

Countering Mass Organization of Communist Terrorist Groups in the Province of Pangasinan: A Community-Based Approach

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Publication history: Received: August 14, 2025; Revised: October 11, 2025; Accepted: October 31, 2025

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Abstract

This study examined the level of participation of Local Government Units (LGUs) in Pangasinan in supporting the Philippine National Police (PNP) program to counter the mass organization of Communist Terrorist Groups (CTGs), and identified key challenges that affect such participation. Anchored on an Input–Process–Output framework and guided by community policing and human security perspectives, the research employed a descriptive mixed-method design. Using a validated survey questionnaire, data were collected from 325 respondents PNP personnel, barangay officials, and community residents from 13 municipalities and 31 previously CTG-infiltrated barangays. Quantitative analysis using weighted means, percentage distribution, and Point-Biserial Correlation (SPSS v.20) showed that, overall, LGU participation was rated as Very High (grand mean = 4.22). PNP personnel rated LGU engagement as Very High, while barangay officials and residents rated it as High. The highest ratings were observed in enhanced participatory decision-making and civic space, educating respect for human rights, diversity and culture, local government capacity for service delivery and security, and work with media and social media to promote alternative discourse. Alternative socioeconomic opportunities and rule-of-law and human-rights-based approaches, though still rated High, registered comparatively lower mean scores, indicating areas needing further strengthening. The most frequently cited challenges included the lack of experts in violent extremism, poor security and monitoring, limited ability to detect extremist activities, and inadequate technological skills for tracking online recruitment. Correlation analysis revealed significant weak to moderate positive relationships between LGU participation and perceived lack of expertise and weak security/monitoring, and a weak negative relationship with the absence of mechanisms to trace fake identities. The study concludes that while LGUs in Pangasinan are highly engaged partners in countering CTGs, their effectiveness is constrained by technical, security, and capacity gaps. It recommends enhancing socio-economic interventions, deepening participatory governance, mainstreaming human-rights-based approaches, upgrading technological and analytical capabilities, and strengthening community-based security structures such as BPATs and auxiliary forces to sustain insurgency-free conditions and support long-term peace and development.

Keywords: Communist Terrorist Groups (CTGs); community policing; human security; Local Government Units (LGUs); Pangasinan; peace and order; Philippines; participatory governance; violent extremism

1. Introduction

Community policing, extremism, and radicalization have become increasingly important in both national and international security discourse because of their direct impact on community safety. Community policing promotes collaboration between law enforcement and residents to ensure public security (USIP, 2014). Extremism, often used pejoratively, refers to views or behaviors that fall far outside social norms and is usually associated with sub-groups within larger organizations. Wilcox (2013) identified 21 traits of extremists, ranging from defamation and abusive language to perceptions of adversaries as inherently evil, while Lipset argued that extremism also exists at the political center as the foundation of fascism (Tamas, 2000). Borum (2011) notes that there is no reliable profile for identifying who becomes a terrorist, and Jenkins (2009) explains that violence is typically the final stage of radicalization. Community policing is now widely promoted as a strategy for preventing terrorism, relying on trust, joint problem-solving, and early identification of extremist threats. Holmer and Van Deventer (2014) highlight the challenges of implementing community policing in societies emerging from conflict, where institutional trust is often weak. Effective community policing requires deep partnership and shared understanding of threats between communities and police, which enables joint development of strategies to counter violent extremism (Haddara, 2017). Peace and order literature emphasizes that community policing when grounded in trust and shared understanding of threats can help prevent violent extremism. Holmer and van Deventer (2014) argue that community policing in post-conflict settings must overcome mistrust, cultural differences, and weak institutions, as premature countering violent extremism (CVE) programs risk becoming informant systems that damage community relations (USIP, 2014). Effective community policing requires collaborative identification of risks, mutual perception of

shared threats, and alignment of security goals. The OSCE stresses that CVE must be embedded in broader democratic policing reforms to succeed (OSCE, 2014).

