

Guns Don't Kill, Gun-Culture Does: A Case Study on the Proliferation of Firearms in Lanao del Sur

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ABSTRACT

The resort to arms is as primordial as many of the grievances over which some conflicts in the world occurs. The continuous resistance of the Bangsamoro people since the coming of the Spaniards, Americans, and Japanese in the Philippines has gradually assimilated into their culture particularly the people of Lanao, the 'Mranaws'. This study aims to determine the main historical and cultural factors that contributed to the proliferation of firearms in Lanao del Sur which deleteriously affects the socio-economic development of the province. Moreover, the widespread availability of firearms and poor management over their transfer has become a serious threat to peace and security. The finding of this study reveals that the perpetuation of firearms in Lanao del Sur can be attributed to historical and cultural experiences of the Mranaws and the Bangsamoro people in general. To quell this proliferation, there is a need to understand the factors and condition in which this proliferation causes in order to generate pragmatic interventions and sustainable programs from the local, regional, and national government. The researcher applied mix-methods approach with Focus Group Discussion (FGD), followed by random survey in each selected municipalities as well as Key Informant Interviews (KII).

Keywords: Bangsamoro, Culture of Violence, Gun-Culture, Rido, Mranaw, firearms

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the opening of borders, the availability of surplus weapons from the Cold War, and the rapid growth of free commerce, diverse sectors of society in different parts of the globe now have easier access to highly lethal firearms ranging from small arms and light weapons to heavy assault rifles. What has changed is that these weapons are now more frequently getting into the hands of civilians, particularly vulnerable children, and fighters of all stripes who are not bound by the laws of national and international humanitarian law.

In the case of the Bangsamoro peace process in Southern Philippines, one of the most important elements of the peace process is the normalization period which aims to address the decades of long-standing armed conflict. Yet, the majority of programs that dealt with managing and reducing the number of firearms are primarily targeted at former militants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which diminishes the

significance of disarming civilians. Inclusion is crucial to sustainability if normalization succeeds in its aim. Moreover, the proliferation of firearms in Lanao del Sur have become a major threat to peace and the normalization itself. Hence, this study used historical and cultural lens in understanding the behavior of the Mranaw towards possession of firearms. The four centuries of arm resistance against the foreign colonizers and then the recent armed struggle to right to self-determination develops the culture of violence in the areas of the Bangsamoro people. In addition, the social-protracted conflict for decades and family feuds known as "Rido" has escalated the gun-culture and violence in Lanao del Sur and the lack of security and political instability gave moral legitimacy and necessity for the locals to possess firearms. Thus, civilians were compelled to own firearms, and cultural intervention is urgently needed to stop and control the proliferation in the Bangsamoro region. As a result, a process must be used in place of coercion. Therefore, it is more crucial to conduct extensive study in order to develop a sensible and practical strategy for controlling unsecured weapons and gradually disarming citizens.

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II. METHODOLOGY

The researcher applied mix-method in gathering the data. Firstly, the researcher conducted focus group discussions (FGD) with four sessions with random and inclusive setting were participants are coming from various sectors of the community; and ten respondents for Key Informant Interviews (KII) in each four identified municipalities (Butig, Marantao, Pagayawan, and Piagapo). Secondly, to cross-examine the data collected in the FGD and KII, it is followed by a random sampling with 600

respondents in the selected municipalities in which in addition to the quantitative survey data, relevant reliable literatures were reviewed and analysed. This included previous survey reports on relevant topics (e.g. civilian firearm possession, Rido, Mindanao secessionism, etc.). Furthermore, the data garnered is used to come up with pragmatic recommendations to help the Bangsamoro government (BTA-BARMM), Municipal Local Government Units (MLGUs) and National Government in their quest to prevent and reduce the proliferation of loose firearms.

III. GUN-CULTURE IN HISTORICAL LENS

Armed Struggle against the Spaniards

Islam initially came in the Sulu archipelago near the end of the 13th century, about in 1280, before the Spanish conquest of Manila in 1565. It is said that a man named Tuan Mashai'ka brought it there after getting married there and founding the first Islamic community (Rodil, 2003: 36). In the work of (Majul, 1973: 57), he supported this as he mentioned that, "The younger Rajah Sipad (Siripada or Sripaduka), who was a descendant of an earlier Sipad, is said to have been the one to whom Tuan Mashaika wedded." In Maguindanao tradition, according to Rudy Rodil, about 1460 and 1515, respectively, a certain Sharif Awliya from Johore and Sharif Kabungsuwan brought Islam to Mainland Mindanao. While the Lanao tradition mentions a man named Sharif Alawi who is supposed to have arrived in the modern-day Misamis Oriental and whose preaching is said to have later extended to Lanao, there is little proof to support this claim (Rodil, 2003: 37). This only indicates that Islam had already begun to take root in Sulu and Maguindanao and that the process of Islamization in the southern Philippines was well underway. Nevertheless, Spain immediately focused on the Moros and made several, ferocious attempts to conquer them. For instance, the following is revealed in the order given on May 23, 1578, by Governor General Francisco de Sande to Captain Esteban Rodriguez de Figueroa regarding an expedition to Maguindanao:

