

**CHAPTER 6**

# **Violence in Borderlands:**

**What Explains the Difference in  
Intensity and Magnitude?**

# Violence in Borderlands: What Explains the Difference in Intensity and Magnitude?

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**T**his chapter examines why violence intensity and magnitude is higher in the borderlands than in other conflict locations in the Bangsamoro region. Heatmaps from the Conflict Alert conflict database demonstrate this geographic characteristic of violent conflict. Ten-year panel data across the region were examined to compare conflict intensity and magnitude within and outside borderlands, supplemented by ocular surveys, key informant interviews, and other secondary data. Two borderland cases were investigated to determine the causal links between violence and geography using the lens of power, space, and time. The study discovered that political institutions, geography, and management of collective identities and identity claims influence violence intensity per unit of time. Underlying identity and territorial claims are rooted in the historical formation of borderlands that can trigger scale shifts in violence when used by external actors or local elites aiming to secure power by leaning on the predominant ethnic group. The study further reveals that eruptions and persistence of violence

are connected to contingent and transgressive events that involve autonomous actions of external agents such as security forces of the central state, rebel groups, and others that are not native to the political resources of local communities.

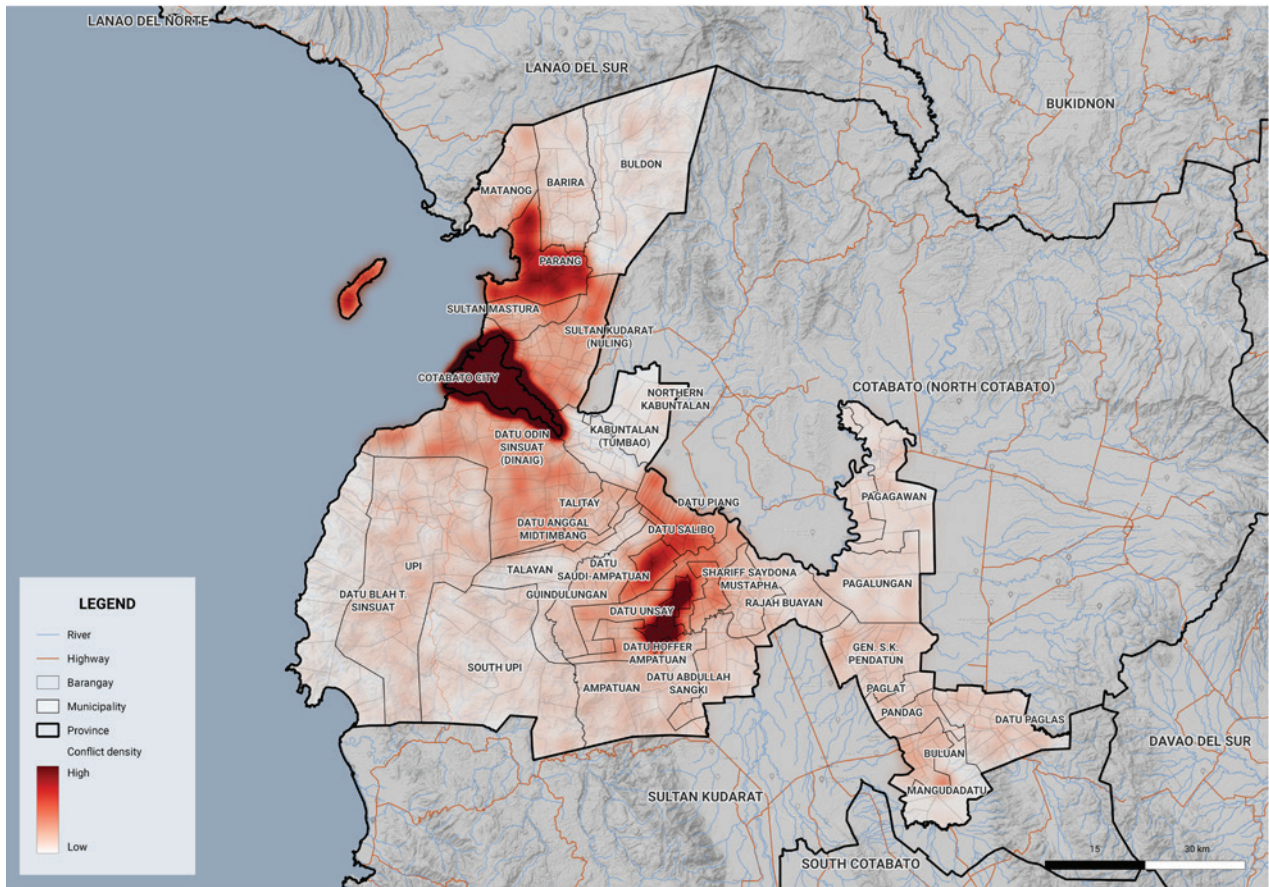
## 1. Conflict intensity and magnitude in the Bangsamoro borderlands

A cursory look at the Conflict Alert 2011–2020 database reveals the spatial characteristics of different types of conflicts in the region and exposes the higher intensity and magnitude of violence in areas straddling border areas, referred to as borderlands, within the Bangsamoro region.<sup>1</sup> Heat maps were used to indicate the intensity of conflict in these borderlands.<sup>2</sup>

In Maguindanao, these heat maps point to borders within the Parang corridor and the SPMS box, including Cotabato City that lies at the border between Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat province. In the SPMS box, borderlands include

<sup>1</sup> Borderlands are variously defined based on the nature and characteristics of borders and the lens being used to study these borders. They can be described as “geographical places demarcated and defined by state-designed boundaries”, and hence, are socially constructed boundaries between states and societies (Chan 2016; Foucault, 1978). They are also defined as areas where dwellers negotiate tensions, disputes, or conflicts atop a diverse set of identities based on ethnicity, culture, language, including gender (Vila 2003). Political scientists refer to them as barriers to the movement of goods, ideas, and people, and as markers of the extent and power of the state (Wilson and Donnan, 1998). Historians view them as “the contested boundaries between colonial domains” (Adelman and Aron, 1999) International relations people see them as “subnational areas whose economic and social life is directly and significantly affected by proximity to an international boundary” (Hansen 1981).

<sup>2</sup> A heat map generalizes and visualizes data based on the clustering of point data in an area. It assumes continuous distribution of point data across the area. It is also called an isopleth map where data drawn shapes depict hotspots or concentration of value on a map (e.g., Map 1). This study also uses another type of map called choropleth map. In Map 6, the choropleth map of Wao and Amai Manabilang is shown. It is a thematic map where the colors correspond to categories defined by numeric ranges and the shapes are defined by standard geographical boundaries, not by the data itself.

**Map 1. Conflict Heat Map of Maguindanao**

Datu Piang and Datu Salibo that share borders with Midsayap and Pikit in North Cotabato (**Map 1**).

An interesting case is South Upi, on the southern tip of Maguindanao province, which shares borders with Lebak, on the northern tip of Sultan Kudarat province (**Map 4a**). On the following map, the incidence of violence in South Upi is remarkably more intense than the neighboring Maguindanao municipalities of Upi, Datu Blah Sinsuat, and Talayan. The question is whether the violence in South Upi is confined to the municipality or has anything to do with being a borderland to Lebak.

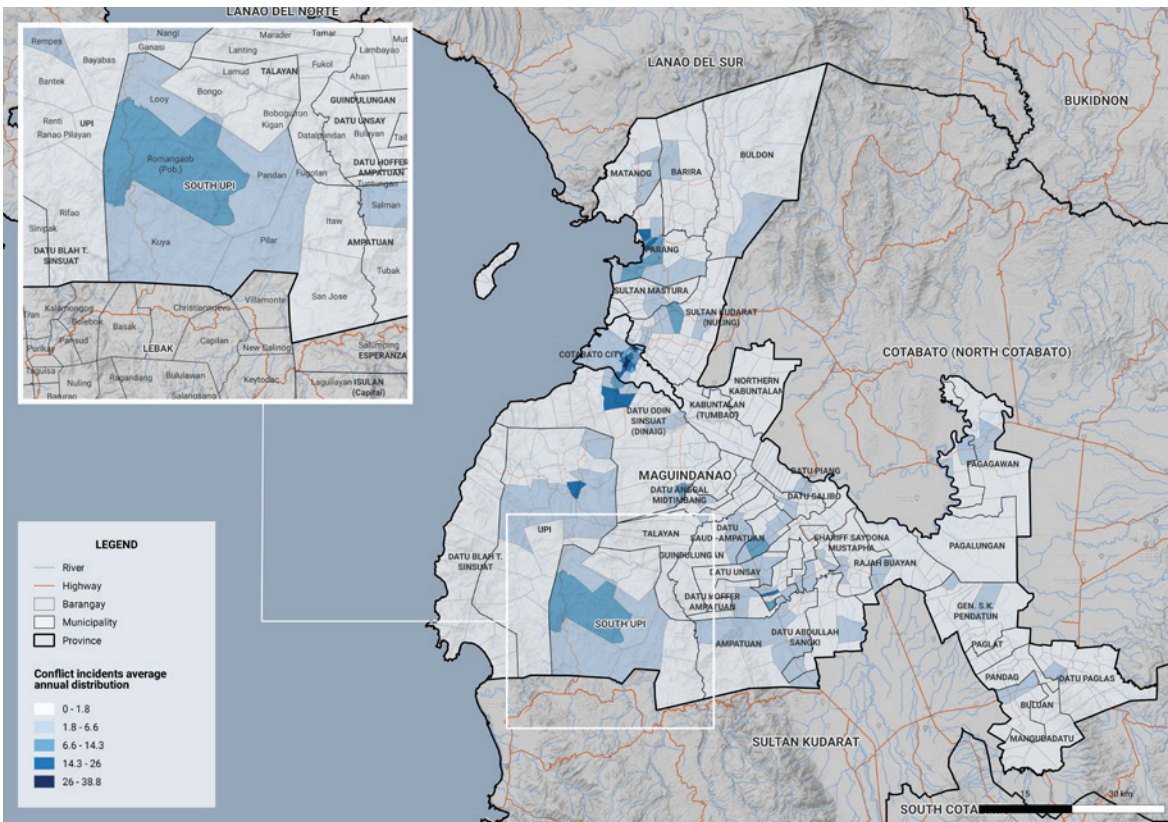
Meanwhile, the Lanao del Sur heat map shows very high concentrations in Marawi City and the adjacent towns of Ditsaan Ramin, Marantao and Saguarian; the adjoining lake towns of Mulondo, Taraka and Tamparan; and, Wao (**Map 3**).

Note that Wao shares borders with Kalilangan and Kadingilan (Bukidnon) and Alamada and Banisilan (North Cotabato). Adjacent to Wao is the Municipality of Amai Manabilang, which also shares borders with Kadingilan and Alamada (**Map 4b**).