1.1 Background of Violent Extremism in the Philippines

In the Philippine setting, violent extremism is historically linked to the establishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) by Jose Maria Sison in 1968. CPP membership surged during Martial Law under President Marcos, reaching about 10,000 fighters by 1986 due to heavy-handed state actions (News Today, 2010; Buendia, 2015). By 2016, under President Benigno Simeon Cojuangco Aquino, membership reportedly declined to around 500, but rose again to about 1,000 after President Rodrigo Roa Duterte declared Martial Law in Mindanao following the Marawi Siege (Ensor, 2017). The CPP remains underground, aiming to wage armed revolution and remove U.S. influence, operating through the National Democratic Front (NDF) and its allied groups, including Kabataang Makabayan as its youth wing and the New People's Army (NPA) as its armed wing (Rosca, Ninotchka & Sison, 2004). From the 1970s to the 1990s, the CPP actively recruited youth, especially from top universities such as the University of the Philippines, Central Luzon State University, and Ateneo de Manila, where professors openly discussed Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology and, in some cases, recruited students (Fabe, 2014). Research also documents CPP recruitment of minors, with 3–20% of NPA fighters reportedly below 18 years old, many from poor rural families with limited opportunities (Global Report, 2008; News Today, 2010). In Mindanao, several terrorist groups further deepened the problem of violent extremism. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), linked to Al-Qaeda, launched its first major attacks in 1991 and became notorious for bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings, expanding from Basilan to other parts of Western Mindanao such as Zamboanga and Sulu. The Maute Group, led by Abdullah Maute, carried out multiple attacks in Lanao del Sur even before the 2017 Marawi Siege. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), identified as Al-Qaeda's Southeast Asian network, was estimated to have 2,000–3,000 members in 2018 and was rumored to have ties with the MILF. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), a breakaway faction of the MILF, now operates in the Bangsamoro Region and has pledged allegiance to ISIS, being blamed for various violent incidents in Central Mindanao (Abad, 2019). The enlistment of very young children as soldiers has been common in areas with minimal government presence. Youth are often targeted because they are impressionable and physically capable. Once recruited into groups like the NPA, child soldiers may become more aggressive, especially after experiencing military attacks on their families. The Philippine military estimates that around 2,000 young fighters are affiliated with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the NPA, and in 2005 about 13% of the MILF's 10,000 fighters were minors. Burnham (2009), in *In the Presence of My Enemies*, recounts that many of her Abu Sayyaf guards were teenage boys. Makinano (2005) further notes that the use of children in combat dates back to the American occupation, when Moro children were deployed as frontliners and human shields in battles such as Bud Dajo (1906) and Bud Bagsak (1913).

1.2 Community Policing, Whole-of-Nation and Whole-of-Community Approaches

Counter-insurgency responsibilities initially lay with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), but Executive Order No. 110 (1999) directed the Philippine National Police (PNP) to support internal security operations following renewed NDF hostilities (Official Gazette, 1999). In Pangasinan, Provincial Resolution No. 554-2002 urged Local Government Units (LGUs) to intensify security measures after confirmed CPP-NPA threats against vital installations. The Marawi attack in 2017 further underscored the urgency of enhanced community-police cooperation. When communities and police both perceive shared danger, collaboration naturally strengthens. From 2000 to 2007, more than 400 Filipinos were killed in terrorist attacks, followed by BIFF bombings, Abu Sayyaf beheadings, and the Maute Group's attack on Davao in 2016. The 2017 Marawi Siege resulted in over 1,100 deaths and displaced about 400,000 residents (CEP, 2018; Loesch, 2017; ICG, 2018). Responding to these threats, the DILG and the Philippine Public Safety College (PPSC) promoted community-based collaboration, launching Training of Trainers on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in November 2017 and developing the Whole-of-Community Approach (WOCA). WOCA strengthens barangay-level institutions: the Barangay Information Network (BIN), the Barangay Peace and Order Council (BPOC), and the Barangay Peacekeeping Action Team (BPAT), and aligns with the PNP's community-oriented policing strategy adapted from Japan's Koban system (PNP Revised Community Relations Manual, 2012; De Leon, Rufo & Pablo, 2018). President Rodrigo Roa Duterte institutionalized a whole-of-nation approach to ending local communist armed conflict through Executive Order No. 70 (2018), establishing the National Task Force (NTF) to address the roots of insurgency through unified delivery of basic services, peace-building, and social development (Clavite, 2019). Sumulong (2018) emphasized that EO 70 aims to ease long-standing national divisions, strengthen development and peacebuilding strategies, address root causes of conflict, and ensure systematic, inclusive peace mechanisms. Recent assessments show that Region 1 is nearing full insurgency-free status, with Ilocos Norte, La Union, and Pangasinan already cleared, highlighting the crucial role of LGUs in preventing CTGs from reestablishing influence. This context motivates the present study, which examines LGU participation in countering CTG activities in Pangasinan.

1.3 Global and Socio-Political Context of Violent Extremism

Evidence from multiple conflict-affected countries shows that when governments fail to provide human security, populations often turn to any group that can offer stability, even extremist movements. Ganiel argues that religion, and in cases like Boko Haram, violent extremism, emerges where the state fails to meet basic security needs (Wolffe and