"... You shall order them not to admit any more preachers of the doctrine of Mahoma (Islam/Mohammad), since it is evil and false, and that of the Christians alone is good. You shall tell him that our object is that he be converted to Christianity and that he must allow us freely to preach the law of the Christians, and the natives must be allowed to go to hear the preaching and to be converted, without receiving any harm from the chiefs. And you shall try to ascertain who are the preachers of the sect of Mahoma, and shall seize and bring them before me. And **you shall burn or destroy the house where that accursed doctrine has been preached, and you shall order that it be not rebuilt** (Blaire & Robertson, 1903: 68)." **[Bold Emphasized]**

Even so, Captain Rodriguez de Figueroa's mission was unsuccessful since on April 20, 1596, he was killed in Maguindanao after being struck in the head by a *kampilan*. The contempt shown by Spanish colonists to the Bangsamoro people's culture and religion served as the impetus for their disobedience. As a result, the Bangsamoro resistance to Spanish rule made sure that the colonizers could not effectively dominate Mindanao. The Bangsamoro people not only resisted the Spanish mission of conversion, but they also refused to renounce their independence and submit to the Spanish. According to NajeebSaleeby's work:

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"One expedition after another was sent to Sulu and Mindanao to destroy, burn, and kill. Thousands of Moros were hunted with bullets and swords and hundreds of towns were leveled to the ground and sacked. **Spain instigated hostilities and coveted the Moros domain. It was not the Moros' part to yield. Their love of home and family naturally prompted them to fight, and they did fight well and valiantly** (Saleeby, 1913: 07)."

In other words, even to the very final days of Spanish colonization in Luzon and Visayas, the Bangsamoro people resented the Spanish with passionate and unyielding tenacity. Therefore, the 333 years of Bangsamoro resistance were referred to by Spanish historians, particularly Vicente Barrantes and Juan Montero y Vidal, as "guerraspiraticas" or wars against pirates (Majul, 1973: 121). And worst, in all Spanish documents and mainstream Philippine history books, referring the Moros as "Tulisanes" and barbaric. With this, it is important to note that in the context of war (Muslim Moros vs. Spanish and native Christians), Moros began counter-attacks against the Spanish presence in the Philippines, that was 21 years after the decisive offensive attacks of the Spaniards to the Moro territories particularly in Maguindanao and Sulu. As a result, the Bangsamoros were also thought to have an underlying culture of conflict, which could have led to a violent past. Their blatant love of weaponry and military build-up in response to the external threats posed by the foreign conquerors added to these overall bad attitudes. This is demonstrated by Datu Salikula of Maguindanao and Datu Sirungan of Buayan's successful invasions in the coastal settlements of Panay, Negros, and Cebu (Majul, 1973: 131).

Armed Struggle against the Americans

The American colonizers seized control of the Philippines from the Spanish in two ways: first, through the Treaty of Paris in 1898, which cost twenty million Mexican pesos; second, through armed conquest, in which they separately crushed the resistance of the Filipino people and the Bangsamoro people. After Spain was defeated by the United States in the Spanish-American War, the treaty served as the political agreement between the two colonial governments (Tan, 2002). At this point, it is crucial to emphasize that the Sulu and Maguindanao Sultanate, the Pat a P'ngampong sa Ranao (Four States/Federals of Lanao), and the Lumads avoided interaction with them and remained free at the time of the pact, which means that Spain did not occupy them. In this historical account, the incorporation of the Bangsamoro people into the Philippine State without their plebiscitary permission is one of the main causes of the Bangsamoro Struggle.