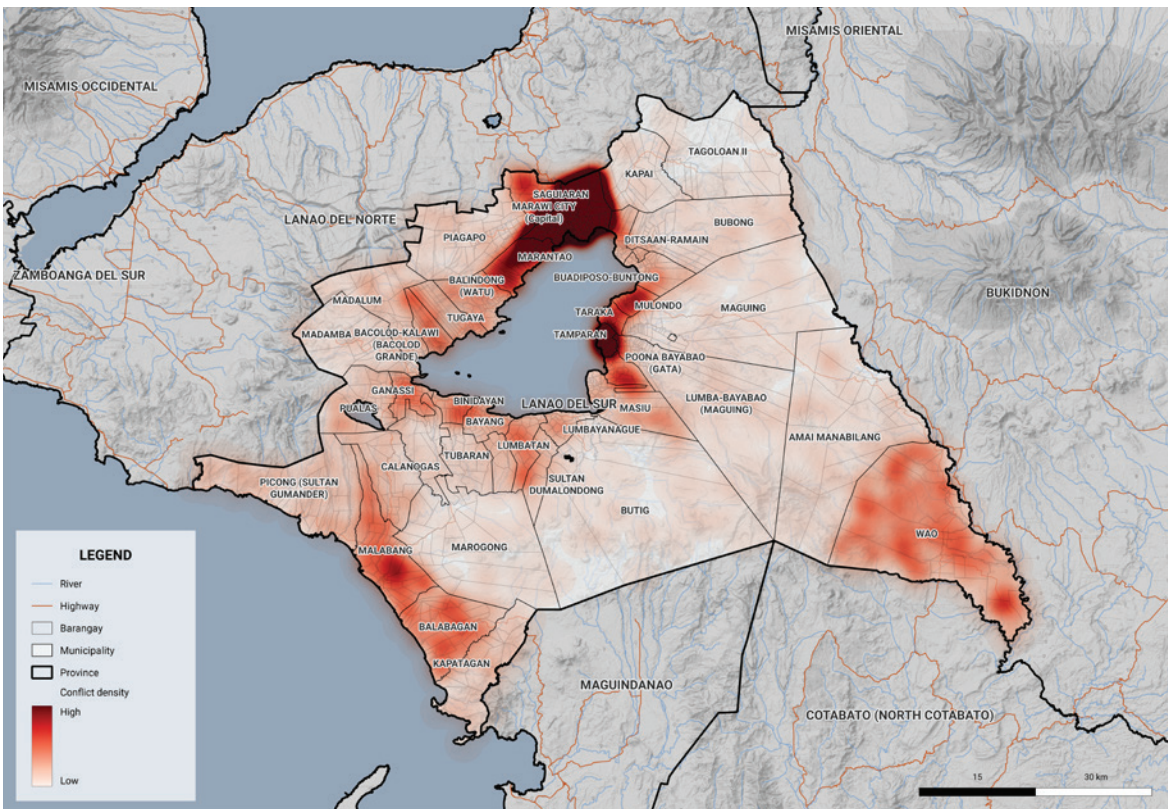
The heat maps of Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao present two striking images: high concentration of violence in capital cities of Marawi and Cotabato as well as in border municipalities. Of 3,950 violent incidents in Lanao del Sur, 34.8% were concentrated in Marawi City. In the case of Maguindanao, 40.1% of the 10,695 violent incidents in the province were concentrated in Cotabato City.

Conflict studies have pointed to at least four specific characteristics of urban areas that make them vulnerable as sites of violent conflict (Putzel and Di John 2012, 27–32; Beall and Fox

Map 2. Spatial Distribution of Violent Incidents: South Upi and Lebak (inset), 2011-2020



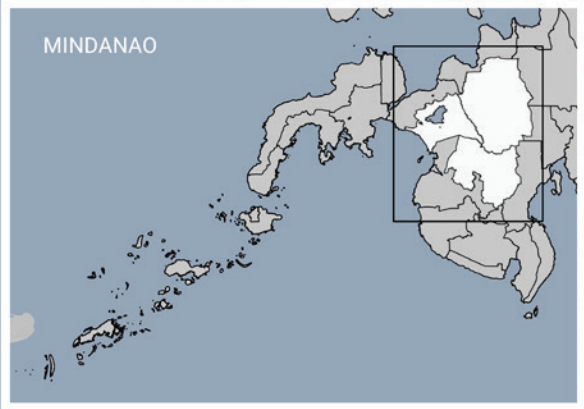
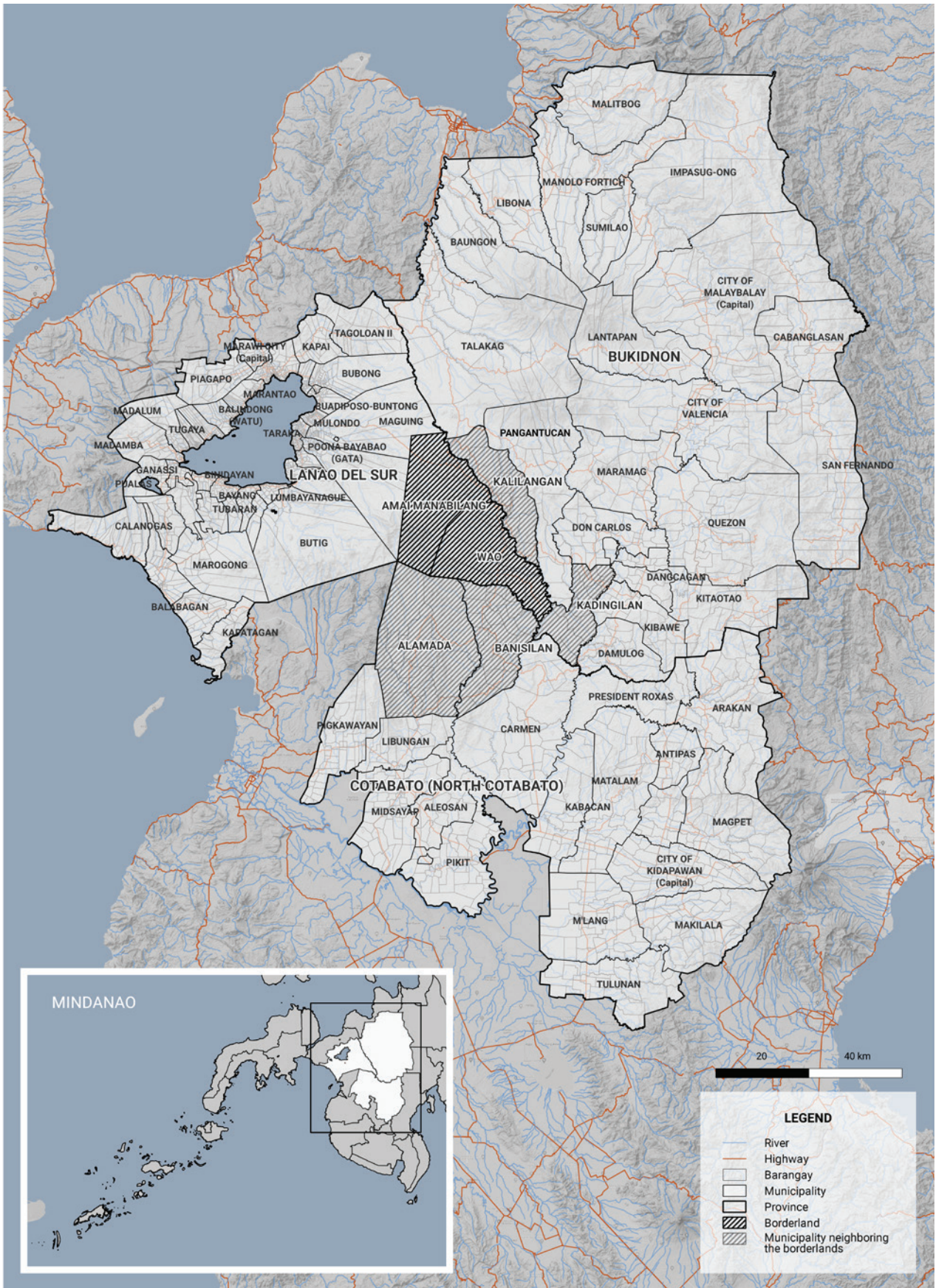
Map 3. Conflict Heat Map of Lanao del Sur



**Map 4a. Borderlands Between Two Provinces**



**Map 4b. Borderlands Between Two Provinces**



**LEGEND**

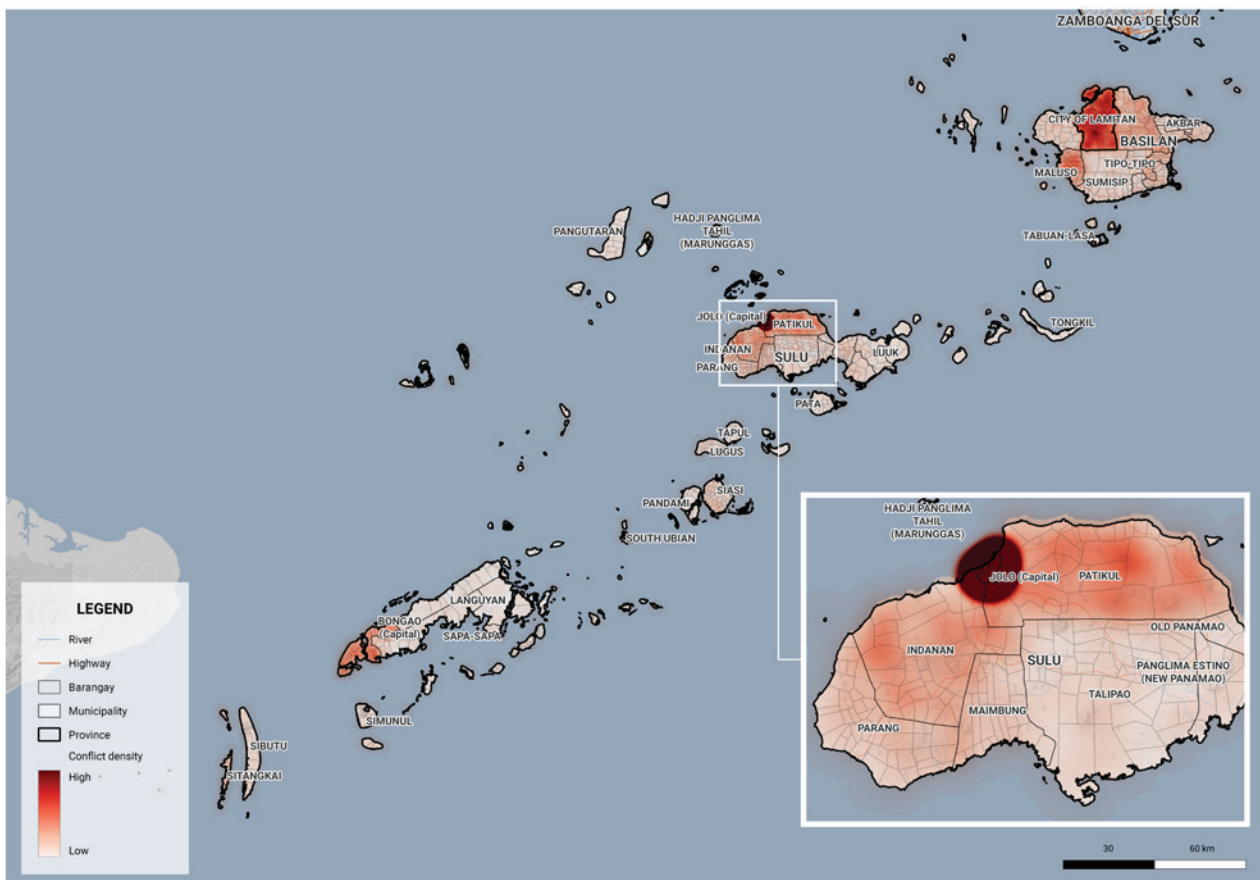
- River
- Highway
- Barangay
- Municipality
- Province
- Borderland
- Municipality neighboring the borderlands

2009, 171–179). The first has to do with the demographics of cities and adjacent municipalities. The population of a province is concentrated in urban locales, particularly in capital cities or municipalities. The second has to do with the heterogenous distribution of the population in a city that is often a source of violent cleavages across ethnic, tribal, and language groups. The third has to do with the concentration of wealth and other resources that attract predation and destruction. The fourth has to do with the tendency of warring factions to act out their violent clashes within cities for maximum projection and impact, even if their struggles are horizontal in nature and may be in the form of clan feuding and land disputes.<sup>3</sup>

However, borderlands exhibit the same levels of violence comparable to cities without the characteristics of the latter. In the province of Lanao del Sur, for example, there were 24 incidents in the non-borderland area of Marogong compared to 517 in Wao. In Maguindanao, there were 54 violent incidents in the non-borderland area of Datu Blah Sinsuat compared to 235 in the borderland area of South Upi.

The Conflict Alert database also exposes a high concentration of violent incidents in other towns and cities of the BARMM, such as in Jolo, Sulu and Bongao, Tawi-Tawi (**Map 5**).

**Map 5. Conflict Heat Map of Island Provinces**



<sup>3</sup> Beall and Fox (2009, 172) argue that cities and other urbanizing areas provide opportunities for maximum propaganda impact especially with the “advent of new wars”, involving “asymmetrical” tactics such as terrorist attacks or massacres designed to maximize civilian deaths and inculcate fear. Beall (2006) also notes that crime rates are rising, social conflicts with historical roots in rural areas are being transferred to urban centers, cities are increasingly the primary battlefield for “new wars”, and terrorists use cities both as bases and targets for their activities. Even in countries where conflict remains primarily focused in rural areas, there are important spillover effects into cities, which become spaces of refuge for displaced populations



A farmer prepares seedlings for transplanting to his paddyfield in Wao, Lanao del Sur. ■ Najib Zacaria

## 2. Conceptualizing borderlands

### *Research question*

The concentration of violent incidents in borderlands is striking. The question of why borderlands are more dangerous than other areas that do not straddle borders needs to be asked. Second, this observation should be examined to determine whether this holds for all border areas, and if not, why some borders are dangerous and why others are not.