Moorhead, 2015). Boko Haram's rise has produced widespread fear, killings, arson, attacks on security forces, and displacement across Nigeria, while the government's heavy-handed response characterized by abuses, arbitrary stops, and "shoot-at-sight" tactics has further eroded civil liberties and deepened political mistrust, especially between the north and south (Onodugo and Itodo, 2016). In the Philippines, international and local analyses trace violent extremism in Mindanao to historical and political grievances. The Philippine government's counter-insurgency has long suffered from weak legitimacy among the Moro population due to its roots in Christian colonial administration and discriminatory land laws that displaced Muslims and favored Christian settlers and elites (Tan, 2015; Buendia, 2015; Islam, 2014). These factors rendered Muslims minorities in their own ancestral land and justified Moro insurgency narratives. The government's inability to assert control in conflict areas further weakened its authority, as the MILF held de facto influence over large territories, preventing successful peace talks and enabling groups like Abu Sayyaf to launch kidnappings, bombings, and assassinations when negotiations stalled (Tan, 2015; Ebrahim, 2015). Despite these weaknesses, the government gradually advanced its counter-insurgency efforts by maintaining consistent objectives focused on territorial integrity and Moro autonomy. The Tripoli Agreement of 1976 provided a stable framework that successive administrations used to guide peace efforts, allowing the government to leverage divisions within insurgent groups and negotiate with moderates first (Luga, 2014; Harris, 2015). Over time, this weakened extremist factions, and groups like the MNLF and MILF shifted toward political roles rather than violent struggle. Though legitimacy issues persisted, the government improved its standing by addressing long-standing grievances, as shown by the 2001 Tripoli Agreement on Peace, which formally recognized Bangsamoro identity and ancestral domain rights an important step toward resolving the century-old conflict (Yeung, 2014; Harris, 2015). Terrorism also inflicts massive socio-cultural and economic damage. Boko Haram has disrupted normal life, caused displacement, harmed religious coexistence, and destroyed property, creating refugee crises and long-term trauma (Onodugo and Itodo, 2016). Economic activity in northern Nigeria collapsed as violence halted business operations, scared away local and foreign investors, reduced agricultural productivity, and intensified poverty. Markets emptied due to fear of attacks, and formerly productive regions became economically stagnant. In the Philippines, socio-economic interventions in Mindanao helped weaken support for extremist groups. The creation of the Bangsamoro Development Agency in 2002 and investments in irrigation, roads, electrification, health, and agricultural programs addressed deep-rooted economic deprivation (Cline, 2015; Harber, 2015). Symbolic measures such as recognizing Islamic holidays also strengthened social inclusion (Madale, 2014). These programs reduced civilian support for armed groups by addressing grievances and signaling government commitment to Moro welfare (Chalk, 2014). Research further shows that extremist ideas are often transmitted through family, peers, and mass media rather than schools, emphasizing the role of informal socialization in violent radicalization (Davies, 2014; Davydov, 2015).

1.4 Technological Dimensions of Radicalization

Technological shifts have also transformed extremist communication. Social media platforms, which are interactive, accessible, and free, provide a powerful tool for propaganda and recruitment, enabling terrorists to reach mainstream audiences (Weinman, 2014). Although Alava et al. (2017) found limited literature linking online media to radicalization in Asia, they note that extremist groups rely heavily on TV, radio, and the Internet to spread ideology, using anonymity and cross-border communication to strengthen propaganda. In the Philippines, violent extremist activity online grew rapidly after ISIS declared its caliphate in 2014. Mindanao-based groups pledged allegiance through online videos, used Facebook and YouTube for recruitment, and connected with foreign networks. During the 2017 Marawi siege, the earliest signs of violence surfaced on social media, with armed groups posting images and combat footage in real time (Rappler, 2017). The Maute Group and Abu Sayyaf used online platforms to promote allegiance to ISIS, marking a shift toward transnational extremist communication. Increased internet access further embedded these networks, enabling online recruitment that leveraged personal ties, digital communities, and sympathetic strangers (Ressa, 2012; Ressa, 2017; Institute of Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2017; 2018). Research shows Facebook Messenger is the most common recruitment channel among local Moros, given its accessibility and widespread use. Technology increasingly functions as an enabler of radicalization, especially through social media platforms used by ISIS and other extremist groups to recruit and spread propaganda (Bertram, 2016; Klausen, 2015; McDowell Smith, Speckhard & Yayla, 2017).

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Crenshaw's (1981) theoretical framework explains terrorism as influenced by situational variables, organizational strategies, and individual motivations. She differentiates long-term preconditions such as modernity, which both connects and marginalizes populations (Francis, 2012) from immediate precipitants that trigger violence. Scholars debate the role of poverty; while some argue socioeconomic hardship can contribute to radicalization (Denoeux & Carter, 2009; Piazza, 2006), others show terrorists often come from middle-class and educated backgrounds (Krueger & Maleckova, 2003; Venhaus, 2010; Dortbudak, 2008). Individual factors such as discrimination, psychological predispositions, and family environment also influence radicalization. Relative deprivation theory (Stouffer; Gurr, 1970) further explains how perceived inequality fuels political violence by widening gaps between expectations and lived conditions. The Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16, integrate development and security approaches to address inequality, marginalization, and human-rights violations as key drivers of extremism (Ensor, 2017). In the Philippines, past counter-insurgency strategies focused on military action but shifted toward a holistic human-security framework under the National

Security Policy 2011–2016 and 2017–2022, acknowledging socioeconomic roots of rebellion. Despite ongoing peace talks, the CPP-NPA-NDF continues armed operations, including attacks that contributed to the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao in 2017 (Santos, 2017; Valente, 2017).