The Bangsamoro people in Mindanao also persisted in their campaign for independence after the Philippine-American war was formally launched in 1902. The American military called

the revolts that took place from 1903 through 1913 "Moro rebellions," and they also called them "armed engagements" (Hawkins, 2011). Teodoro Agoncillo, an eccentric and Manila-centric historian, also labelled this the "Muslim Problems." This is evidence that Americans, like the Spaniards, had negative opinion of the Bangsamoro people because they saw them as nothing but killers, pirates, and criminals in general. For self-defence against American forces, the Bangsamoro people armed themselves. Over the course of the administrations of three military governors, Generals Leonard Wood, Tasker H. Bliss, and John J. Pershing, there was a ten-year period of violent resistance to American rule (Miller, 2009: 01). Mranaws and Moro people have a strong heritage of keeping weapons for self-defence or to prepare for battle against Western invaders. As a result, the decades of struggle finally gave way to a culture of resistance, which aided in the historical resistance to colonialism and any other challenge to their faith, culture, or territory from without. Communities are ready to engage in conflict. The outcome made it possible for communities to become armed, which became a part of Bangsamoro traditions. General Leonard Wood, a military governor from 1903 to 1906, was one of the American military governors sent to Mindanao and is therefore largely responsible for formulating the strategy of the American military administration (Miller, 2009: 02). Wood's strategy was to concentrate on creating a system of local government for the province. He thought that once the Moros saw the advantages of good administration, they would readily adopt the new American system over their customary and traditional ways of tribe rule. Nonetheless, he never considered a military campaign of conquest as a precondition for defeating opposition. He believed that one strong example would be sufficient to put a stop to all opposition, therefore he approached each act of resistance as if it were the final and crucial one. For the three years he was in charge, he believed every battle would be the last, only for resistance to reappear in different regions of the province. Up to the Battle of Bud Dajo in the spring of 1906, there was always another battle waiting for him, which was unfortunate. His perception that this was the decisive fight he anticipated, rather than just another in a long line of resistance that persisted for the remaining years of military rule, was probably only strengthened by the relative size of this war to the others under his command.

On the other hand, Tasker Bliss, another military governor appointed in Mindanao, served from 1906 to 1909; at this time, ongoing opposition was primarily perceived as criminal activity, and Bliss took actions to position and adjust his men in accordance with this viewpoint. The military government was unable to increase its influence or deal with the causes of resistance as a result. Security in the province actually declined, but if one truly believed that there was no organized danger to authority still present following the decisive conflicts, Bliss' choices would look wise (Miller, 2009: 03). The administrations under Wood and Bliss didn't think a military operation was necessary to genuinely conquer and defeat resistance through the use of force. Throughout their stay in power, they upheld these views despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Finally, The last military governor of the Moro Province was General John J. Pershing (1909–1913). During his administration, the necessary security framework was ultimately put in place for the handover to civilian authority. When Pershing assumed command, he realized there were security concerns right once, and at first, he thought the transition to civilian rule would take much longer than it did.

Security conditions were created after almost two years of concentrated military operations enforcing disarmament, allowing Pershing to hand up administration of the Moro Province to civilians and abolish the military regime. Although Pershing's disarmament policy was the most effective, it was also the one that faced the most resistance, and before it was successful, it resulted in quite a bit of violence.

Furthermore, the US colonial prohibitions on the carrying of traditional weapons were also necessary during his administration and were viewed as a significant move treated seriously by the Americans in their pacification activities in Mindanao, particularly in Lanao province. These agreements with former Sulu sultans and datus included the disarming and management of traditional weapons.

According to records, all unaccounted-for firearms in Jolo had been gathered by June 1912, with the exception of Lati and Luuk, where there was fierce opposition to disarmament. When Gen. John Pershing became the Moro Province's governor and launched a forceful disarmament push in Jolo, this program was launched. However, imposing it in Lanao was unavoidable because of the Mranaws, who continued to harass and ambush American camps long after 1903. As said by Funtecha:

"Muslim lawlessness, including murders of Americans and foreigners **caused Gov. General Forbs to issue Executive Order No. 24, Government of the Moro Province, for the purpose of disarming the offenders.** A formal order to that effect was promulgated on September 9, by Brig. General John J. Pershing who was the governor of the Moro Province. **The principal reason for disarming the Mranaws and other Muslim groups, as advanced by the Americans, was that Muslims could not be trusted with arms** (Funtecha, 1979)."**[Bold Emphasized]**

Disarmament took place, and it was employed to stop Moro plundering operations that persisted after the American era. According to Funtecha (1979):

"The Mranaws and other Muslims hesitated to surrender their firearms due to fear and doubt. Military force had to be used, precipitating more bloody encounters between them and the government troops. By the latter part of 1913, **the disarmament of the Muslims, not only of guns but of fighting knives and spears, was practically complete and the safety of life and property of non-Muslims in the Moro province was, at length, generally accomplished.**"**[Bold Emphasized]**

Therefore, this disarmament includes the traditional weapons of the Mranaws, which were divided into swords like the Sundang, Pudang, Kampilan, and Barong, as well as daggers like the Kris and Gunong. These weapons were classified by Noralia Ibrahim as being: cannons called Lantakas, spears like the Bangkaw, shields called the K'long, and war drums (Ibrahim, 2022: 21).