These are relevant questions in determining the means for ending or reducing violent conflict in borderland areas specifically, and the Bangsamoro generally. The study also enables early response and prevention of potential flashpoints that can spill over to a wider set of areas, locally and internationally.

It is common knowledge that the bordering of lands in the public domain, untitled lands in alienable and disposable (A&D) areas and common pool resources (such as lakes, rivers, watersheds, municipal fishing grounds) are influenced by violent struggles for dominance—i.e., between the rules of the State, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) government, the local government units, and the many shadow actors and authorities in these border areas.

The challenges are even greater for places in transition from conflict to peace. BARMM is still in flux and the new formal structure of subregional local governments is not yet instituted. Local elites and clan institutions are bound to bargain for the redivision of territories and re-demarcation of interprovincial, inter-municipal, and inter-barangay territories.



Ethnicities within the aspired Bangsamoro national identity will continue to shape the determination of borders and their orders.<sup>4</sup> The dynamics not only pertain to the interactions among Muslim ethnic groups, but also between them and non-Muslim ethnic groups in the region. Resolving these issues before they explode into violence will be critical. It will require various actors to collectively resolve border and borderland factors that engender violent conflicts, to recognize the contribution of local institutions in borderlands to state-building rather than treating borderlands as an appendix problematized by the central state, and prevent violence in the process of ordering and bordering.

Finally, an answer to the “why” question will require an exploration of the overlapping meanings and values that various actors place on borderlands—e.g., as signifiers of identity (ethnic, clan, and language) boundaries, as barriers or bridges for economic integration or exclusion, and, as checkpoints or gates to allow or prevent the flow of resources. These are only a few of the potential signifiers that borderlands possess, the rest of which can be found in the rich literature.

### ***Review of literature***

Extensive literature on borderlands shows that the scholarship on the issue have long ago rejected the notion that these boundaries are singularly geographic in nature. Migdal (2004) argued that boundaries are more than simple borderlines represented in maps. They incorporate ‘checkpoints’ or physical or virtual separators that differentiate members from others, as well as ‘mental maps’ that divide the included and the excluded, home from alien territory and loyalties, emotions and other meanings attached to the physical space.<sup>5</sup>

One way of balancing the physical characteristics of borders with other elements such as nationalism, identity, and resources is to see borderlands from the prism of power, space, and time. Goodhand (2018) puts forward three related propositions: first, borderlands and frontier regions are frequently central to the dynamics of conflict, state building and development; second, state-centric analytical frameworks and ways of working influence policy makers to view borderlands as marginal; and third, taking borderlands seriously would challenge mainstream approaches and necessitate significant changes to development and peacebuilding policy and practice.

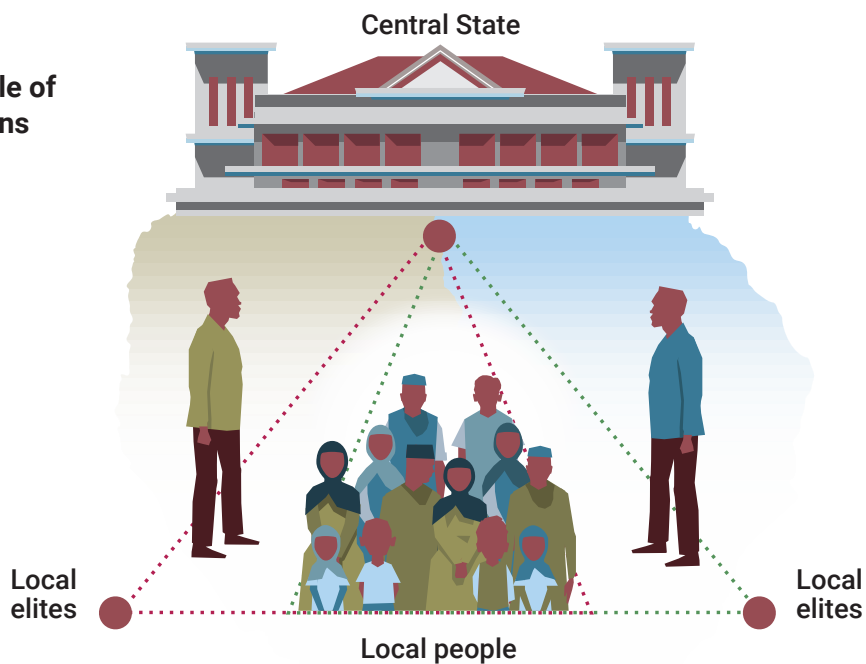
Akin to Goodhand’s notion of power, space, and time is the notion that territorial compartments and social groups are part of a mutual feedback relationship in which group identities are responsible for creating boundaries and forming hierarchical processes of ordering (Harvey 2001). Examining borderlands in this manner goes beyond the deterministic perspectives of territorial configuration and focuses on the fluidity of identities, borders, and orders. The Identities-Borders-Orders (IBO) frame offers a conceptual approach that departs from the deterministic perspective and pays attention to marginal sites where new perspectives on the creation of identities, borders and orders can be gained (Wilmer 1996).

The IBO approach asserts that identity formation, bordering, and ordering are socially constructed. One is challenged to relinquish the notion of borders as static demarcation lines in favor of the notion that borders are zones where lives and landscapes are shaped by the presence of the border (Newman 2001, Rea 2018). They are spatial and temporal records of relationships between local communities and between states (Wilson & Donnan 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Orders refer to the institution of rules governing the behavior of people in the territory. Local institutions are shaped by the rule making of the central state, local elites, and the people in the territory.

<sup>5</sup> Other descriptions are aligned with Migdal’s argument. For example, Del Sarto’s (2015) definition of borderlands as areas in closest geographic proximity to and affected by a border informed by the notion that territories and borders are sites too of shared practices (Adler & Pouliot 2011), where reciprocal ties between the social and cultural definition of belonging to a nation and the bureaucratic regulation of the state are worked out (Sparke 2004).

**Figure 1.**  
**Double Triangle of Power Relations**



The challenge to the study is to establish the association between identity, border, and order on the one hand, and violent conflicts on the other. Indeed, the relationship between the central state and the periphery is a constant feature in rebellions, insurgencies, and wars of secession and nonviolent political actions. These are vertical conflicts that comprise part of the data in Conflict Alert. Others are horizontal conflicts, some of which are linked to or instrumentalized in vertical conflicts. The object of this chapter is to explain how violent conflicts of various typologies are differently distributed in subnational spaces and why.

Depending on type and configuration of borders, borderlands either become zones of transition from one set of rules to another or zones of socioeconomic, legal, and cultural separation (Del Sarto 2015). Baud & van Schendel (1997) describe borderlands as a "double triangle of power relations", with the state, regional elites, and local people as actors meeting at the international crossroads of two political entities (Figure 1). The overlaps and intersections involve processes that can evolve rules for managing conflicts or transgressions that can drive violent conflicts.

Similar triangles of power relations may be seen in the relations of the Philippine central state with subnational borderlands. Local people in this regard are not homogenous communities whose identities are not necessarily tied to a single national identity as Filipinos but also to their ascribed or self-ascribed ethnic identities with bounded social networks and informal norms. Being distant from the central state, they may be viewed as marginal sites and object of 'conquest' for extension of administrative reach from the center. Zooming in, they may be viewed as sites of horizontal bargaining, relationship building, and forming of local institutions.

### **Analytical framework and methodology**

The study uses a political economy approach that looks at the links between natural and economic resources in borderlands and notions of **power, space, and time**. In this approach, borderlands are seen as rich yet "unruly spaces that need to be incorporated and pacified", where "lagging regions" need to be integrated through improved infrastructure, better connectivity, and investment in people; and "as exemplars

of the temporal hybridity of institutions, with the sedimentation of new institutions on top of older ones” (Goodhand 2018).

Goodhand (2018) adds that there are important differences between borderlands, and not all borderlands are violent. He argues that borderlands may have comparative advantages in illegality, but this does not mean that illegal activities are inherently violent. It is more likely that external policies play a role in inflaming and catalyzing cycles of violence.

The study uses descriptive statistics from Conflict Alert 2011–2020 to illustrate intensity and spatial distribution of violent incidents over a 10-year period. This is complemented by case studies on two types of borderlands: **one**, inter-municipal borderlands between two provinces; and **two**, inter-municipal borderlands

within one province. Data for the case studies were drawn from interviews, ocular surveys of communities in the case study areas, and official data shared by local authorities.

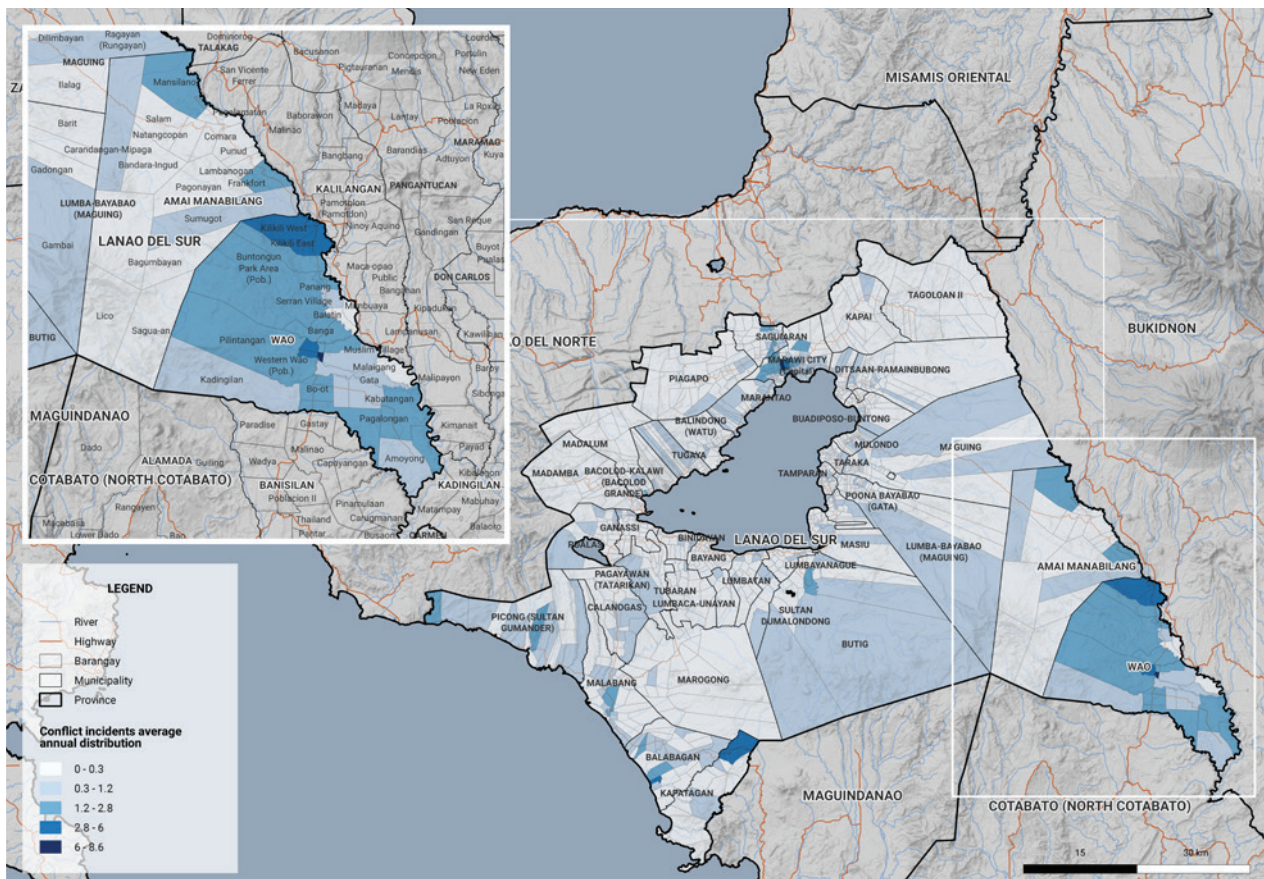
### 3. Findings from the borderland cases

#### *Wao and Amai Manabilang comparative features*

**Table 1** shows the comparative features of Wao and Amai Manabilang, two borderlands within the province of Lanao del Sur.