1.6 Review of Related Studies

Arao, Panay, Estrada, and Danguedan Jr. (2018) examined the level of participation of Sangguniang Kabataan members in Silang, Cavite in preventing radicalization and violent extremism, focusing on education, empowerment, and engagement. Using mixed methods through key informant interviews and focus group discussions involving SK members, barangay chairmen, PNP personnel, students, and government officials, their study found moderate participation in education and engagement and high participation in empowerment. Factors limiting SK involvement included lack of awareness, non-implementation of projects, and absence of dedicated funding. Castillo, Lao, Guillermo, and Guillermo (2018) analyzed the PNP's perspective on the role of social media in preventing and countering violent extremism and insurgency, assessing tools and reach, control mechanisms, and media cooperation. Through percentage distribution, weighted mean, and T-Tests on data from five PNP directorates and the Camp Crame Press Corps, they concluded that social media is a vital platform for public awareness and recommended establishing a Social Media Center under DPCR to enhance PNP engagement with netizens. Delorino, Merin, and Plecerda (2018) assessed the Community Mobilization Program in Rodriguez, Rizal using qualitative methods, including document analysis and interviews with PNP and local government officials. Their findings indicated that the CMP supports PNP efforts by providing intelligence against insurgent activities but suffers from inadequate logistics, weak support systems, and the need for stronger LGU financial backing. They emphasized that a solid support base is crucial for program sustainability. Although similar to the present study in its community-based approach, their work focused on the effectiveness of the CMP, whereas the current research centers on preventing CTG mass organization. Aguillon, Bannawagan, De Mesa, and Doromal (2018) evaluated the capability of CIDG-Calabarzon to prevent and counter violent extremism and insurgency, analyzing proactive detection, legal strategies, investigative innovations, and collaborative actions. Interviews with 31 CIDG personnel and 205 community members revealed that CIDG was effective due to new technologies, prompt legal actions, speedy investigations, and coordination with educational institutions. However, they identified issues such as insufficient personnel, limited specialized training, and inadequate collaboration with LGUs. Their study resulted in a proposed project titled "Enhancing the Capability of CIDG-Calabarzon in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency." In related action research, the present Researcher, along with Fanged and Sacyat (2019), studied the sustainability of Pangasinan as an insurgency-free province. They found that both LGUs and the PNP prioritize information, education, communication campaigns, and community dialogues to maintain peace. Respondents reported that political indicators were highly present, while peace and order indicators were barely present or not present, depending on the group. To prevent insurgency, respondents emphasized active barangay council involvement and community support for government programs. Taken together, these studies highlight the importance of community participation, interagency cooperation, local government support, and proactive security measures in addressing radicalization, insurgency, and violent extremism. They demonstrate that countering CTGs requires sustained community engagement, adequate logistics, and strong institutional coordination elements that make the present study timely and relevant amid ongoing concerns about peace, order, and local development.

1.7 Conceptual Framework, Scope, and Significance of the Study

This study is grounded on the Input–Process–Output (IPO) framework, where the legal mandates of the Philippine National Police serve as the foundation for examining how local government participation influences countermeasures against community-based terrorist groups. These mandates, which include the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Republic Act No. 7160, Executive Order No. 110 s. 1999, Pangasinan Provincial Resolution No. 554-2002, and Executive Order No. 70 s. 2018, shape the context within which the Philippine National Police implements programs designed to prevent mass-organization activities of Communist Terrorist Groups (CTGs) in Pangasinan. Using these mandates as the starting point, the study employed a survey questionnaire to determine the level of participation of local government officials in supporting these police programs, as well as to identify the challenges that affect their involvement. The results of this process ultimately guided the development of recommendations intended to motivate communities to work closely with the police in preventing the entry, influence, and recruitment efforts of CTGs within their localities. The study assessed the extent to which Local Government Units in Pangasinan participate in efforts to stop CTGs from conducting mass-organizing activities. It sought to describe this level of participation in terms of alternative socioeconomic opportunities, participatory decision-making and civic space, adherence to the rule of law and human-rights-based approaches in preventing violent extremism, local governments' capacity for service delivery and security, education promoting human rights and cultural diversity, and the use of media and social media to promote alternative discourse. The research further examined the obstacles that hinder LGU participation and determined whether a significant relationship exists between their level of involvement and the challenges they encounter. The research was conducted in areas of Pangasinan previously infiltrated by CTGs, particularly in the municipalities of Mangatarem, Labrador, Natividad, Tayug, Infanta, San Nicolas, Aguilar, and Bugallon. It also included San Manuel, where the San Roque Multi-Purpose Dam is situated, and Sual, home to the Sual Coal-Fired Power Plant. Additional areas such as Mangaldan, San Fabian, and Bayambang were included due to reports of CTG supporters planning mass-organization activities, based on the 2017 briefing report of the Pangasinan Police

