion of the "accidental guerrilla," elucidating that individuals may affiliate with militant organizations not out of ideological allegiance, but as a pragmatic reaction to perceived external threats or governmental dysfunction.

Recent empirical research has underscored the significance of incorporating various views. Hafez and Mullins (2015) contended that radicalization processes are influenced by the interplay of structural grievances and social networks, whereas Schuurman et al. (2018) illustrated that trajectories toward violent extremism are significantly context-dependent and entail intricate interactions among personal, social, and political elements. Borum (2011) underscored the significance of perceived injustice and grievance narratives, however, Neumann (2013) warned against interpreting radicalization exclusively through ideological frameworks, promoting a more comprehensive contextual perspective instead. Franc and Pavlović (2021) argued that socio-political inequality shows a stronger positive correlation with terrorism and cognitive radicalization compared to economic inequality, which is more associated with behavioral radicalization.

While Sageman (2008) emphasizes decentralized social networks, Moghaddam (2005) highlights psychological progression, and Hoffman (2006) underscores organizational adaptability, these perspectives remain insufficient when applied independently to complex conflict environments such as Mindanao. Stange (2019) asserts that acknowledging the elements of identity, religion, and culture is essential for effective war-to-peace transitions and the attainment of sustainable conflict resolution methods.

Building on Sinai et al. (2019), improving the effectiveness of community-based responses can help weaken the drivers of radicalization and recruitment. Despite extensive research, current studies frequently examine structural, social, or ideological factors in isolation, hindering the advancement of cohesive explanatory frameworks.

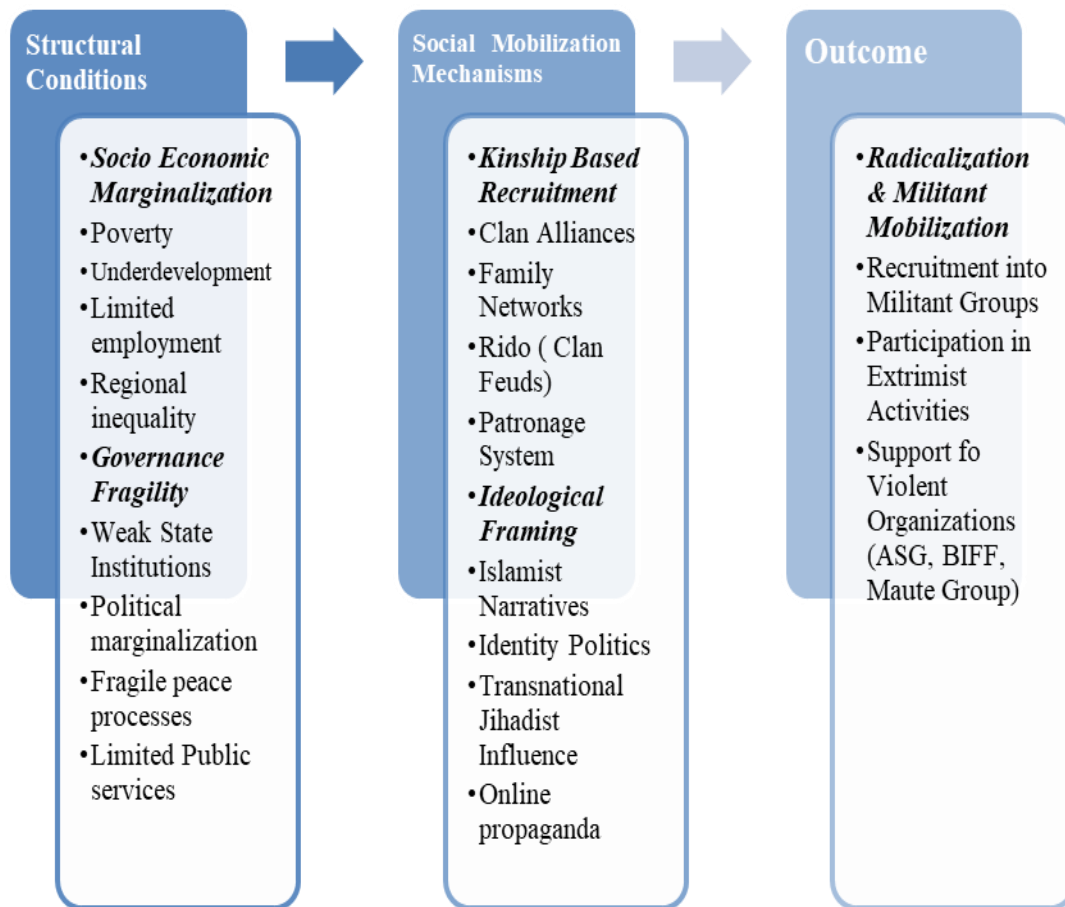
2.1 Conceptual Framework of Radicalization in the Philippine Context