**Map 6** shows the heat map of Wao and Amai Manabilang (inset). The color legends indicate intensity, specifically, per barangay. In Wao, violent incidents were recorded in 17 (out of 26) barangays; in Amai Manabilang, in 6 (out of 17) barangays.

**Map 6. Spatial Distribution of Violent Incidents: Wao and Amai Manabilang (inset), 2011-2020**



**Table 1. Comparative Features of Wao and Amai Manabilang**

Selected Statistics	Wao	Amai Manabilang	Lanao del Sur (Province)
Population (as of 2020)	50,366	12,124	1,195,518*
Land area, in square kilometer (sq km)	363.88	544.10	13,574.24**
Population density (per sq km)	138	22	88
Total number of violent incidents, 2011–2020	517	73	3,950
Annual average	51.7	7.3	395
Violent incidents per sq km (2011–2020 average)	0.14	0.01	0.03
Violent incidents per 10,000 persons (2011–2020 average)	10.26	6.02	3.30
Total number of deaths, 2011–2020	124	29	2,531
Deaths per incident	0.23	0.39	0.64
Deaths per square kilometer (2011–2020 average)	0.34	0.05	0.19
Deaths per 10,000 persons (2011–2020 average)	24.62	23.92	21.17

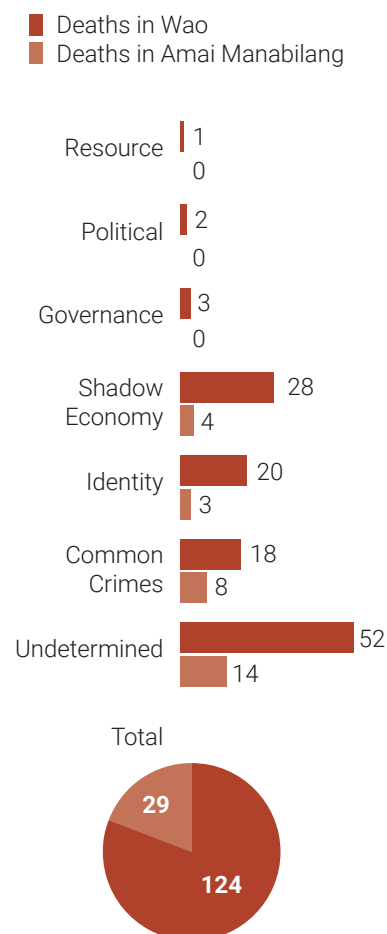
\* Republic of the Philippines, Philippine Statistics Authority. <http://rssoarimm.psa.gov.ph/provincial-office/lanao-del-sur>.

\*\* Source: Province of Lanao del Sur. <https://lanaodelsur.gov.ph/about/history/>

Violent incidents were more widely spread in Wao (65% of total number of barangays) compared to Amai Manabilang (35% of total number of barangays). Also, in comparison, there are no 'blue' barangays in Amai Manabilang. The three 'blue' barangays in Wao are barangays East and West Kili-Kili and Manila Group. Manila Group is in the center of the township. Kili-Kili (east and west) are the farthest barangays and the crossroad toward the border with Amai Manabilang and the municipality of Kalilangan. Community members are mostly Ilocano from the same ethnic group that occupies Barangay Sumogot in Amai Manabilang.

In terms of per unit of time or frequency, violence is more intense in Wao with an average of 51.7 incidents per year (or 4 per month) compared to Amai Manabilang at 7.3 per year (or less than one incident per month). So is spatial density with 0.14 incidents per square kilometer (sq km) compared to Amai Manabilang at 0.01 and higher than the 0.03 provincial average.

Impact on human life was larger in Wao. During 2011–2020, 124 people were killed in violent conflicts—four times more than the 29 conflict deaths in Amai Manabilang. Almost one-half of the

**Figure 2. Conflict Deaths by Cause of Conflict: Wao and Amai Manabilang, 2011–2020**

deaths in both areas are of undetermined causes. Excluding these deaths with undetermined causes, most of the causes are due to shadow economy issues, identity issues, and common crimes. Amai Manabilang has no conflict deaths due to resource issues, political issues, and governance issues (Figure 2).

The top three causes of violence shared by both municipalities are shadow economy issues, common crimes, and identity issues. The difference lies in the intensity, spatial distribution, and magnitude of violence.

There is no comparable data on violent conflict between South Upi and Lebak in the Conflict

Alert monitoring system because Lebak falls outside the BARMM. Examining whether the borderlands between the two provinces in this case had anything to do with conflict intensity and magnitude required an analysis of other available data sets—such as crime data and manifestations of violence from police reports.

A total of 235 violent incidents were recorded in South Upi during 2011–2020, almost 50% occurring in the three years before, during, and immediately after the 2016 elections (Figure 3).

The total number of incidents is less than the total number than that of Wao but three times higher than that of Amai Manabilang. The violence incurred 89

**Table 2. Top Causes of Violence (excluding undetermined causes)**

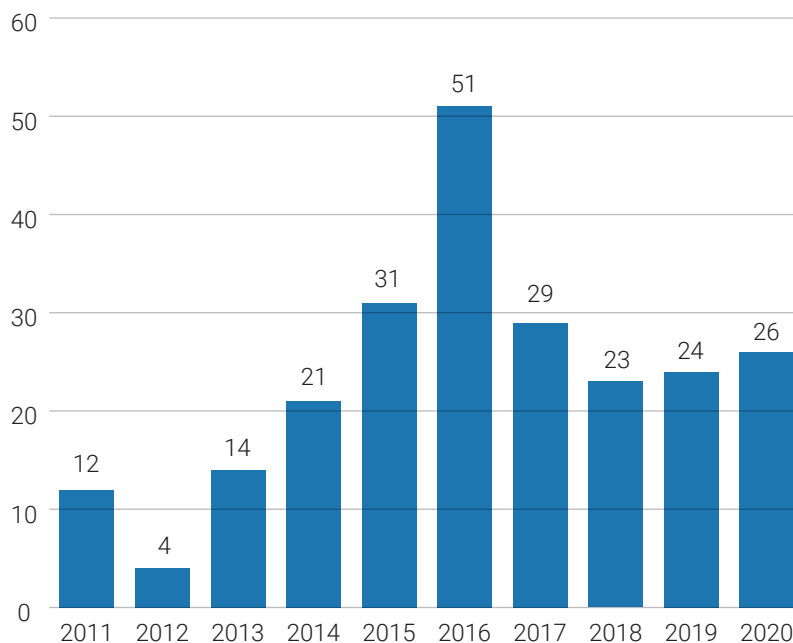
<i>Top Three Causes of Violence</i>	<i>Proportion to total cases (in percent)</i>	
	<b>Wao</b>	<b>Amai Manabilang</b>
<b>Shadow economies</b>	44.9	37.9
<b>Common crimes</b>	33.3	37.9
<b>Identity issues</b>	21.7	24.1
<b>Total</b>	100	100

**Table 3. Top Single Causes of Violence**

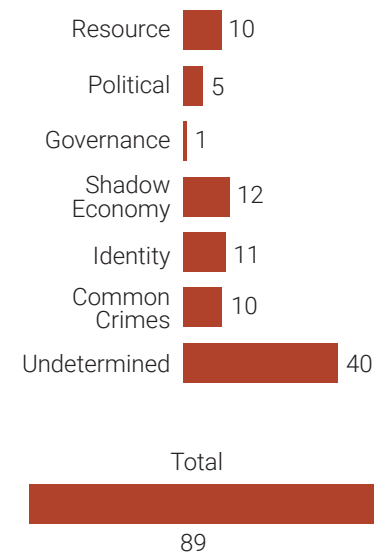
<i>Top Three Causes of Violence</i>	<i>Sub-categories*</i>	<b>Wao</b>	<b>Amai Manabilang</b>
		(in percent)	(in percent)
<b>Shadow economies</b>	Illegal drugs	55.2	48.0
	Illegal weapons	22.4	32.0
	Carjacking	22.4	20.0
<b>Common crimes</b>	Robbery	40.4	54.5
	Alcohol intoxication	39.7	40.9
	Child abuse	19.9	4.5
<b>Identity issues</b>	Gender related	67.6	78.5
	Personal grudges	23.8	14.3
	Clan feud	8.6	7.1

\* In proportion to total cases in the category

**Figure 3. South Upi: Number of Violent Incidents, 2011–2020**



**Figure 4. South Upi: Number of Violent Deaths, by Cause of Violence, 2011–2020**



deaths, almost one-half due to undetermined causes. Again, if the deaths from undetermined causes were excluded, the common causes are shadow economy issues, identity issues, resource issues, and common crimes (Figure 4). Except for resource issues, the main causes of death are the same with those found in Wao and Amai Manabilang.

The three municipalities share the same dominant causes of conflict, i.e., shadow economies, identity issues, and common crimes, except for South Upi.<sup>6</sup> The prevalence of resource issues in South Upi is corroborated by Gulane (2013) who documented 14 boundary disputes and 20 other land conflicts during 2009–2012 in one barangay alone. The local government of South Upi also recorded 45 cases of resource-based conflicts and overlapping claims on land during 2013–2016 (South Upi 2017–2022 Comprehensive Development Plan).

This study looked at the record of crime and manifestations of violence in Lebak as an alternative source of data for comparison with South Upi. From January 2017 to August 2020, 469 crime incidents were recorded in Lebak. Over 32% of these were index crimes and 43.9% crimes related to special laws.<sup>7</sup> These special laws include the Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, and the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act of 2013.

If the crime data on manifestations of violence and rule-breaking were used in relation to the special laws, data shows that Lebak had a higher intensity of violence per year at 156.3 compared to 23.5 per year in South Upi. Lebak incurred 206 conflict incidents in three years compared to 12 incidents in South Upi in 10 years. Moreover, those violent incidents had something to do with the shadow economies in illicit drugs and illegal guns.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In 2011–2020, Wao recorded only one resource issue and none in Amai Manabilang.

<sup>7</sup> Index crimes, as defined by the Philippine National Police (PNP), involve crimes against persons such as murder, homicide, physical injury and rape, and crimes against property such as robbery, theft, carnapping and carjacking, and cattle rustling. Meanwhile, special laws refer to the Special Penal Law that categorizes certain acts as crimes. The Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 (RA 9165) and the Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act of 2013 (RA 10591) are examples of special laws (See: <https://ralblaw.com/what-is-a-special-penal-law/>).

<sup>8</sup> Lebak is not included in Conflict Alert. There is no comparable 10-year conflict data. The three-year data on crimes related to special laws is used as proxy for violence related to shadow economy issues.

**Table 4. Amai Manabilang and Wao Key Actors and Roles**

<b>Political Clans</b>	In Wao, they evolved from pioneer settler elites seeking monopoly of local rule through elections and brokerage with regional elites in the BARMM. In Amai Manabilang, the non-native Manabilang political clan that established monopoly in the absence of competition from home-grown political clans.
<b>Philippine National Police (PNP)</b>	Extension of central authority with regard to peace and order and enforcement of penal laws and special laws. It is a primary actor influencing the intensity of violence related to illegal drugs, illegal firearms, armed robbery, carjacking, and other crimes.
<b>Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)</b>	Extension of central authority for suppression of rebellion and collective violence. It intervened in the July 2000 massacre of 22 Christian villagers in Amai Manabilang. It also intervened in the April 2015 massacre of Maranao villagers in Wao.
<b>National Chief Executive</b>	In the context of post-World War II resettlement programs and prior to the Local Government Code of 1991, source of authority in creation of and bordering of local political territories and establishment of civil administrations.
<b>Local Chief Executive</b>	In this study, the mayor, holder of formal authority legitimized through elections and, in certain cases, appointed by the national chief executive.
<b>Shadow Economy Actors</b>	Key actors involved in informal economic exchanges, either as suppliers, go-betweens, and consumers of goods covered by special laws (such as illegal guns and illegal drugs).
<b>Private Investors</b>	External actors and holders of financial capital that instigate shifts from smallholder agriculture to plantation economies as well as fuel the dynamics between and among political clans. In this area of study, they refer to Dole Philippines and Unifrutti and their subsidiaries as well as other external investors engaging in financing of corn, sugar, and rubber production. They play a big role in changing land ownership, and use arrangements and fueling resource conflicts.
<b>National Land Management Agencies</b>	Primarily referring to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) mandated to allocate access and tenure in lands of the public domain and the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) mandated to allocate ownership right to agricultural lands and adjudicate contestations of ownership.
<b>Private Security Contractors</b>	Formal and informal groups of security providers primarily serving the needs of private investors.
<b>Ethnic-Based Community Influencers</b>	Preachers, teachers, entrepreneurs, traders, and community organizers whose thoughts, attitudes, and behavior influence others from the same ethnic group.
<b>Non-state Armed Actors</b>	Armed individuals not affiliated with any rebel group but easily malleable into a local armed group to pursue collective violence under informal authority of local elites. In Wao and Amai Manabilang, they act on behalf of local political elites offering protection to private investors.