Pershing's choice to prioritize security through his disarmament program and the ensuing enforcement actions were primarily responsible for creating the conditions necessary for the end of military rule in the province and the transition to civilian power. Military operations ultimately proved to be the most effective way to put an end to Moro opposition to American rule, despite only being initially intended as a supporting effort to a more comprehensive whole-of-government approach.

Furthermore, because of this US disarmament effort, the

traditional weapons that were gathered from the Mranaws and other Moro groups have later come to be valued for their historical and cultural significance. On September 2, 1945, a combined U.S., Moro, and Filipino force successfully overthrew the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during the Second World War (Aniel, 2009). The following year, the Philippines, including Mindanao and Sulu, proclaimed their independence on July 4, 1946, and were subsequently known as the Republic of the Philippines.

President Ferdinand E. Marco, Sr. took office in the Philippines after more than 20 years, particularly in the late 1960s, ushering in the most turbulent and violent phase of relations between the Bangsamoro people and the Filipino government. The culture of resistance made a stronger comeback. Without a doubt, this also signalled the start of the proliferation of unsecured weapons in Lanao and the wider Bangsamoro area.

On March 18, 1968, 64 Bangsamoro recruits from Sulu were killed by their military trainers, who claimed they had rebelled. However, other accounts claim they had just petitioned for the payment of their allowance, which had previously been overdue by more than a month. Because of the military training on Corregidor Island's code name, Jabidah, this became known as the infamous Jabidah massacre (Jubair, 1999). The Jabidah massacre is thought to have inspired the creation of Bangsamoro self-determination movements, such as the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) in 1968, which was led by Datu Udtog Matalam and publicly declared its goal of creating an Islamic State in the primarily Muslim regions of Mindanao and Sulu (Gowing, 1979).

The conflict between Muslims and Christians in Central Mindanao, mainly in the provinces of Cotabato and Lanao, erupted in violence between the 1970s and 1980s. In both provinces, Ilagas was linked to Christians. The "Blackshirts," the Muslim provincial security forces recognized for their all-black uniforms, were connected with the Muslims in the Cotabato region, while the Barracudas, a Mranaw paramilitary group, were affiliated with the Muslims in the Lanao region. Several killings targeting Muslim communities occurred between January and December of 1971. One of these was the Tacub Massacre, in which a group of unarmed Muslim voters in Lanao del Norte were shot dead by government soldiers at a military roadblock and dismembered by onlookers (Gowing, 1979). Another instance was the Manili Massacre, in which Muslims who had assembled for a peace conference in Carmen, Cotabato, were massacred inside a mosque (Rodil, 1994).

Moreover, the establishment of the Ilaga and the imposition of Martial Law paved the way for widespread bloodshed and societal polarization. The Ilaga, the Christian settlers who supported them, and especially the Philippine government, particularly its armed forces, who continued to create fear in their communities whether there was a conflict or relative peace, were all seen as perpetrators of injustice by the Bangsamoro people. Men and women would frequently be taken hostage, tortured, raped, and killed whenever soldiers raided villages, and it was not until the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro was signed in 2012 that this ordeal came to an end.

On the other hand, the stories told by the Moros were also echoed by Christian settlers. They feared for their life because Moros, like Blackshirts before them, later formed the Moro National Liberation Front and Moro Islamic Liberation Front to equip themselves. Many Ilonggo Christian families were murdered by Moros, and they continue to feel uneasy due to ongoing Rido or clan conflicts. In addition, according to Barron,

Engvall, & Morel, "as more than 150,000 have been estimated to have been killed in conflicts in Central and Western Mindanao over the past five decades (Barron and Morel, 2016)."

President Ferdinand Marcos officially imposed martial law in 1972 due to the statewide revolt led by the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army and the Bangsamoro movement in Mindanao. The Bangsamoro Republic would be founded in the area that the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) claimed to be their ancestral homeland, mainly the islands of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. This declaration was made in late 1972. It is estimated that between 100,000 and 120,000 individuals died during the conflict, of whom 50% were MNLF, 30% were soldiers, and 20% were civilians (Rodil, 2000). The Bangsamoro communities' continuing genocide and political unrest strengthened their "culture of resistance," which adhered to their traditional and religious belief that they had the right to defend their homeland from invaders and ignited the Bangsamoro struggle.