Provincial Office. The study involved local officials, especially barangay officials who have direct knowledge of community residents, while excluding Sangguniang Kabataan members due to ethical and legal constraints concerning the involvement of minors. The significance of this study extends to several sectors. In the field of public administration, it contributes insights into the role of local government in ensuring community safety and security by examining how LGUs support and align with law enforcement programs. For senior leaders of the Philippine National Police, the findings and the proposed community-based motivational plan may serve as a useful guide and potential standardized tool for strengthening police–community partnerships throughout the country. At the provincial level, the findings may assist the Provincial Director of the Pangasinan Police Provincial Office in implementing and pilot-testing the proposed plan as part of daily police operations. Chiefs of Police may also benefit from the study by gaining practical guidance on how to reduce community hostility and foster greater engagement from local officials in countering CTG activities. Likewise, Local Government Units across Pangasinan may draw from the study to enhance their support for police programs and contribute more actively to maintaining peace and order in their communities. The findings can also help PNP personnel nationwide strengthen their front-line efforts to prevent CTG infiltration at the grassroots level. Finally, the study provides a valuable reference for future researchers, especially since terrorism and violent extremism remain global concerns that continue to require sustained academic and practical attention.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design through a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to determine the level of participation of local government officials in supporting the PNP's program to counter the mass organization of Communist Terrorist Groups (CTGs) in Pangasinan. As noted by Martinez, cited in Flora (2013), descriptive research is suited for examining contemporary events shaped by past circumstances that may influence future outcomes. All collected data were compiled, indexed, collated, and reviewed for proper analysis and presentation.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in thirteen areas in Pangasinan that had previously been infiltrated by CTGs. These included Mangatarem, Labrador, Natividad, Tayug, Infanta, San Nicolas, Aguilar, and Bugallon, along with San Manuel, which hosts the San Roque Multi-Purpose Dam, and Sual, home to the Sual Coal-Fired Power Plant. Additional localities Mangaldan, San Fabian, and Bayambang were included due to reported CTG supporters intending to conduct mass-organization activities.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were selected using simple random sampling and consisted of three groups: PNP personnel, barangay officials, and community residents from the identified municipalities. Resident respondents were included only if they possessed background knowledge about CTGs. This ensured that responses reflected actual awareness of local security concerns.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study relied primarily on a researcher-made survey questionnaire. Based on the 2015 population (727,508) of the identified localities, the Raosoft online calculator generated a sample size of 344. These were distributed among 31 affected barangays, where four barangay officials and five residents were selected from each, totaling 279 respondents. An additional five PNP personnel from each of the 13 municipalities contributed another 65 respondents, completing the 344-sample requirement. Of these, 325 questionnaires were retrieved, yielding a retrieval rate of 94.47%.

2.5 Research Instrument

The instrument used was a researcher-made questionnaire derived from multiple online sources, including the *Homegrown Violent Extremism Mobilization Indicators for Public Safety Personnel* (2015). Part I measured the level of LGU participation in preventing CTG mass organization, while Part II identified the factors affecting participation. The questionnaire was pre-tested among one Police Community Relations Officer, one barangay chairman, and two residents from Burgos. While police respondents had no difficulty, barangay officials and residents struggled with some English items, prompting the translation of the instrument into Filipino (Appendix D). The descriptive survey method guided the assessment of LGU participation as perceived by PNP personnel, barangay officials, and community residents.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

After validating and testing the questionnaire, the researcher secured necessary permissions from the PNP Provincial Director, the Provincial Governor, and the Municipal Mayors. Once approval was granted, the researcher personally visited all 13 municipalities and distributed the questionnaires to the chosen respondents. Considering the number of locations and respondent groups, data collection was completed over a ten-day period.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data gathered from the survey were analyzed using several statistical tools. Percentage distribution was used to examine factors affecting LGU participation. Weighted mean determined the level of participation across all three respondent groups. A five-point Likert scale was used for descriptive interpretation: 5 (4.21–5.00) Very High Participation, 4 (3.41–4.20) High Participation, 3 (2.61–3.40) Low Participation, 2 (1.81–2.60) Very Low Participation, and 1 (1.00–1.80) No Participation. Hypothesis testing utilized the Point-Biserial Correlation at the 0.5% significance level to determine whether differences existed among the three groups regarding factors influencing participation. All statistical processing was conducted using SPSS version 20.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of Participation of Local Government Officials in the PNP Program to Counter CTGs

3.1.1 Overall Level of Participation

Across the six indicators, the Philippine National Police (PNP) personnel rated the participation of local government officials in Pangasinan as Very High Participation (overall weighted mean = 4.56), while barangay officials (WM = 4.02) and community residents (WM = 4.09) rated it as High Participation. At the composite level, the overall mean of 4.22 corresponds to Very High Participation, indicating that, in general, LGUs are viewed as highly involved in the PNP program to counter the mass organization of Communist Terrorist Groups (CTGs). The highest mean ratings were observed for enhanced participatory decision-making and civic space (WM = 4.32), educating respect for human rights, diversity, and culture (WM = 4.28), local government capacity for service delivery and security (WM = 4.26), and work with media and social media to promote alternative discourse (WM = 4.25). In contrast, rule of law and human-rights-based approaches (WM = 4.11) and alternative socioeconomic opportunities (WM = 3.86) were rated slightly lower, though still within the High Participation range. These results show that LGUs in Pangasinan are broadly perceived as strong partners of the PNP in countering CTGs, with PNP respondents consistently observing higher levels of engagement than barangay officials and residents. This reflects how institutional actors, who directly coordinate programs and task forces, tend to have greater visibility of LGU actions, while grassroots actors may only see partial outputs. The pattern aligns with Barzegar, Powers and El Karhili's (2016) observation that government responses to violent extremism often fall short when collaboration with civil society is weak, and conversely perform better where such collaboration is evident. In Pangasinan, the consistently high ratings suggest that LGU participation is not merely symbolic but manifests through concrete governance, security, and communication interventions in support of PNP anti-CTG efforts.