## Key actors

The key actors that shape conflict dynamics come from the State, including shadow authorities, the private sector including actors engaged in shadow economies, communal groups, and non-state armed groups including rebels, insurgents, and terrorists engaged in both vertical and horizontal violence.

These actors play important roles in shaping the dynamics of conflict in borderlands (**Table 4**).

## *The evolution of the Wao and Amai Manabilang borders*

The precolonial history of Wao is largely unknown even to local people. The municipal profile disseminated by the municipal tourism, planning, and development offices cite probable beginnings based on legends.<sup>9</sup>

What is commonly known is its beginnings as a resettlement area in the early 1950s. The first batch of settlers arrived in 1954. More appropriately, they were homesteaders—beneficiaries of homestead patents that included an 8-hectare (ha) farm lot and 600-square meter home lot. They came from different provinces and various ethnicities. They included former *sacadas* (sugarcane farmworkers) from Panay Island, landless peasants from Bohol, Pampanga, Batangas, Cebu, Batanes, Ilocos, and some from the Tagalog region of Luzon who were later collectively identified as the Manila Group. They

were brought to Wao in batches of 60 people through the port of Cagayan de Oro, then by road through the Cagayan de Oro–Malaybalay highway and the road connecting Malaybalay to a Base Camp near Maramag. Succeeding batches arrived in 1956.

The Base Camp was the staging ground for final entry to the promised land. From there, they were brought to Wao via Pangantucan and Kalilangan in World War II relics—American weapons carrier vehicles that were fitted with iron chains to traverse muddy roads. In some cases, settlers had to walk from Kalilangan to Wao with state-provided sacks of rice, draft animals such as carabao, and farm tools. The difficult journey is depicted in a monument at the Wao central plaza. Homesteaders were awarded lots (e.g., Lot No. 725 PLS) identifying location and size of land and the legal reference (e.g., Homestead Patent No. 01418) and, subsequently, the original certificate of title (e.g., Original Certificate of Title No. PAF-136).<sup>10</sup>

While the resettlement administrators tacitly recognized that there were native inhabitants of the place, the resettlement program viewed Wao as frontier land for homesteaders. The resettlement administrators facilitated the 'meet and greet' but there was no explicit recognition of the existence and territory of the native inhabitants. In the mental map of the sultan and his people, Wao was their territory. Unlike other resettlement areas where Maranaos were recognized as "special settlers",<sup>11</sup> it was not clear how the resettlement administration treated lands already in the hands

<sup>9</sup> A more official version of the community history is being prepared in cooperation with the University of the Philippines in Los Banos (Interview with Bella Bobadilla, Wao municipal planning and development coordinator). Some Maranao leaders deplore the inaccuracies in many internet accounts (Interview with Acmad Saripada, barangay *kagawad* and grandson of Sultan Mamaco Saripada).

<sup>10</sup> Republic of the Philippines, Supreme Court, Manila, Third Division. G.R. No. 131099 20 July, 1999. Domingo Celendro, petitioner, vs. Court of Appeals and Leonila vda. de Guevarra, respondents. [https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1999/jul1999/gr\\_131099\\_1999.html](https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1999/jul1999/gr_131099_1999.html).

<sup>11</sup> The experience of the Maranao native inhabitants of the Sapad Resettlement site in Kapatagan (Lanao del Norte) was unique. The resettlement site was established in 1953 under the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR), which was directly under the administration of the AFP. Prior to establishment of the resettlement site, a field inspection was conducted in October 1952. The inspectors found three Maranao native inhabitants. Still, the site was classified as virgin public land based on the recommendation of the District Land Officer of Kapatagan. EDCOR did not recognize prior ownership. Instead, the three Maranaos were categorized as "special settlers" added to the 118 move-in settlers brought in by EDCOR (NEDA Region XII 1997).



of the Maranao.<sup>12</sup> As was common in the history of resettlement to Mindanao, Christian settlers had the edge over Muslim and non-Muslim natives in terms of access to state laws on land and agricultural capacities (Abinales 1996).

In the early 1970s, lives were disrupted by the violence of the Ilonggo-dominated 'Ilagas' coming from North Cotabato and Moro 'Black Shirts'. A Muslim village called Barangay Gata was burned to the ground and has since been occupied by Batangueño settlers.<sup>13</sup> New migrants arrived in due course, as the original homesteaders sold, mortgaged, or simply allowed other settlers to occupy portions of awarded lots to those in need. The result became a pockmark of settlements: Muslim villages within predominantly Christian villages and small groups of Muslim households within Christian villages. As the state-sponsored settlers gained the upper hand in land acquisition and access to law and power, the native Maranao settlers gave way and moved to enclaves within the larger settlement.

It took time for the homesteaders to form communities owing to varying ethnicities and dispersion of farm lots. The best site for assertion of identity was the township. The home lots formed the basis of physical proximity of similar ethnicities and the naming of some barangays based on ethnicity. Thus, the forming of groups such as the Cebuano Group, Batangas Group, Manila Group, Christian Village, and others. These communities became barangays. The native Maranao accommodated the siting and internal bordering process and secured their own Muslim villages on the outer rim of the township. One barangay called Muslim Village sits by side with Ilonggo-dominated

barangays called Barangay Extension, Barangay Middle Village and Barangay Christian Village. Other groups opened new settlements within the forested area.<sup>14</sup>

## Formation of the political territory

For almost a decade since the arrival of the settlers, Wao was not defined as a political territory. Under the prevailing administrative code of the period, it did not pass the criteria of progress in civilization. It was only converted into a municipality by virtue of Executive Order (EO) No. 418 in 1961. By then, the settlers of Wao had fulfilled the progression of siting to a new subnational territory where, as defined by the Revised Administrative Code of 1917 and Republic Act 1515 of 1956, citizens have "progressed sufficiently in civilization" to have surpassed the "remoteness and smallness of non-Christian settlements".

While these laws defined the external borders of the municipality, the internal borders of communities— inclusive of boundaries of farm lots and home lots, were not technically secured. The property borders of native Maranao inhabitants and poorer settlers remained informal. Individual possessions of land remained vulnerable to unregulated transfer, sale, or outright encroachment and/or divestment.

After 16 years of existence as a political territory, the central state changed the bordering and ordering of Wao. In November 1977, by virtue of a martial law decree (Presidential Decree No. 1243), 21 barangays of Wao were carved out to form a new municipality called Bumbaran. The logic was to enhance economic progress and secure peace and order.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Records at the DAR show that Sultan Mamaco Saripada, the first appointed mayor of Wao, was the owner of a farm lot (Lot. No. 494) and a male horse sold in 1966 for P5,000 to a certain Francisco Montanez, who also owned the adjoining lot (Lot. No. 493) (See <http://lis.dar.gov.ph/documents/2693>). It may well be that Saripada was awarded a farm lot because he was the mayor and not because he was classified as a "special settler".

<sup>13</sup> Settlers coming from the southern Luzon province of Batangas.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Sitio Magampong in Barangay Park Area.

<sup>15</sup> The decree stated that Wao was "so vast a territory that the present strength of the local Integrated National Police Force is far from adequate to patrol outlying communities for the maintenance of peace and order," and to "expediate optimum development thereof," especially the "vast agricultural lands capable of producing variable crops which would provide sufficient food and income to its population."

**Table 5. Mayorality Succession in Wao, 1961–2022**

Term of Office	Mayor	Ethnicity	Mode of Assumption to Power
1961–1963	Datu Mamaco Saripada	Maranao	Appointed
1963–1967	Datu Mamaco Saripada	Maranao	Elected
1967–1982	Capt. Silverio Eleazar	Ilocano	Elected
1982–1986	Dionisio Baldeviso	Ilonggo	Elected
1986–1988	Wilfredo Villalba	Ilonggo	Appointed
1988–1998	Atty. Remedios Guiab	Ilocano	Elected
1998–2007	Elvino Balicao Sr.	Ilonggo	Elected
2007–2016	Elvino Balicao Jr. (son of Elvino)	Ilonggo	Elected
2016–2019	Bobby Balicao (son of Elvino)	Ilonggo	Elected
2019–2022	Elvino Balicao Jr.	Ilonggo	Elected

Source: Wao Municipal Hall

The remaining barangays in Wao and the 21 barangays transferred to Bumbaran were identified based on their physical location in the divided territory. The Maranao in Wao remained minoritized as well as the Christian settlers in Bumbaran.<sup>16</sup> Over time, settler communities and Maranao communities evolved into barangays with elected local governments: 26 in Wao and 17 in Bumbaran. In 2018, the local officials of Bumbaran renamed their municipality as Amai Manabilang to cement the legacy of the clan.

### Clan rule and competition

Amai Manabilang and Wao are both ruled by strong political clans, i.e. families who see political office as an economic resource and a source of power. In Wao, the Balicao clan has been in power since 1998. In Amai, the Manabilang clan has ruled the town since 1992. The mayor and vice mayor of Wao and Amai are both siblings. In 2022, the siblings only switched places. In Wao, the siblings compete with each other and with two other aspirants.

The emergence of clan rule in the two borderlands followed different historical paths. Upon its creation as a municipality in 1961, political rule in Wao was determined by the central government through appointment. Sultan Mamaco Saripada, leader of the native Maranao, was recognized by the central government as the political leader and became the first appointed mayor. He subsequently became the first elected mayor during the 1963 election and ruled the town until 1967. New political elites soon emerged from the pioneering settlers in the place. Political rule eventually transferred to the settlers (**Table 5**).

Wao is the only majority Christian municipality of Lanao del Sur. Christian settlers would have opted for exclusion from the BARMM but there was no room to exercise the vote. The whole of Lanao del Sur was automatically included under the BARMM when the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) was ratified.<sup>17</sup> While Saripada's rule lasted six years, it did not cement the dominance of the Maranao in a predominantly non-Muslim municipality.

<sup>16</sup> In December 1986, President Corazon Aquino signed Executive Order No. 108, s. 1968, abolishing thousands of barangays in the country. Four barangays of Bumbaran (Lama, Mirorod, Bulantacan, and Semiorang) were abolished.

<sup>17</sup> The BOL was ratified in 2019. Interview with Bella Bobadilla, municipal planning and development coordinator (MPDC), Wao; and Mariela Jane Garita Gicole, municipal tourism officer, 6 April 2022.

Since 1982, the mayoralty has been mainly in the hands of the Ilonggo settlers. In 1998, the mayoralty fell under the control of the powerful Ilonggo Balicao clan. The patriarch, Elvino Balicao Sr., was one of the first batch of 60 settlers received by Datu Saripada. He ruled the town for three terms (nine years) and was succeeded by his sons Elvino and Bobby. The only longest-serving Ilocano mayor was Atty. Remedios Guiab, wife of the local health officer of the resettlement administration. The doctor's role in providing health services at a time when this service was scarce earned the family a lot of respect. She has continued to serve the poorest of the poor, including Muslims from as far as Banisilan.<sup>18</sup> Wao now has six doctors, but Dr. Guiab is still the local favorite.

Meanwhile, Bumbaran was established as a separate municipality in 1977 and its rulers appointed by the central government until 1988. There were no Maranao local strongmen that the central government could appoint as mayor, so most appointees were outsiders, chosen from political clans in the lake area of Lanao del Sur.