This study presents a comprehensive conceptual framework for comprehending radicalization and militant mobilization within the Philippine setting. The framework argues that extremist recruitment emerges from interaction between structural conditions and social mobilization mechanisms. Structural elements including socioeconomic disadvantage and governance fragility foster conditions marked by political discontent, economic hardship, and diminished state legitimacy.

These conditions promote the formation of kinship-oriented recruitment networks that engage individuals via familial connections, clan affiliations, and local patronage systems. In these networks, ideological framing—frequently shaped by transnational terrorist narratives—offers the symbolic rationale for violent involvement. These factors do not function

independently; rather, they form a reinforcing system in which each dimension amplifies the effects of the others.

Figure 1: Integrated Radicalization Model for Islamist Militancy in the Philippines (2000-2024)



This conceptual framework illustrates the progression from structural conditions to radicalization and militant mobilization, mediated by social and ideological mechanisms. Structural conditions, including socioeconomic marginalization and governance fragility, create an environment characterized by inequality, limited opportunities, weak institutions, and political exclusion. These factors generate grievances and increase vulnerability among affected populations. The framework demonstrates that while structural conditions create susceptibility, it is the combination of social networks, political dynamics, and ideological narratives that ultimately translates vulnerability into organized extremist behavior.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

A structured study selection process was used to enhance transparency in identifying and organizing relevant literature. This study employs a structured literature review combined with a

thematic synthesis approach to examine academic research on Islamist militancy in the Philippines from 2000 to 2024. The study adopts a structured and transparent approach to selecting and analyzing relevant literature, enabling a comprehensive and structured synthesis of existing empirical findings.

A total of 38 qualitative (including 7 mixed) + 14 quantitative = 52 studies were identified and selected based on their relevance to Islamist militancy in the Philippine context, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research. These studies were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and conflict datasets.

The review aims to integrate fragmented findings across disciplines by identifying recurring informative patterns associated with radicalization and militant mobilization. This approach allows for the development of a context-sensitive analytical framework grounded in existing empirical research.

While an earlier version of this study employed a more preliminary review approach, the present study adopts a structured literature review and thematic synthesis to deepen analytical clarity and methodological transparency.

3.2 Search Strategy

A structured search of academic and policy-oriented literature was conducted to identify relevant studies on Islamist militancy in the Philippines. A literature search was performed across various academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, to get both peer-reviewed papers and pertinent policy reports about Islamist militancy in the Philippines. These resources were chosen for their provision of access to peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, and academic publications pertinent to terrorism studies and Southeast Asian security. Grey literature sources encompassed documents from the International Crisis Group and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as datasets from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). Unlike other types of criminal violence, terrorism poses specific challenges for data collection (LaFree and Dugan, 2007).

Inclusion criteria:

- Published between 2000–2024
- Focus on Islamist militancy in the Philippines
- Empirical qualitative, quantitative or mixed method of studies
- Peer-reviewed articles, books, policy reports

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies focusing on non-Islamist insurgencies
- Purely opinion or commentary articles
- Studies without empirical evidence

3.3 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extraction involved reviewing the selected studies and recording key information including:

- Author and year of publication
- Research focus
- Methodological approach
- Key findings related to militant activities

Additional variables extracted included geographic focus, type of militant organization examined, and key explanatory factors related to recruitment and radicalization dynamics.

The review utilized a narrative synthesis methodology to assess findings due to the varied methodologies and analytical frameworks implemented in the included studies. Narrative synthesis enables researchers to discern common themes and patterns across diverse studies (Popay et al., 2006). Data pertinent to each study was gathered, encompassing publication year, research design, geographic focus, analyzed militant groups, and significant findings regarding radicalization and recruitment strategies.

A thematic coding methodology was employed to discern recurring patterns throughout the literature. Research was examined and categorized according to recurring explanatory variables associated with radicalization and militant mobilization. Four predominant themes emerged through iterative comparison: socioeconomic marginalization, kinship-based recruitment networks, ideological framing, and governance fragility.