3.1.2 Alternative Socioeconomic Opportunities

For alternative socioeconomic opportunities, PNP personnel rated LGU participation as **Very High Participation** (WM = 4.32), while barangay officials (WM = 3.53) and residents (WM = 3.72) rated it as **High Participation**. Most respondents in all three groups chose "High Participation," but barangay officials registered the highest proportion of "No Participation" responses, followed by a smaller number of residents, while no PNP respondent selected "No Participation." This suggests that while many see LGUs as providing alternative sources of income and support for vulnerable sectors, there are still pockets where respondents feel such efforts are insufficient or absent. The quantitative results indicate that LGUs are implementing socio-economic interventions such as supplemental feeding, health assistance (e.g., free eye and dental services), skills or livelihood training, and scholarship programs, but these are not uniformly felt across all barangays. These programs align with Administrative Order No. 10 (2018), which enhances the Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) by providing assistance to former rebels and their families (Official Gazette, 2018). However, as UNDP (2016) points out, horizontal inequalities economic, political, social, and cultural can fuel perceptions of injustice that contribute to radicalization. Uzodike and Maiangwa (2012) and Blair et al. (2013) likewise argue that poverty and deprivation do not solely explain violent extremism but can create conducive environments for extremist recruitment by deepening grievances. The lower ratings from barangay officials and some residents, as well as the presence of "No Participation" responses, highlight the need for broader and more inclusive livelihood coverage, especially in communities that still perceive gaps in government support.

3.1.3 Enhanced Participatory Decision-Making and Civic Space

Enhanced participatory decision-making and civic space received one of the highest overall ratings (WM = 4.32, Very High Participation). PNP respondents gave Very High Participation scores across all parameters (WM = 4.64), while barangay officials (WM = 4.12) and residents (WM = 4.19) rated participation as High to Very High. A large proportion of respondents in all groups indicated "High" or "Very High Participation" for establishing programs that encourage community cooperation, intensifying coordination and information-sharing on extremist activities, and conducting regular meetings of local leaders and action teams. The strongest consensus was on the conduct of regular meetings, where all three groups leaned heavily toward "Very High Participation." These results indicate that LGUs are perceived as strongly engaged in participatory governance in support of PNP anti-CTG initiatives. Citizens' participation has been recognized as critical in restoring public trust and enhancing local government legitimacy (Brillantes and Fernandez, 2011; Gabriel and Gutierrez, 2017). Programs that encourage community cooperation, information exchange, and regular dialogue reflect

the principles of participatory governance and align with national frameworks such as the Human Security Act of 2007 (Official Gazette, 2007) and PAMANA's conflict-sensitive development efforts (U.S. State Department; PAMANA, 2019). At the same time, the existence of some "No Participation" responses on community cooperation programs suggests that not all localities experience participatory initiatives equally. This supports Piazza's (2015) finding that blocking or limiting non-violent participation can increase the risk of terrorism, and Schanzer et al. (2016), who found that many police departments do not fully utilize community outreach for countering violent extremism. The Pangasinan experience shows relatively strong performance but still underscores the need to institutionalize inclusive engagement across all barangays.

3.1.4 Rule of Law and Human-Rights-Based Approach in Preventing Violent Extremism

For the rule of law and human-rights-based approaches, PNP respondents rated LGUs' participation as Very High (WM = 4.50), while barangay officials (WM = 3.88) and residents (WM = 3.93) rated it as High Participation. Most respondents across the three groups indicated high or very high participation in adopting measures to prohibit incitement, contributing to the prevention and peaceful resolution of prolonged conflicts, and ensuring the rule of law in apprehending and prosecuting perpetrators of extremist acts. The parameter with the most "Very High" responses was ensuring the rule of law in apprehension and prosecution, where 71.0% of PNP and nearly half of residents and barangay officials gave the highest rating. Only a small percentage of residents and barangay officials chose "No Participation" for certain parameters, while none of the PNP respondents selected "No Participation" or "Low Participation." The results reflect that LGUs of Pangasinan are generally perceived to uphold due process and legal safeguards in their counter-extremism efforts, particularly in coordination with the PNP. This is consistent with the principle of the rule of law, which requires accountability of all actors and consistency with human rights norms (Department of Justice, doj.gov.ph). The strong ratings from PNP personnel likely stem from their direct involvement in implementing Executive Order No. 70 and their collaboration with LGUs through task forces such as the Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (TF-ELCAC). However, the slightly lower ratings from barangay officials and residents suggest that some community-level actors may not be fully aware of higher-level coordination structures or may perceive gaps in how legal protections and human rights standards are applied in practice. Galletti (2018) and UNDP (2016) caution that counter-extremism measures, if not carefully implemented, risk restricting rights and stigmatizing certain groups, thereby becoming themselves drivers of radicalization. The findings also resonate with Arao et al. (2018), whose study on SK participation in preventing violent extremism found high empowerment ratings but underscored the need for human-rights sensitivity in handling extremist suspects and issues.