After the downfall of the Marcos regime, the appointments by the new Aquino government became more frequent. There were three appointed mayors between 1986 and 1988. A new mayor, Hadji Sarip Dimaporo was elected in 1988. He was from the Sultanate of Binidayan and brother of the Binidayan Sultan Muliloda Datumulok. He ruled Bumbaran by remote control and monitored developments through his cousin.<sup>19</sup>

It was during Dimaporo's term that Bumbaran was described as a lawless town and local government presence was hardly felt by citizens.<sup>20</sup> It was also

during this period of instability and hopelessness that Mastura Manabilang, then a staff sergeant of the Philippine Constabulary/Integrated National Police (PC/INP) made his presence felt as chief of police and enforcer of laws. He filled the gap in governance and became the de facto ruler in lieu of an absentee mayor. Effectiveness in settling clan feuds, reducing crime, and pacifying the town earned him popularity that led to his election as mayor in 1992 of the now renamed Amai Manabilang. Since most drug addicts were also Muslims, Mastura demonstrated an ability to impose discipline by establishing a private 'prison' for nephews involved in illegal drugs.<sup>21</sup>

Since 1992, town rule has been in the hands of the Manabilang clan, first by the patriarch, then his wife, back to the patriarch and then by his son (**Table 6**). Control over both the elective and executive positions in the municipality remains distributed among members of the clan.<sup>22</sup>

How do the Wao and the Amai Manabilang clan rulers differ? Essentially, the Balicao of Wao and the Manabilang siblings in Amai are both non-natives of the places they rule. They were able to take power by different means beyond electoral success. They followed clan rule systems though they differed in their methods.

The Manabilang clan monopolized all power. The succession—from patriarch, to wife, to sons and between the two sons—is negotiated within the family and without opposition from any other Maranao clan. Local elites from the minority Christian settlers in two barangays are content with running barangay local government units or getting appointments at some offices in the municipal government. In fact,

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Nida Settler, 5 April 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Junail Dimaporo, 4 April 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Junail Dimaporo.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Junail Dimaporo and Sal Bacallan, 4 April 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Republic of the Philippines, Commission on Elections. 2022. Certified List of Candidates (Municipal) Lanao del Sur - Amai Manabilang. 9 May. [https://comelec.gov.ph/php-tpls-attachments/2022NLE/TentativeListsofCandidates/BARMM/LANAO\\_DELSUR/BUMBARAN.pdf](https://comelec.gov.ph/php-tpls-attachments/2022NLE/TentativeListsofCandidates/BARMM/LANAO_DELSUR/BUMBARAN.pdf)

**Table 6. Mayoralty Succession in Amai Manabilang, 1977–2022**

Term of Office	Mayor	Ethnicity	Mode of Assumption to Power
1977–1986	Sultan sa Malungun Baulo O. Magandia	Maranao	Appointed
1986–1987	Pundarola Lomonog	Maranao	Appointed
1987–1988	Asalan Macabando & Tawagun Macarambon	Maranao	Appointed
1988–1992	Hadji Sarip M. Dimaporo	Maranao	Elected
1992–1998	Sgt. Mastura C. Manabilang	Maranao	Elected
1998–2007	Hedjarah Lydia E. Manabilang (wife of Mastura Manabilang)	Maranao	Elected
2007–2013	Sgt. Mastura C. Manabilang	Maranao	Elected
2013–2022	Jamal James Manabilang (son of Mastura)	Maranao	Elected

Source: Wao Municipal Hall

the mayor's most trusted aide and secretary to the Sangguniang Bayan is a Christian whose college education was supported by the clan.

Meanwhile, in Wao, the Balicao clan is riven by factions. They compete within themselves and with elite challengers from outside the clans. In fact, the Balicao brothers competed for the mayoral post in the 2022 elections.

## Political rule and economic competition

The Manabilang clan distances the political rulers from the clan's economic interests. It is the internal agreement of the clan that the female siblings take charge of business interests.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, it is also agreed that the female siblings do not interfere in the political contests.

The Manabilang clan women manage Manabilang Services Inc (MSI), a freight forwarding company that also provides manpower and security services to the Unifrutti banana agribusiness corporation.<sup>24</sup> They also manage the town's only modern and secular café business.<sup>25</sup>

In 2003, the clan invited a banana plantation company, Unifrutti, through its subsidiary Mt. Kalatungan Ventures Inc. - 2 (MKAVI-2) to operate in the municipality.<sup>26</sup> This move was facilitated by a Maguindanao clan leader, Datu Toto Paglas, who pioneered large-scale cavendish plantation economies in Maguindanao in partnership with Unifrutti.<sup>27</sup>

When the La Frutera-Unifrutti model was introduced to Amai Manabilang in 2003, various local leaders in Amai were sent to other Unifrutti plantation areas to acquaint them with the

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Junail Dimaporo.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Junail Dimaporo and Sal Bacallan, 4 April 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Inaya's Café is owned by the female siblings of the Manabilang clan. The café is a regular hangout and is usually visited by Maranao LGBT customers who are tolerated despite the strict and conservative customs prevailing in the municipality.

<sup>26</sup> The MKAVI-1 plantation was established in 1999 in ancestral domain areas of the Talaandig indigenous people in Lantapan, Bukidnon (RSM, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> The La Frutera-Unifrutti banana agribusiness venture in Maguindanao has been described as a success story in doing business in conflict-conditions in Mindanao (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 December 2012). See Habito again in *Braving It and Making It: Insights from Successful Investors in Muslim Mindanao*. A joint publication of Australian Aid, ARMM Regional Board of Investments, ARMM Business Council and Management Association of the Philippines. Available at: <https://documents.pub/download/braving-it-and-making-it-and-making-it-case-study-of-agumil-philippines.html>.



A worker prepares washed Cavendish banana for export in a processing plant in Amai Manabilang. Transnational companies start to expand their plantations in the border areas of Lanao del Sur. **Wilven Pinili**

business and to assuage fears of the Unifrutti's Jewish connection (Balaoing-Pelkmans 2020). By 2004, the 504-hectare MKAVI-2 plantation and packing facility had been established.

The project was preceded by negotiated arrangements on rents and other incentives. The customary 20%–30% share of the construction contract in favor of the Manabilang clan was waived in favor of auxiliary contracts for services related to the establishment and operations of the plantation (Balaoing-Pelkmans 2020). In lieu of rents, the clan, through MSI, would have monopoly of leasing, staffing, and logistics services. MKAVI-2 has no other political and economic elite to deal with. In fact, since 2006, Mastura, the patriarch, assumed direct management of the agribusiness owing to the difficulty of the previous manager to enforce discipline on the Maranao workers (Balaoing-Pelkmans 2020).

Meanwhile, in Wao, large-scale investments in plantation agriculture, mainly in pineapples care of Dole Philippines were negotiated. The

investments formed part of the economic agenda of the BARMM. In 2019, the BARMM Regional Board of Investments (RBOI-BARMM) approved the registration of the Wao Development Corporation (WDC) for the establishment of a P306 million pineapple packing plant in Wao (BARMM Information Office 2019).

The plant has a packing capacity of six million boxes per year with current capacity of two million boxes per year from a preexisting 1,200-hectare plantation in Wao (*MindaNews*, 12 February 2022). With below optimum utilization of the plant, WDC plans to expand production with an additional 1,400 hectares (*Manila Times*, 14 February 2022; *MindaNews*, 12 February 2022).

Unifrutti dealt with a single clan which eased its business entry into Amai Manabilang. In contrast, DOLE had to deal with competing political elites in Wao. A group of local elites formed a management company called PABE. The acronym is derived from three elite families: Alexis Pablico, Al Belopendos, and Elvino Balicao, Sr. Pablico and

Belopendos are former vice mayors and Balicao is a former mayor.

In the early years of the pineapple agribusiness, PABE had monopoly of land leasing, trucking services and staffing services.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the PABE office has become a landmark characterized by the boom of workers' lodging houses in the vicinity. Recently, WDC assumed direct management of staffing services. PABE's income streams have been reduced to land leasing and trucking services, which are currently experiencing tensions.

## Management of collective identities and claims

Migration is often blamed for order-disrupting changes in host societies and highlights tension, connections, and generation of centrifugal and centripetal forces (Heisler 2001). The same is true for the two case study areas. Resettlement meant exchanging one's home community for another, and native inhabitants adapting to the presence of new inhabitants.

The Wao homesteaders were of different ethnicities. They included Ilonggos, Cebuanos, Boholanos, Batangueños, Ilocanos, Ivatanos, and others. The administration of the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA) did not leave information on the exact ethnic distribution of the settlers and the population count of native Maranaos upon arrival of the settlers. However, during this study the municipal planning and development coordinator (MPDC) issued a certified copy of the population distribution by barangay identifying the location of the Maranao.

The settlers are collectively identified as 'other conglomeration'. Of 40,479 population recorded in 2010, 7,783 (19.2%) were identified as Maranao.

They are distributed in 12 of 26 barangays. There are no Maranaos in the other 14 barangays, including a barangay called Gata, which used to be a Maranao village. Gata was burned down years ago during an Ilaga attack from Cotabato in the 1970s.<sup>29</sup> The barangay is now home to settlers from Batangas who are under constant pressure from Maranao claims of prior ownership. In Barangay Park Area, the site of the killings in 2015, the Maranao comprise 16% of the local population.

The Maranao have come to terms with the demographic reality while reserving claims of prior rights to land linked to the preexistence of the Saripada sultanate.<sup>30</sup> The spread of the Maranao in 12 barangays is partly due to intermarriages. However, these mainly involve male Maranaos marrying non-Muslims rather than Maranao women getting married to non-Muslims.<sup>31</sup> Alongside intermarriages is the adoption of Ilonggo as common language. Non-Ilonggo settlers tend to adjust to Ilonggo in daily communication instead of asserting their own language. Hence, in this case the Maranao were the ones who had to learn to speak Ilonggo, instead of the other way around.

In Amai Manabilang, non-Muslims are concentrated in only two out of 17 barangays, with their housing units aligned along narrow ridge plateaus along the highway. By mother tongue, majority are Bisaya. The Manabilang Municipal Profile collectively describes Ilonggo, Cebuano, and Boholano settlers as "Bisaya". They comprise 22% of the municipal population.

The Christian settlers have come to terms with being a minority in a predominantly Muslim town. They are not prevented from practicing Christian traditions and rules, such as preparing food that Muslims call *haram*, including pork lechon though they had to informally agree not to display these

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Nida Settler and Winnie Settler, 5 April 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Interviews with Bella Bobadilla and Mariela Jane Garita Gicole, 6 April 2022; and Nida and Winnie Settler, 5 April 2022).

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Acmad Saripada, grandson of Datu Mamaco Saripada, 5 April 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Nida Settler, April 5, 2022; Dominimark Jack Jaco, 4 April 2022.

food preferences.<sup>32</sup> Some food sellers hide *haram* food in freezers and reserve these only for Christian buyers. Most others have agreed to sell halal food. This is partly due to economic logic. Enterprise growth and survival leans on the larger Maranao market.

Muslim-Christian accommodation in Amai Manabilang extends to public services and private employment. The mayor and vice mayor both rely on Christians as their most trusted aide.<sup>33</sup> Although the banana agribusiness has brought in Maranao workers from outside the municipality, there are indications that the clan prefers the work ethic of Christian workers.<sup>34</sup>

Behind the Muslim-Christian mutual tolerance and accommodation is the porous nature of the Manabilang clan's kinship ties: the patriarch is married to Christian wife from Bicol. The Manabilang siblings studied outside Muslim Mindanao and are comfortably ensconced in the social life of Cagayan de Oro City.<sup>35</sup> Their tolerance for non-Muslim culture, including LGBTI groups is well known. Another son-in-law organized a music band composed of non-Muslims and plays non-Muslim music, apart from being the organizer of a tennis association and a motorcycle bikers' club in Cagayan de Oro City.