Through this process, the literature was organized into thematic categories including:

- Socio-Economic Marginalization - This theme investigates how structural deprivation, poverty, and insufficient livelihood prospects contribute to recruitment into groups such as the ASG, BIFF, and Maute Group.
- Kinship-based Recruitment Networks - This topic emphasizes the significance of familial ties, clans, and Rido (clan feuding) as key mobilization processes that frequently overshadow ideological commitment.
- Ideological Framing - This subject juxtaposes the secular nationalism of the MNLF and MILF with the "Islamic revivalism" or violent extremism of the ASG, BIFF, and Maute Group.
- Governance Fragility - This theme examines leadership failure, "bossism," and the state's incapacity to meet obligations as catalysts for persistent militancy.

Studies addressing multiple dimensions of radicalization were categorized across relevant themes but were not double-counted in the aggregate methodological totals.

Potential sources of bias include publication bias and variation in methodological approaches across studies, which were addressed through comparative thematic analysis.

3.4 Thematic Arrangement of References with Methodology. These themes provided the basis for the analysis presented in the results and discussion sections.

1. Socio-Economic Marginalization

(Focus: structural deprivation, poverty, lack of livelihood opportunities)

Reference	Method
Adriano, F. & Thomas Parks. T.(2013). <i>The Contested Corners of Asia: The Case of Mindanao</i> .	Qual
Conflict Alert (2018). <i>Annual Report on Violence in Mindanao: 2010–2017</i> .	Mixed (Qual + Quant)
Institute of Economics and Peace (2024). <i>Global Terrorism Index: Philippines Ranking</i> .	Quant
Lara, F. J. (2019). Transition-induced Violent Conflict and the Bangsamoro State-building Project. <i>Philippine Sociological Review</i> , 67, 5–34.	Qual
Adriano, F. & Thomas Parks. T.(2013). <i>The Contested Corners of Asia: The Case of Mindanao</i> . Mendoza, R. U., Yap, J. K., Mendoza, G. A. S., Pizarro, A. L. J., & Engelbrecht, G. (2022). Political Dynasties and Terrorism: An Empirical Analysis Using Data on the Philippines. <i>Asian Journal of Peacebuilding</i> .	Quant
Philippine Human Development Report (2005). Peace, Human Security and Human Development in the Philippines	Mixed (Qual + Quant)
Schiavo-Campo, S. & Judd, M. (2005). The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Roots, Costs, and Potential Peace Dividend	Mixed (Qual + Quant)
World Bank (2010). <i>Mindanao Conflict Monitoring Report: Casualty Data</i> .	Quant

2. Kinship-Oriented Recruitment Networks

(Focus: clan systems, Rido feuds, family alliances, kinship-based recruitment)

Reference	Method
ACLED (2024). Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: Philippines dataset.	Quant
Adam, J. (2013). A Comparative Analysis on the Micro-level Genealogies of Conflict in the Philippines' Mindanao Island and Indonesia's Ambon Island. <i>Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis</i> .	Qual
Canuday, J. J. (2007). "Big War, Small Wars: The Role of Regional and Clan Conflicts in the Mindanao Insurgency." In W. M. Torres III (Ed.), <i>Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao</i> .	Qual
Conflict Alert. (2014). <i>Out of the Shadows: Violent Conflict and the Real Economy of Mindanao</i> .	Mixed (Qual + Quant)
Fianza, M. (2010). <i>Rido: Clan Feuding and its Impact on Local Governance</i> .	Qual
Geneva Call (2024). <i>Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Culturally Grounded Solutions for Clan Conflicts</i> .	Qual
Kreuzer, Peter (2005). <i>Political Clans and Violence in the Philippines</i> . Peace Research Institute Frankfurt.	Qual
Matuan, M. S. (2007). "Inventory of Existing Rido in Lanao del Sur." In <i>Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management</i> .	Mixed (Qual + Quant)
Mendoza, R. U., Beja Jr, E. L., Venida, V. S., & Yap, D. B. (2016). Political Dynasties and Poverty: Measurement and Evidence of Linkages in the Philippines. <i>Oxford Development Studies</i> , 44(2), 189–201.	Quant
USAID (2015). <i>Assessment of Rido Incidents in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao</i> .	Mixed (Qual + Quant)
Torres, W. M., III (Ed.). (2014). <i>Rido: Clan feuding and conflict management in Mindanao (Expanded ed.)</i> . Ateneo de Manila University Press.	Quant