3.1.5 Local Governments' Capacity for Service Delivery and Security

Local government capacity for service delivery and security obtained an overall rating of Very High Participation (WM = 4.26). PNP personnel again gave Very High Participation scores (WM = 4.59), while barangay officials (WM = 4.05) and residents (WM = 4.13) rated participation as High. Among the parameters, the highest proportions of "Very High Participation" responses were associated with increasing security and protection in vulnerable areas such as infrastructure and public places, and enhancing police visibility and security inspection. A significant number of PNP, barangay officials, and residents rated these security-related activities as very highly implemented, although a small fraction of respondents from all groups still indicated "No Participation," particularly in relation to police visibility and inspections. These findings show that LGUs in Pangasinan are perceived to be actively coordinating with the PNP in maintaining local security and delivering basic services, in line with the mandates of R.A. 7160 on accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness. Organizational capacity is a key dimension of local government performance (Melkers and Willoughby, 2002; Franklin, 2002; Berman and Wang, 2000), and the high ratings across most parameters suggest that LGUs have developed mechanisms for peacekeeping, inclusive development, legal assistance, and protection of vulnerable areas. The emphasis on securing infrastructures and public spaces reflects national frameworks such as the National Disaster Response Plan for terrorism-related incidents and contingency planning under the DRRM system (NDRP, 2014). However, the presence of "No Participation" responses in police visibility and inspection hints at irregularities in implementation or resource constraints in some communities. This is important because security and justice deficits can undermine state legitimacy and create openings for extremist groups, as noted by Glazzard, Jespersen, Maguire, and Winterbotham (2018). The results also support De Leon, Rufo, and Pablo (2018), who argue that barangays must be treated as the first line of defense and that increasing their involvement enhances community ownership of counter-terrorism efforts.

3.1.6 Educating Respect for Human Rights, Diversity, and Culture

Educating respect for human rights, diversity, and culture garnered an overall rating of Very High Participation (WM = 4.28). PNP respondents rated LGU participation as Very High (WM = 4.55), while barangay officials (WM = 4.13) and residents (WM = 4.17) rated it as High Participation, with several parameters reaching Very High. Most respondents agreed that LGUs actively promote mutual respect for human rights, diversity, religions, and culture, foster a culture of peace, and implement education and public awareness programs that include inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue. However, a small number of barangay officials and residents indicated "No Participation" in relation to initiatives that promote dialogue, tolerance, and understanding among cultures and religions, suggesting that such programs may not uniformly reach all communities. The high ratings confirm that LGUs are perceived to be integrating human rights and cultural respect into

their programs, consistent with constitutional mandates and international frameworks. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda emphasizes global citizenship, tolerance, and respect for diversity, with education as a key vehicle (UNDP, 2016). UNESCO (1996, 2009) further underscores the role of culture of peace and cultural diversity in shaping governance and participation. The disparity between PNP perceptions and some community experiences, particularly regarding dialogue and tolerance initiatives, suggests implementation gaps or uneven communication. As UNDP (2016) notes, radicalization is often driven less by pure ideology and more by social and identity-based grievances, where religion and ethnicity become vehicles for expressing exclusion (Hegghammer, 2011; Gleave, 2014; Maher, 2015). Enhancing inter-faith and intercultural initiatives, as well as ensuring their visibility at grassroots level, can counter extremist narratives by fostering inclusion and belonging. Melange (2018) notes that inter-faith harmony, while difficult to attain, is attainable where mutual respect and awareness are intentionally cultivated an imperative in CTG-affected or vulnerable localities.

3.1.7 Work with Media and Social Media to Promote Alternative Discourse

On the use of media and social media to promote alternative discourse, PNP respondents rated LGU participation as Very High Participation (WM = 4.68), while barangay officials (WM = 4.01) and residents (WM = 4.07) rated it as High Participation. A large majority of respondents in all groups selected “High” or “Very High Participation,” though a few barangay officials and residents indicated “No Participation,” particularly regarding the use of the Internet and social media to counter the spread of extremism. None of the PNP respondents chose “Low” or “None,” which reflects their stronger awareness of official online campaigns and coordination mechanisms. The findings suggest that LGUs and PNP units in Pangasinan are actively using online platforms and local media to support counter-extremism messaging, consistent with the growing recognition of social media’s power in shaping norms and attitudes (Weinman, 2014). Many LGUs maintain official websites and social media pages where they post activities and advisories, while PNP local stations use Facebook and other platforms through their Police Community Relations offices. However, the fact that some residents and barangay officials still perceive low or no participation indicates that not all are followers or consumers of these online channels. UNDP (2016) stresses that counter-narratives must be proactive and creative, engaging disaffected groups and amplifying voices of women, youth, religious leaders, victims, and returnees. The results reinforce the findings of Castillo, Lao, Guillermo, and Guillermo (2018), who concluded that social media is a relevant tool for alerting the public to the dangers of violent extremism and insurgency and recommended strengthening institutional structures like a Social Media Center. Ensuring that online messaging is accessible, localized, and interactive is essential for closing the gap between institutional communication and grassroots perception.