Indeed, the clan maintains good relations with the non-Muslim minorities. Educated Catholic civil servants work in the municipal government. In fact, the mayor's most trusted aide and concurrent secretary to the town council is a non-Muslim. In the two predominantly Christian barangays of FrankFort

and Sumugot, the barangay local government units are predominantly Christian. Instead of one politico-economic center, two were promoted in Amai. The original FrankFort barangay is called the 'Christian población' while ApartFort barangay is known as the 'Muslim población'.<sup>36</sup>

The rise of the Manabilang clan to power was driven by citizens' trust when the physical and personal presence of the ruler was scarce and filled-in by the town's police chief. The police chief was Mastura, the patriarch of the clan. He resolved clan feuds, pacified the town, and established an environment of peace. He gave new significance to the preexisting communal ties of Maranao and Christian settlers that had negligible political influence in shaping local institutions (see Abinales 2000). He filled the vacuum of political leadership and became the new broker with the central government.

Manabilang's legitimacy was certified in the 1992 elections and reinforced in two succeeding elections for a three-term service. His wife and successor showed the same mettle in the aftermath of the July 2000 massacre of 22 Christian villagers and the burning of six houses in Barangay Sumugot attributed by the AFP to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.<sup>37</sup> Sumugot was, and still is, a minority Christian village and did not retaliate.

The clan patriarch arrived in the area 30 years after Wao was created as a municipality and 15 years after Bumbaran became an independent municipality. His rule was not rooted in the tradition of the Maranao sultanates. He was originally from

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Junail Dimaporo and Sal Bacallan.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Junail Dimaporo, 4 April 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mr. Banza, Ilocano settler, and owner of a pizza shop in Amai Manabilang, 7 April 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Musmera Manabilang-Dimaporo, daughter of the Manabilang patriarch and manager of Manabilang Services Inc. is a college graduate from Xavier University. She considers Amai Manabilang as a workplace. Her family resides in Cagayan de Oro City.

<sup>36</sup> There is no official record on the naming of FrankFort and ApartFort as barangays. They are derived from the names of resettlement administrators at the time. The 'Fort' refers to Fortich, the family of the first district governor of Bukidnon.

<sup>37</sup> Kyodo. 2000. "Muslims rebels massacre 22 villagers, military charges." 17 July. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Muslim+rebels+massacre+22+villagers%2c+military+charges.-a063674197>.

Raya Madaya, a small village in Marawi City that had no social and political connection with Bumbaran. He did not invoke the traditional authority of a sultanate, nor the politics of identity, utilizing his nonpartisan and autonomous mode of rule to create direct linkages with the national government, particularly the PNP and AFP.

Clan rulers in Amai also created a new narrative. In April 2018, a plebiscite was held to change the name of the municipality from Bumbaran to Amai Manabilang. The purpose was to promote a distinctly Manabilang identity with direct lineage to Sultan Amai Manabilang. The initiative drew almost 100% yes votes (Municipal Profile of Manabilang).

Datu Amai Manabilang was regarded as a hero and leader of the *Americanistas* that rejected the inclusion of Mindanao from the planned Philippine Republic during the Commonwealth Period (Municipal Profile of Amai Manabilang).<sup>38</sup> Edgerton (2020) described him as the intermediary between Pershing (the American military commander of the disarmament campaign in the Lanao area in early 1900s) and other local chieftains. In fact, he cunningly redirected the violent attacks of the colonial United States forces toward his political rivals and other strongmen to expand his turf and his power. The Amai Manabilang legacy is now written in the official history of the town, as well as the evolution of the FrankFort and ApartFort barangays.

In the meantime, in Wao, the management of competing identities was different and more tense. In contrast to Amai Manabilang, the Wao rulers tended to support the interests of the Christian settler majority against the land claims of the Maranao, accentuating their muted aspirations to be excluded from the BARMM. The growing animosity

between the Maranao and the Christian settlers was exposed in April 2015 when two teenage children of Christian settlers were killed, one of them allegedly raped in Sitio Campo Dos, a Christian settlement in Barangay Park Area (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 3 May 2015; *Cagayan de Oro Sun Star*, 17 August 2016).<sup>39</sup> This barangay had a population of 2,858 Christian settlers and 544 Maranao Muslims who inhabited a forested enclave called Sitio Magampong.

Witness accounts alleged that the perpetrators ran to Sitio Magampong. Despite inadequate evidence over who the real perpetrators were, a Christian armed group allegedly associated with the Balicao clan retaliated against the Maranao, killing five (including two pregnant women) and wounding seven others (including children).<sup>40</sup> Two Balicao siblings and two others were indicted by the Marawi Regional Trial Court for murder (*Cagayan de Oro Sun Star*, 17 August 2016).

While the Maranao minority of Wao are adapting to Ilonggo rule and language, they are reserving the right to claim black presettlement ownership of lands and recognition of the Saripada sultanate.<sup>41</sup> After the 2019 ratification of the BOL, the Maranao feel empowered. There are reports of bullying and the outright occupation of areas covered by land claims by the Maranao who insist that all future litigation be conducted in the city of Marawi.

## The South Upi and Lebak borderlands

### *Origins of the borderlands*

The creation of South Upi as a municipality was triggered by two distinct yet interrelated objectives: the aspiration of the non-Muslim Teduray

<sup>38</sup> During the period, the opposing pole, the so-called Pilipinistas, was headed by the late Sultan Alauya Alonto, former Sultan of Ramain, who was later appointed senator.

<sup>39</sup> Also mentioned during the interview with Bella Bobadilla (Wao MPDC) and Mariela Jane Garita Gicole (municipal tourism officer), 6 April 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Based on recovered empty shells, the armed group had access to high-power weapons such as Cal. 5.56 mm and 7.62 mm high-powered rifles and 40mm grenade launchers.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Acmad Saripada, 6 April 2022.



indigenous peoples for its own territory, and the anti-secessionist pacification drive in Mindanao carried out by Marcos's martial law regime. The municipality was carved out of the municipality of Upi in 1976, by virtue of Presidential Decree No. 1011.<sup>42</sup> The justification bore similar aims with the redivision of Wao and the establishment of Bumbaran in 1977.<sup>43</sup>

The clamor for a separate Teduray municipality was brokered by the Teduray Welfare Association and the Mindanao Highlanders Association (South Upi CDP 2017–2022). This clamor was driven by grievances against the forcible displacement of the Teduray from the lowlands (of Cotabato City and Datu Odin Sinsuat) toward the upland areas to avoid conflict. Eleven highland barangays were separated from Upi to constitute the new municipality of South Upi.

The urgency was also spurred by Teduray fears that a barangay that they were claiming was being eyed by Talayan Muslim datos to form part of the planned new municipality of Talayan.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the prime movers of the resolution were leaders of the Gunsí clan who ruled the barangay since the early 1950s. The move was negotiated with the ruling Sinsuat clan in Upi, hence the Municipal Council endorsed the resolution to the central government with the proposed name of 'South Upi' instead of 'Teduray Municipality'.

In contrast, Lebak had a longer history of political formation. An object of American colonial expansion to Mindanao, it was designated as a military district in the early 1900s. In 1908, the American military governor appointed a Muslim, Amanildong Guiabar, as 'Presidente' of Lebak and

Kalamansig. Amanildong's adopted son married the daughter of a Manobo chieftain, Sultan Dewig. Subsequently, Sultan Dewig allowed Amanildong to expand his territory in the areas of Kati and Kebitic in Sultan Kudarat.

The evolution of political institutions came side by side with predatory economic expansion from the center. In 1927, two plantations established a base in Lebak: an American-owned plantation—the 1,024-hectare Barurao Plantation (also known as American Land and American Land Commercial Company), and the Taguisa Plantation.<sup>45</sup> Both plantations were engaged in coconut, timber, and timber milling.

Migrant workers from the Visayas arrived beginning 1925. They were recruited by Aurelio Frieres Sr., an agriculturist, who became the first appointed mayor of Lebak in 1950. They provided the labor force to the plantations and invited relatives to benefit from the job opportunities. More migrants arrived in 1929 from the Bicol and Ilocos regions of Luzon.

A private entrepreneur provided boat transportation between the ports of Cotabato and Kalamansig. The new arrivals also worked in the plantations, some as cooks and mechanics for the American managers. With generous wage incomes in contrast to other farm businesses at the time, the migrants purchased land of their own, cleared forests or acquired lands as gifts from the Manobo chieftain, Datu Sangkulan Wakay. State building and civil administration progressed apace as telegraph and postal services were opened, as well as treasury and judicial services.

<sup>42</sup> Republic of the Philippines, *Official Gazette*. 1976. Presidential Decree no. 1011. Creating the Municipality of South Upi in the Province of Maguindanao. Malacanang, Manila. 22 September. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1976/09/22/presidential-decree-no-1011-s-1976/>

<sup>43</sup> The decree noted that the "independent municipality will redound and contribute greatly to the pacification drive in the area" and insure the upliftment of the socioeconomic wellbeing of residents.

<sup>44</sup> Barangay Pandan.

<sup>45</sup> This was the same period when Philippine Packing Corporation (later known as Del Monte Philippines) established its experimental pineapple plantation in Bukidnon (see <https://www.delmontephil.com/about-us/our-history>).



Non-Moro indigenous peoples (NMIP) fight for recognition of their ancestral domain. Mount Firis, also known as Hill 224, is the ancestral land or *fusaka fantad* of the Teduray, Lambangian, and Dulangan Manobo tribes, encompassing large swaths of Maguindanao province.

📍 **Ferdinandh Cabrera**



Lebak became a municipal district under the Municipality of Kiamba in 1947.<sup>46</sup> One year later, the municipal districts of Lebak and Salaman (which was then under Dinaig, the former name of Datu Odin Sinsuat) were merged to form the new Municipality of Lebak.<sup>47</sup> In 1951, the seat of government was transferred from Kalamansig to Salaman.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Ethnicity and geography***

There is very little in common between South Upi and Lebak. Other than being both ethnically diverse borderlands on the edges of each other's mother provinces, all other features are remarkably different.

South Upi is a landlocked highland municipality with an average elevation of 639 meters (highest elevation at 1,083 meters). Mobility of people is limited to the north–south highway that connects it to Sultan Kudarat via Lebak and to Cotabato City via Upi.

Meanwhile, Lebak is a coastal municipality with an average elevation of 28 meters. In addition to the north–south highway going to Cotabato City, it has road access to the major urban centers of Sultan Kudarat.

What socially connects the two municipalities is the Manobo ethnic group, which is extremely minoritized in both areas and the Teduray, which is a majority group in South Upi and a minority group in Lebak. Manobo and Teduray people go to Upi to

visit relatives or to buy fish. They also hold longtime grievances against the Maguindanaon Muslims.

### ***Political rule***

The political existence of South Upi was the product of a political settlement between Teduray clan leaders and the central state. The prime movers, the Gunsu clan, found an educated Teduray, Santiago Moendeg. Moendeg was a law graduate and employee of the Presidential Assistant on Community Development. The latter was initially asked to refine the semantics and grammar of the resolution drafted for the Upi legislative council. Moendeg was subsequently appointed as the first mayor and ruled the new municipality for an uninterrupted term of 10 years.

However, Teduray rule in the municipality was not consolidated, similar to the collapse of Teduray rule in Upi when it was created in 1956.<sup>49</sup> Competing forces sponsoring Maguindanao claims on land have always threatened Teduray monopoly rule. In fact, no clan has had a monopoly of rule. Mayoral offices from any ethnic background have always been targeted physically. The incumbent mayor, an Ilonggo, has been a target of three assassination attempts.<sup>50</sup>

South Upi's biggest constraint in political rule is the inability to fix the municipal territory and the contested territories of farms and home lots of its citizens. Although South Upi's claimed area

<sup>46</sup> Republic of the Philippines, *Official Gazette*. 1947. Executive order no. 82, Organizing into Ten Municipalities All, Except Three, Municipal Districts in the Province of Cotabato and Annexing the Said Three Municipal Districts to the Municipality of Cotabato. Malacanang, Manila. August 18. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1947/08/18/executive-order-no-82-s-1847/>

<sup>47</sup> Republic of the Philippines, *Official Gazette*. 1948. Executive order no. 195, Segregating the Municipal Districts of Lebak and Salaman from the Municipalities of Kiamba and Dinang, Province of Cotabato, as Organized under Executive Order no. 82 of August 18, 1947, and Organizing Them into an Independent Municipality under the Name of Lebak with the Seat of Government at the Sitio of Kalamansig. Malacanang, Manila. December 31.