3. Ideological Framing

(Focus: extremist narratives, identity politics, ideological motivations, propaganda)

Reference	Method
Abuza, Z. (2016). <i>The Islamic State in the Philippines: A Looming Shadow in Southeast Asia</i> .	Qual
Asia Foundation (2018). <i>Understanding Violent Extremism: Messaging and Recruitment on Social Media in the Philippines</i> .	Qual
Banlaoi, R. C. (2019). <i>Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiyyah: Essays on the Abu Sayyaf Group, Terrorism in the Philippines from Al-Qaeda to ISIS (4th ed.)</i> . Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR).	Qual
Caballero-Anthony, M. (2016). <i>An Introduction to Non-Traditional Security Studies: A Transnational Approach</i> .	Qual
DAI. (2018). <i>Youth and Violent Extremism in Mindanao, Philippines</i> . DAI Publications.	Quant
Echelmeyer, L., Slotboom, A., & Weerman, F. (2023). The Putative Effect of identity on Extremist Radicalization: A Systematic review of quantitative studies. <i>Studies in Conflict and Terrorism</i> , 1–42.	Quant
Franco, J. G. (2022). "Islamic State-linked Groups in the Philippines." <i>Program on Extremism</i> .	Qual
Franc, R., & Pavlović, T. (2021). Inequality and Radicalisation: Systematic Review of Quantitative studies. <i>Terrorism and Political Violence</i> , 35(4), 785–810.	Quant
Gunaratna, R. (2002). <i>Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror</i> . Columbia University Press.	Qual
Hafez, M., & Mullins, C. (2015). The radicalization puzzle: A theoretical synthesis of empirical approaches to homegrown extremism. <i>Studies in Conflict & Terrorism</i> , 38(11), 958–975.	Qual
Sumpter, C., & Franco, J. (2021). <i>Islamist Militancy in Indonesia and the Philippines: Domestic Lineage and Sporadic Foreign Influence</i> . International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT).	Qual
Sinai, J., Fuller, J., & Seal, T. (2019). Effectiveness in Counter-Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism: A Literature Review. <i>Perspectives on Terrorism</i> , 13(6), 90–108.	Qual
Völker, T. (2023). How terrorist attacks distort public debates: a comparative study of right-wing and Islamist extremism. <i>Journal of European Public Policy</i> , 31(11), 3487–3514.	Quant

4. Governance Fragility

(Focus: weak state institutions, peace processes, political fragility, governance failures)

Reference	Method
Abuza, Z. (2003). <i>Balikatan: The US-Philippine Partnership Against Terrorism</i> . Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College.	Qual
Brillantes, Alex B. Jr., & Moscare, Donna Lou (2002). <i>Decentralization and Federalism in the Philippines</i> .	Qual
Buendia, R. G. (2005). <i>The State-Moro Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Unresolved National Question or Question of Governance?</i> <i>Asian Journal of Political Science</i> , 13(1), 109–138.	Qual
Chalk, P. (2001). "Separatism and Southeast Asia: The Islamic Factor in Southern Thailand, Mindanao, and Aceh." <i>Studies in Conflict & Terrorism</i> , 24(4), 241–269.	Qual
Coronel Ferrer, M. (2013). <i>Region, Nation and Cause: Essays on the Radical Left and the Moro Secessionist Movements in Southern Philippines</i> . University of the Philippines Press.	Qual
Crost, B., Felter, J., & Johnston, P. (2014). <i>Aid Under Fire: Development Projects and Civil Conflict</i> . <i>American Economic Review</i> .	Quant
Fjelde, H., & Nilsson, D. (2012). <i>Rebels Against Rebels: Explaining Violence Between Rebel Groups</i> .	Quant
International Crisis Group. (2022). <i>Southern Philippines: Fostering an Inclusive Bangsamoro</i> .	Qual
International Alert. (2021). <i>Conflict Alert 2020: Enduring wars</i> . International Alert Philippines.	Qual
International Crisis Group. (2021). <i>Southern Philippines: Keeping normalisation on track in the Bangsamoro (Asia Report No. 313)</i> .	Qual
International Crisis Group. (2019). <i>The Philippines: Militancy and the new Bangsamoro (Asia Report No. 301)</i> . https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/asia-pacific/philippines/301-philippines-militancy-and-new-bangsamoro	Qual
Kaufmann, Daniel & Aart C. Kraay. (2024). "The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and 2024 Update." Policy Research Working Paper. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.	Quant
LaFree, G., & Dugan, L. (2007). <i>Introducing the Global Terrorism Database</i> . <i>Terrorism and Political Violence</i> , 19(2), 181–204.	Quant