3.2 Challenges Affecting the Level of Participation of Local Officials in the PNP Program

The responses on challenges reveal that the most frequently identified issue, chosen by 172 respondents across all groups, is that local governments lack experts with backgrounds and experience in the field of violent extremism. This was followed closely by poor security and monitoring in the locality, identified by 165 respondents. A high proportion of PNP respondents (58.1% or 36 out of 62) also cited the inability of local officials and law enforcers to detect extremist activities, while 145 respondents highlighted the lack of technological skills to track or detect online recruitment. Other frequently selected challenges included lack of coordination and communication between residents and authorities, failure of community members to report extremist-related observations, weak control over firearms, and absence of mechanisms to trace fake identities. Across most items, substantial percentages of PNP, barangay officials, and residents indicated that these challenges affect LGU participation in countering CTGs. The challenges identified point to critical capacity gaps in expertise, technology, coordination, and community engagement. The perceived lack of experts in violent extremism and weak ability to detect extremist activities suggest that both LGUs and law enforcement agencies may require more specialized training, analytical tools, and systematic mechanisms for early warning and threat assessment. This aligns with the findings of Aguillon, Bannawagan, De Mesa, and Doromal (2018), who reported that even CIDG-Calabarzon faced shortages in personnel, specialized legal and investigative training, and coordination with LGUs and stakeholders on violent extremism and insurgency. Poor security and monitoring further indicate that while LGUs and PNP engage in many visible activities, they may still struggle to maintain continuous situational awareness, particularly regarding clandestine recruitment, online radicalization, and identity fraud. These constraints are especially concerning in a post-Marawi context, where early detection is crucial to preventing large-scale attacks. Strengthening technical capacity, institutional linkages, and community-based reporting systems is therefore essential to sustain and deepen LGU participation in anti-CTG initiatives.

3.3 Relationship Between Level of Participation and Challenges

Using Point-Biserial Correlation, the study tested the relationship between the overall level of LGU participation and the eleven identified challenges. The analysis showed that only three challenges had a **significant relationship** with the level of participation:

- **Local governments lack experts in violent extremism (item e)** – weak positive relationship ($r = 0.230$, $p = .010$);
- **Poor security and monitoring in the locality (item h)** – moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.301$, $p = .001$);
- **Absence of mechanisms to trace fake identities (item i)** – weak negative relationship ($r = -0.276$, $p = .002$).

The remaining challenges did not show statistically significant relationships with the level of participation. The positive correlations for items (e) and (h) indicate that higher levels of perceived participation co-exist with stronger perceptions that these problems affect LGUs, while the negative correlation for item (i) suggests that higher participation is associated with a decreased perception that the absence of mechanisms to trace fake identities is hindering participation. The significant weak to moderate positive relationships for lack of experts (item e) and poor security and monitoring (item h) suggest that as LGUs intensify their participation, respondents become more conscious of how these capacity gaps constrain implementation. In other words, more active engagement may expose the limits of technical expertise and security systems, prompting greater recognition of these issues. This is consistent with the notion that program expansion often surfaces structural and capability problems that were previously less visible. Conversely, the weak negative relationship between the level of participation and the absence of mechanisms to trace fake identities (item i) implies that high-participating LGUs are less likely to see this challenge as a major barrier, possibly because they employ compensatory measures or stronger coordination with national agencies. Overall, the results emphasize that while LGUs in Pangasinan show high levels of engagement in countering CTGs, their effectiveness is shaped by the availability of subject-matter experts, robustness of security and monitoring systems, and access to technical tools. Addressing these gaps is crucial for translating high participation into sustained and impactful counter-extremism outcomes.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that local government units (LGUs) in Pangasinan demonstrate *very high participation* in participatory decision-making and civic engagement, and *high participation* in providing alternative socioeconomic opportunities that support the PNP's efforts to counter CTG mass organization. The PNP respondents identified their primary challenge as the limited capability of LGUs to detect extremist activities in their areas. Barangay officials and community residents similarly pointed to the lack of technical experts with experience in violent extremism as a major constraint. Statistical analysis further revealed significant relationships across three indicators between LGU participation and the challenges they encounter, showing patterns ranging from weak to moderate positive relationships and a weak negative relationship.

In light of these findings, several actions are recommended to strengthen LGU participation in preventing CTG mass organization. First, socioeconomic support should be enhanced through stronger networking and collaboration among LGUs, national agencies, NGOs, and people's organizations to ensure timely delivery of services and livelihood programs. Politically, barangay councils must be more proactive in addressing community needs, while residents should participate actively in government initiatives. Strengthening community relations and adherence to the rule of law with human-rights-based approaches emphasized for police and barangay officials is essential. Technologically, LGUs should improve coordination with media and social media platforms to support PNP campaigns against CTG recruitment and propaganda. For peace and order, communities must promptly report suspicious gatherings or activities, and LGUs should reinforce security by hosting CAFGU/CAA units and strengthening Barangay Peacekeeping Action Teams (BPATs) to maintain stability in insurgency-cleared areas.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study adhered to institutional and academic ethical standards for research involving human participants. No experimental procedures were conducted. All respondents participated voluntarily, and confidentiality and responsible data handling were strictly observed.

Acknowledgements

The authors extend their gratitude to the local government officials, PNP personnel, and community residents of the participating municipalities in Pangasinan for their cooperation. Appreciation is also given to the validators and administrators who supported the distribution and evaluation of the research instrument.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no financial or personal conflicts of interest in the conduct, analysis, or publication of this research. No external entity influenced the study's processes or outcomes.

Statement of ethical approval

The study involved survey-based data collection with prior permission from concerned local authorities. As it posed no physical, psychological, or legal risk to participants, formal ethics board approval was not required. All procedures complied with accepted ethical guidelines for social science research.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary nature, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. No personal identifiers were included in the final report.

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