<sup>48</sup> Republic of the Philippines, *Official Gazette*. 1951. Executive Order No. 432, Transferring the Seat of Government of the Municipality of Lebak, Province of Cotabato, from its Present Location at Kalamansig to the Barrio of Salaman of the Same Municipality. Malacanang, Manila. April 12. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1951/04/12/executive-order-no-432-s-1951/>

<sup>49</sup> The first elected Mayor of Upi was Ignacio Labina, a Teduray. He invited Maguindanaons to occupy lands in what would become the Municipality of South Upi.

<sup>50</sup> All three attempts (July 2016, June 2020, and January 2021) were with the use of improvised explosive device (IED) in Barangay Romangaob, the seat of the municipal government (*MindaNews*, 3 January 2021, 27 January 2021).

**Table 7. Lebak and South Upi: Comparative Data**

Selected Variables	Lebak	South Upi
Population (as of 2020)	91,344 (PSA, 2021a)	43,197 (PSA, 2021)
Population concentration	25% distributed in six urban barangays	25% concentrated in Brgy. Romongaob
Land area (sq km)	573.51	188.4
Population density (per sq km)	159	229
Poverty	34.7 (as of 2018)	60.4 (as of 2018)
No. of Barangays	27	11
Income Class	1st class	4th class
IRA (as of 2016)	PHP 192 M	PHP 93.5M
Banks	2	0
ATM	1	0
Transport terminals	5	1
Petrol stations	3	1
DTI Municipalities Competitive Index (Rank), as of 2021, out of 1,488 municipalities	79	352
Rate of unemployment (% in proportion to labor force)	3.11 (as of 2020)	94.0
Magnitude of unemployed	634 (as of 2020)	1,175 (as of 2010)
Dependency Ratio	83.93 (as of 2020)	88.79 (as of 2010)

Sources: 2007 Socio-economic profile of Lebak; 2020 Ecological profile of Lebak; South Upi CDP 2017-2022; PSA, 2021, 2021a.

is 46,342 ha, only 18,480 ha is on record with the Department of Budget and Management.<sup>51</sup> Collection of real property taxes is difficult under conditions of undefined extent of A&D lands and public lands and records of land titles. Even more difficult is the protection of informal land exchanges facilitated by barangay officials. From 2004 to February 2012, 406 Free Patents and 54 Sales Patents involving 2,279 ha were transacted in the informal land market (Gulane 2013).

Since the establishment of Lebak as a municipality in 1947, political rule has been in the hands of Ilonggo migrant settlers with different clans vying for power through elections. Traditional leaders

from the Maguindanao and Manobo ethnic groups earlier recognized by the American colonial administration could not muster sufficient support to participate and win electoral contests.

### ***Economic development and people's welfare***

Lebak is better-off than South Upi in most indicators of economic development and people's welfare such as income class of the municipality, business competitiveness, urbanization, employment, poverty incidence, access to health, water and education services, communication, and mobility (**Table 7**).

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Renato Sirikit, South Upi MPDC, 13 April 2022.

## *Management of collective identities and claims*

The first inhabitants of South Upi were the Tedurays followed by the Lambangian and the Manobo groups.<sup>52</sup> Maguindanao and non-Muslim migrant settlers later followed the original inhabitants. The population comprises Tedurays (65%), Maguindanaos (20%), and migrant settlers (15%) of different ethnicities but predominantly Ilonggo and Ilocano.

The Tedurays are spread in different barangays with a few barangays where they are dominant. The smaller sitio within the barangays where Maguindanaos are predominant include e.g., Sitio Kuhan in Romangaob, Sitio Letingan in Bongo, and Sita Sibowa in Biarong and Lamud.

Much of interethnic relations in South Upi has been influenced by land exchanges, accompanying conflicts and hope that local rulers protect ownership rights and boundaries. Informal land exchanges were mainly between Tedurays, Lambangians, Cebuanos, Ilocanos, and a few Ilonggos (Gulane 2016). The peacefulness of these transactions is often upset by the intervention of Maguindanao claimants that are supported by a combination of armed force and external sources of legitimacy such as access to formal land titles and free patents.

Lebak is also an ethnically diverse municipality though this diversity is not inflamed by land conflicts. The first inhabitants were the Manobos, followed by Maguindanaos and, in the 1970s, new Christian settlers. Independent estimates of population distribution are widely different: one estimate suggests that the Lebak population comprises 50% Muslims, 25% Ilonggo-Ilocano

and 25% Manobo; another suggests that Lebak is composed of 30%–40% Muslims and 60% Christians.<sup>53</sup>

A look at an official census data from 2007 indicate religious affiliations in the following distribution: 57% Roman Catholic, 14.23% Islam, 2.43% tribal religions, the remaining 26% comprising all other Christian denominations. In terms of major dialects spoken: 41.06% Hiligaynon/Ilonggo, 12.98% Karay-a, 12.91% Maguindanao, 9.42% Cebuano, 8.08% Teduray, 5.74% Manobo, 1.22% Tagalog, 7% Ilocano, and 3.35% other dialects. Ilonggo and Karay-a being closely related, 54% of the population would be speaking either Ilonggo or Karay-a. The pattern of self-ascription by household is coherent with identity by spoken language. Ilonggo and Karay-a comprise 54% of households, 13% Muslims (of the Maguindanao, Maranao, and Tausug ethnic groups), 5.7% Manobo, and 8% Teduray.

Much of the land exchanges during the arrival of migrant settlers in the late 1920s were informally and peacefully transacted with the native Manobos. Maguindanao settlers who arrived in the 1930s also benefited from these informal transactions including territorial expansion through intermarriage.

While Christian settlers (mainly Ilonggo and Karay-a) are dominant in both ethnic distribution and political rule, land and other economic exchanges are not dominated by any single group and is often negotiated in informal markets.

Indigenous peoples, specifically the Manobo, Lambangian, and the Teduray, have become weaker as minorities due to their dwindling numbers not only in Lebak but in the whole of the BARMM and Region 12. Results of a 2013 survey conducted by

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Renato Sirikit, South Upi MPDC, 13 April 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews with Muhammad Mastura, descendant of Datu Guiwan Mastura; Nemesio Tomongtong, Ilonggo Christian settler; Jameson Mijares, Ilonggo settler and Kagawad of Barangay Poloy-Poloy, 12 April 2022.

IPDEV<sup>54</sup> show that there are only 2,904 Manobos (in 383 households) in the two regions. Most of them are in the municipality of Sen. Ninoy Aquino (formerly the municipality of Dulangan).

## 4. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explain the higher intensity of violent conflict in borderlands in contrast to non-borderland areas as shown in the Conflict Alert database, and to determine as well why some borderlands exhibited the reverse, i.e., low levels of violent conflict. The author examined two case studies of borderlands: inter-municipal borderlands within one province and inter-municipal borderlands between two provinces.

The study concludes with the following observations:

**One, the historic formation of borderlands explains whether these areas will become embroiled in high levels of violence or not.** Borderlands that were formed through an organic and gradual process of migration and settlement were less violent than those that were established due to the population movement policies of the State.

Indeed, when the processes of siting and bordering ignored presettlement land rights and forcefully transferred property rights to favored migrants, intense violence became the outcome. In the case of Wao, the state-sponsored resettlement programs ignored prior claims of ownership of the native Maranao population. In contrast, the migrant settlers of Lebak negotiated land rights with preexisting native inhabitants.

The siting and bordering of South Upi was also state-sponsored yet the central state ignored the need to formalize land tenure rights or even the territorial

limits of the municipality. Ethnic-based land claims of the Teduray, Maguindanaon, and other ethnic groups were left exposed to violent claims and the informal land market. Meanwhile, national land management agencies ignored their obligation to secure land tenure rights for all valid claimants, hence setting the stage for violent contestation.

**Two, the manner through which borderlands took shape, survived, and thrived matters more than the heterogenous or homogenous nature of the population.** There are borderlands that are as heterogenous as urban areas yet exhibit low levels of violence, and there are borderlands that are ethnically homogenous yet tied up in the conflict. Amai Manabilang was carved out of Wao and practically retained the same heterogenous composition of Christian ethnic groups, Maranao, and other migrants yet it exhibited low levels of violence. There are two palpable explanations: one, none of the multiethnic Christian settler groups asserted their ethnic exclusivity in dealing with the other groups; and, two, the land resources were more than enough for the various claimants to avoid intense and violent competition.

South Upi was intended to be the land of the Teduray when it was first created. It was to shield them from the other identity groups in the more heterogenous mother town of Upi. However, it lost its homogenous character due to competition over land resources coupled with the vibrancy of the informal land market that brought in other ethnic groups in the territory.

**Three, there are two factors that may be more important than the composition of the population: one, the wealth and other resources present within the borderlands, and two, the nature of the prevailing illicit economy in the borderland.**

<sup>54</sup> Recognition of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao for their Empowerment and Sustainable Development' (IPDEV) was a three-year project launched in February 2012 and was implemented by the consortium of the KAS Philippines, its institutional partner Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG)<sup>1</sup> and Development Consultants Inc (DEVCON).

Most of the land in borderland areas are part of the public domain or the 'commons' as they are called elsewhere. In Mindanao, most of the remaining public lands are 'open-access' despite the fact that these areas have not yet been declared as 'A&D'.

If national agencies, local states, or local strongmen decide to instrumentalize the dominance of one ethnic group over the other in the case of apportioning or redistributing land in borderlands, the level of violence will rise. The weaponization of identities was the case in Wao while in South Upi, local rulers were unable to manage interethnic competition.

In borderlands where open-access public lands were scarce relative to the demand of competing groups, violence escalated. This characteristic is present once more in the case of Wao, which is relatively denser (138 per sq km) in contrast to Amai Manabilang (22 per sq km). South Upi is also relatively denser (229 per sq km) compared to Lebak (159 per sq km).

It is true that violent conflicts caused by shadow economy issues, common crimes, identity issues, and resource issues are prominent but are not unique to borderlands in the BARMM. However, those borderlands that are known transit points for illegal drugs and weapons exhibited higher levels of violence than those involved in coping and survival economies such as informal cross-border trade and the smuggling of food-related commodities. Violence was spurred by cyclical periods of state suppression rather than turf wars between the ruthless entrepreneurs in drugs and guns.

**Four, the nature and character of administrative and politico-military control over borderlands matter.** If the border is rather porous, levels of violence are generally lower as the entry and exit of business is often determined by informal and traditional institutions. If the administrative and politico-military control of the State is direct and rigorous, higher levels of violence fester and affect socioeconomic conditions.

The intensity of violence rises in borderlands with a heavier and predatory presence of the PNP and/or AFP. This can be seen in the volume and intensity of shadow economy conflicts in Wao and Lebak where AFP and PNP presence is heavier compared to Amai Manabilang and South Upi. This is especially graphic in the case of common crimes.

Indeed, the shifts in the level of violence related to shadow economies and common crimes are largely influenced by the vectors of law enforcement in the area, especially the policies and practices of the PNP and AFP, whether they occur in borderlands, non-border areas, or in big urban centers.

**Five, the nature of clan rule matters in taming or promoting violence.** Monopolistic clan rulers invite violent resistance when they side with one ethnic group and exclude others. This is shown in the case of Wao in 2015 when both town officials (mayor and vice mayor) were siblings who sided with the dominant Ilonggo ethnic group involved in the massacre of minority Maranao Muslims in one village.

This is in contrast with Amai Manabilang, where the ruling clan represents the Maranao Muslim majority but does not employ this dominance to violently marginalize the minority Christian settler community. Lara (2014) demonstrates a similar case in the non-borderland municipality of Upi during 2001–2010 when the mayor used his experience in cross-cultural alliance building to bring together representatives of different ethnic groups in continuous dialogue on peace and order issues to head off violence.

One can argue that this lesson resonates across the Bangsamoro, but more so in borderlands. Borderlands require rulers who can bargain and engage with other social and identity groups beyond their own and across the border. Their legitimacy is founded on an openness to construct a wider social contract between various identities. Their rule is also structured and constrained by informal institutions that operate only at the border, such as



the rules on barter trade that only traders in Sulu and across the sea recognize.

To conclude, scale shifts in borderland violence are intimately related to the resource and identity issues

that determine the distribution and access of each group to land and other resources, but the evolution of a border, the nature of state intervention, and the mode of clan rule are intervening factors that can deter or escalate conflict.

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