Magdalena, F. V. (2018). <i>Managing the Muslim Minority in the Philippines</i> .	Qual
Santos, S. M. (2005). Dynamics and Directions of the Peace Negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. East-West Center Washington Working Papers, (3).	Qual
Strachan, A. L. (2015). Conflict analysis of Muslim Mindanao. (Rapid Literature Review). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham	Mixed (Qual + Quant)
Tan, S. K. (2008). A History of the Philippines. University of the Philippines Press.	Qual
Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). <i>Islamist radicalisation: A root cause model</i> . https://www.diis.dk/files/media/publications/import/islamist_radicalisation.veldhuis_and_staun.pdf	Qual
Vitug, M. D. (2017). The Bangsamoro's Long Road to Peace, often cited for its coverage of the peace process history.	Qual
Yusof, N., & Bagolong, S. (2023). The Administration of Moral Governance in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao government. <i>JPAIR Multidisciplinary Research</i> , 53(1), 196–235.	Qual

3.5 Summary of the Themes

Theme	Qualitative	Quantitative
Socioeconomic Marginalization	5 (Including 3 Mixed)	3
Kinship Recruitment Networks	8 (Including 3 Mixed)	3
Ideological Framing	9	4
Governance Fragility	16 (including 1 Mixed)	4

Total number of studies reviewed: 52 (38 qualitative (including 7 mixed) + 14 quantitative)

The thematic distribution demonstrates that governance fragility, ideological framing, kinship-based recruitment networks, and socioeconomic marginalization operate together as drivers of Islamist militancy. The prominence of governance-related studies suggests that institutional weaknesses create conditions conducive to recruitment and mobilization, while ideological narratives, social networks, and structural inequalities shape pathways into extremist

movements. These patterns support a multidimensional understanding of radicalization that extends beyond ideological or single-factor explanations.

4. Results

4.1 Study Selection

The synthesis of 38 qualitative (including 7 mixed) + 14 quantitative = 52 research uncovers four persistent explanatory patterns influencing Islamist militancy in the Philippines. To enhance transparency in the organization of the reviewed literature, the study selection process is summarized in Figure 2.

• Figure 2: Study Selection Overview of Reviewed Literature

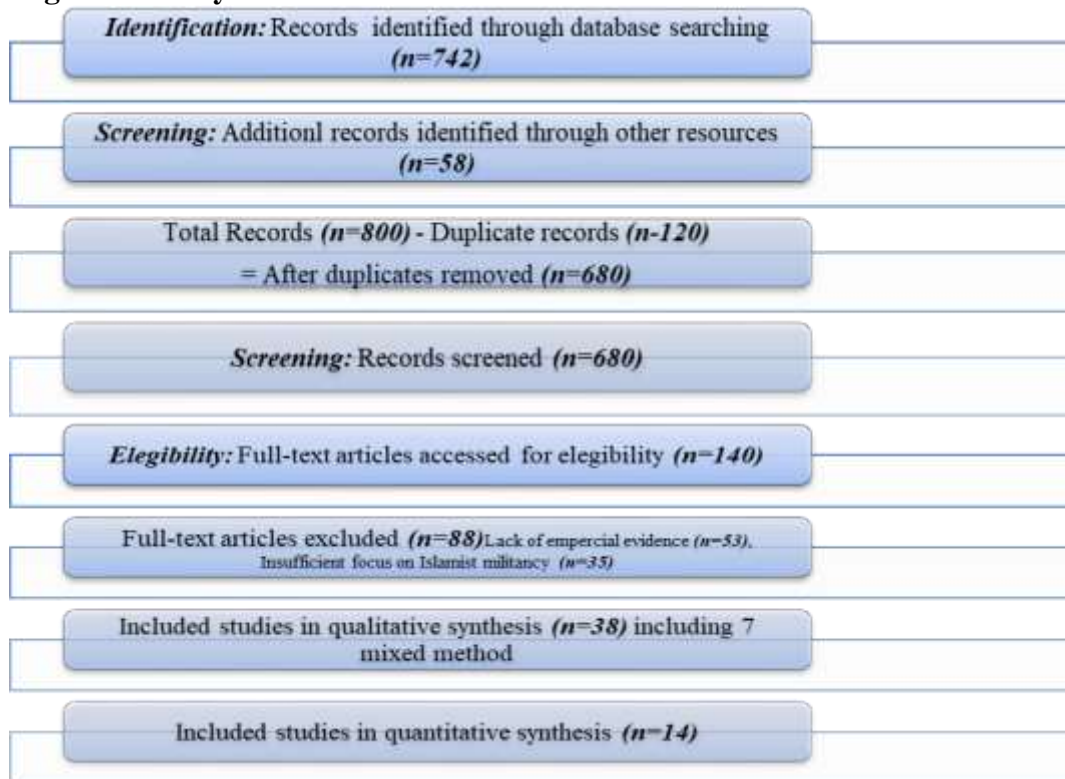


Figure 2 illustrates the study identification and selection process used to organize the literature included in this review. The process summarizes the identification, screening, and final inclusion of studies based on relevance to Islamist militancy in the Philippine context. The initial database search identified 742 records related to Islamist militancy and insurgency in the Philippines. An additional 58 records were identified through grey literature and supplementary sources.

After removing duplicate records, 680 studies remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 540 records were excluded due to insufficient relevance to the research topic. The remaining 140 articles were assessed through full-text review. Following eligibility assessment, 88 studies were excluded due to lack of empirical evidence or insufficient focus on Islamist militancy in the Philippine context. The final dataset consisted of 38 qualitative (including 7 mixed) + 14 quantitative = 52 studies.

4.2 Characteristics of Included Studies

The reviewed literature encompasses a varied collection of academic work investigating Islamist militancy in the Philippines across several fields, including political science, terrorist studies, security studies, and Southeast Asian studies. Numerous studies concentrate on the evolution, structure, and operational dynamics of prominent militant organizations, including the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and the Maute Group.

The literature predominantly employs qualitative methodologies, featuring 38 qualitative research (including 7 mixed studies) and 14 quantitative analyses. Qualitative research predominantly use case studies, policy analyses, and historical methodologies to investigate insurgent dynamics, whereas quantitative studies offer empirical insights into patterns of violence, recruitment, and structural conditions. This distribution underscores a significant dependence on contextually rich, case-based analysis for comprehending militancy in Mindanao.

Throughout this corpus of work, numerous regular patterns manifest. Socioeconomic marginalization is often recognized as a contributing factor that heightens vulnerability to recruitment, especially in conflict-affected regions like Basilan, Sulu, and Lanao del Sur (World Bank, 2020). Instead of acting as a direct cause, structural deprivation establishes conditions that render individuals more susceptible to mobilization.

Kinship-oriented recruitment networks is often integrated within kinship and clan networks, where familial connections and patronage structures influence involvement in militant activities. These relationship dynamics frequently influence, and in certain instances surpass, merely ideological objectives and the violence in Muslim Mindanao is predominantly fueled by clan rivalries and personal relationships, rather than by the ideological or religious objectives of the parties involved. (Kreuzer, 2005).

Ideological framing, the impact of transnational jihadist narratives—especially those linked to the Islamic State—has amplified the symbolic and justificatory aspects of mobilization. Research indicates that ideology is insufficient on its own; it operates most effectively when it aligns with local grievances and existing social frameworks (Ranstorp, 2016).

Governance fragility, erratic service provision, and unfinished peace initiatives diminish state legitimacy and hinder the sustained efficacy of counterterrorism strategies. These circumstances allow violent organizations to maintain operations by capitalizing on local grievances and institutional deficiencies.

Collectively, these studies present a unified understanding of militant dynamics in the Philippines, highlighting the interaction among structural vulnerability, social embeddedness, ideological framing, and governance conditions.

4.3 Emerging Patterns in the Literature

The examination of the chosen articles uncovered multiple consistent themes in the academic literature regarding Islamist militancy in the Philippines.

● **Structural Determinants of Militancy**

Numerous studies emphasize the influence of socioeconomic marginalization, ineffective governance, and historical grievances on militant recruitment and mobilization in Mindanao. Researchers contend that these structural problems foster circumstances conducive to the support of militant organizations within local communities.

● **Organizational Development**

Numerous studies highlight the adaptive characteristics of militant organizations in the Philippines. Organizations like the Abu Sayyaf Group have transformed over time, transitioning from ideologically driven insurgency to hybrid forms of militancy that amalgamate ideological aims with criminal enterprises such as abduction and extortion.

● **Transnational Influences**

Existing literature consistently demonstrates the impact of global jihadist networks on militant groups in Southeast Asia. Researchers observe that ideological and operational connections with international extremist organizations have influenced the techniques and narratives utilized by militant groups in the Philippines.

5. Theoretical Contribution

This study redirects the analytical emphasis from individual or ideology-based explanations to the relational and structurally ingrained aspects of radicalization, especially in conflict settings marked by robust family structures and inadequate institutional capability.

By synthesizing these dimensions into a cohesive analytical framework, the study tackles fragmentation in current literature and offers a systematic approach for examining radicalization in fragile and conflict-affected environments.

6. Policy Implications

Policy responses should address structural vulnerabilities, kinship-based networks, ideological processes, and governance conditions simultaneously. Treating these factors in isolation limits effectiveness. Although coercive methods may yield temporary interruptions, they are inadequate without actions addressing the socio-political context that fosters militant mobilization.

Addressing socioeconomic disadvantage necessitates investment in inclusive development, especially in conflict-affected areas like Mindanao. Improving livelihood opportunities, expanding access to education, and reducing regional disparities can directly reduce vulnerability to recruitment.

Secondly, due to the pivotal importance of kinship and clan networks, counter-extremism programs must integrate community-level involvement mechanisms. Initiatives that enhance local conflict resolution, promote discourse among competing clans, and empower community leaders might obstruct recruitment channels in social and family frameworks. These methodologies are significant in circumstances where relational duties and patronage networks influence engagement in militant activities.

Third, interventions addressing ideological framing should move beyond counter-narratives and focus on strengthening local legitimacy. Engaging reputable local entities, such as religious leaders and civil society organizations, can augment the efficacy of preventive efforts by harmonizing the community-specific norms and values.

Enhancing institutional efficacy, guaranteeing uniform service provision, and strengthening the rule of law can augment state legitimacy and diminish the political environment to militant organizations. In this context, counterterrorism policy must be connected to comprehensive governance and peacebuilding reforms.

The report emphasizes that effective sustainable counter-extremism policies necessitate a multi-faceted approach that combines security measures with development, community interventions, and institutional fortification. This strategy is crucial for tackling both the immediate symptoms and the fundamental causes of militant mobilization in unstable and conflict-affected environments.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamist militancy in the Philippines is best understood as the product of interacting structural, social, ideological, and institutional forces rather than any single pathway to radicalization. The synthesis identified four factors of militant mobilization: socioeconomic marginalization, kinship-based recruitment networks, ideological framing, and governance fragility. Rather than operating independently, these factors reinforce one another, creating localized conditions that facilitate recruitment and sustain militant activity in conflict-affected areas such as Mindanao.

By integrating evidence from 52 empirical studies, this review advances a context-sensitive framework for understanding militant mobilization in the Philippines. The findings show that socioeconomic deprivation creates conditions of vulnerability, kinship networks provide channels for mobilization, ideological narratives legitimize participation, and governance weaknesses enable militant groups to persist. Together, these dimensions offer a more comprehensive explanation of radicalization than approaches centered solely on ideology, psychology, or security concerns.

The study has important implications for both theory and practice. Understanding Islamist militancy as an outcome of interconnected structural and social processes provides a stronger foundation for explaining extremist trajectories in the Philippines and for designing more effective, context-responsive approaches to peacebuilding and prevention.

8. Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the synthesis may be influenced by publication bias, as the available literature tends to prioritize studies reporting significant findings or prominent militant cases, potentially underrepresenting contradictory or null evidence. Second, substantial variation in how studies conceptualize and measure radicalization, recruitment, and community vulnerability limits direct comparability and may affect the consistency of interpretations across the literature. Third, the predominance of qualitative case studies and the limited availability of longitudinal evidence constrain both the generalizability of findings and the assessment of how radicalization processes evolve. Finally, the reliance on English-language publications may exclude relevant scholarship produced in Filipino or regional languages.

Future research should prioritize standardized and theoretically grounded measures of radicalization to improve comparability across contexts. Mixed-method and longitudinal designs that integrate conflict datasets with community-level fieldwork would provide a more robust understanding of recruitment pathways, disengagement processes, and the long-term effectiveness of counter-extremism interventions.

Conflict of interest

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