IV. GUN-CULTURE INCULTURAL LENS

Family/Clan Feud "Rido"

According to Wilfredo Torres (2014), the Mranaw, Iranun, and Maguindanaon use the term "Rido/Lido" or "family feud" to describe conflict between clans or violent outbursts. In addition, Moctar Matuan defined Rido as created when a "Simok't" which means a conflict or dispute between people results to death. When there is a death because of misunderstanding, it becomes Rido because the element of retaliation or the desire to retaliate comes in (Matuan, 2007). Rido is also characterized by a sporadic outburst of retaliatory violence between families, kinship groups, and communities. Moreover, Rido includes recurring violent retaliation over perceived affronts or injustices. Factions can be historical (geographic, ethnic, linguistic, insurgent); rivalries are often due to personal, family, clan, or political feuds. Conflicts can erupt over land dispute, marriage, elections, business deals, or personal grudges and often cut across and through families, clans, and insurgent groups (Asia Foundation, 2017).

Furthermore, according to Macabuac-Ferolin & Constantino, "Rido or clan feuding, has become the most important conflict issue facing the BARMM. Rido tends to interact with separatist conflict and other forms of armed violence, resulting in wider implications for conflict in Mindanao. Internal displacement, loss of lives and livelihoods, destruction of property and the disruption of political and community life are among the impacts of Rido (Macabuac and Constantino, 2014)."

Therefore, civilians are encouraged to possess firearms for their protection. This can be reflected in one of FGD participants in the municipality of Pagayawan when he said:

"Possession of firearms is for personal use, and the purpose of those who possess firearms is self-defence," he added, "Households are keeping firearms because their relatives have feuds. Their firearm is used only for their protection in case the enemies of their relatives attack them."**[Bold Emphasized]** Free Translation. (FGD, Pagayawan, June 2, 2021)

Similarly, one of the FGD participants in Piagapo related that:

"In our culture, we cannot prevent conflict or feud (Rido); that is the reason why Mranaw are keeping firearms in their household for their self-protection."**[Bold Emphasized]** Free Translation. (FGD, Piagapo, June 4, 2021)

In addition, another key interview informant in Butig supported this when he said that:

“The reasons why some households are keeping firearms is because firstly, they have rido (family feuds) or their relatives have enemies, so they have firearms only for their protection in case the enemies of their relative retaliates. **Secondly, some civilians are possessing firearms especially those who are involved in politics.** They said, you cannot run into politics if you don't have goons and guns.” [Bold Emphasized] Free Translation. (KII, Butig, June 5, 2021)

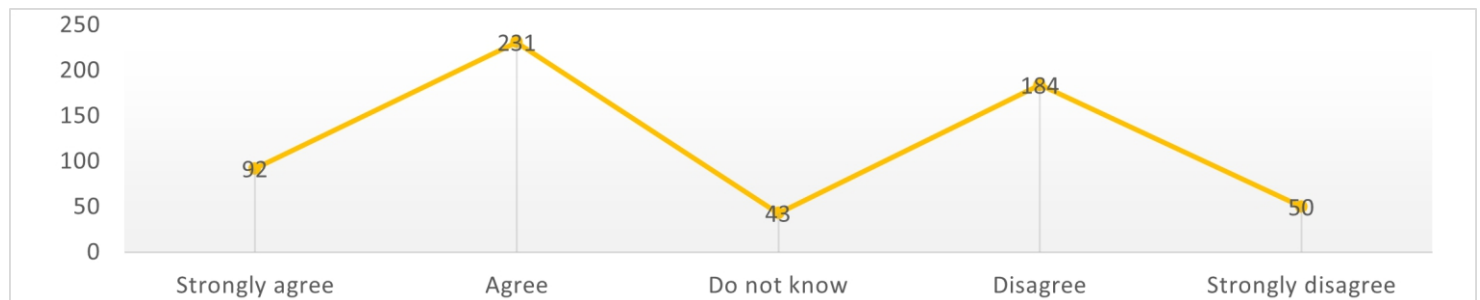


Figure 1: “Gun ownership is part of the Mranaw Culture and Tradition?”

Moreover, data shows in Figure 1 the distribution of responses of the survey participants about gun ownership as a part of culture and tradition. The table shows that most of the respondents, two hundred thirty-one (231) or 38.5%, responded “agree,” this means that they believed gun ownership is part of the Mranaw culture and tradition. One hundred eighty-four (184) or 30.6% “disagree” responded that they believed gun ownership is not part of the Mranaw culture and tradition. Also, 15.3% or (92) and 8.3% or (50) responded strongly agree and strongly disagree, respectively. This only implied that the possession of firearms has become a part of their culture or tradition because more than half of the respondents agreed to it.

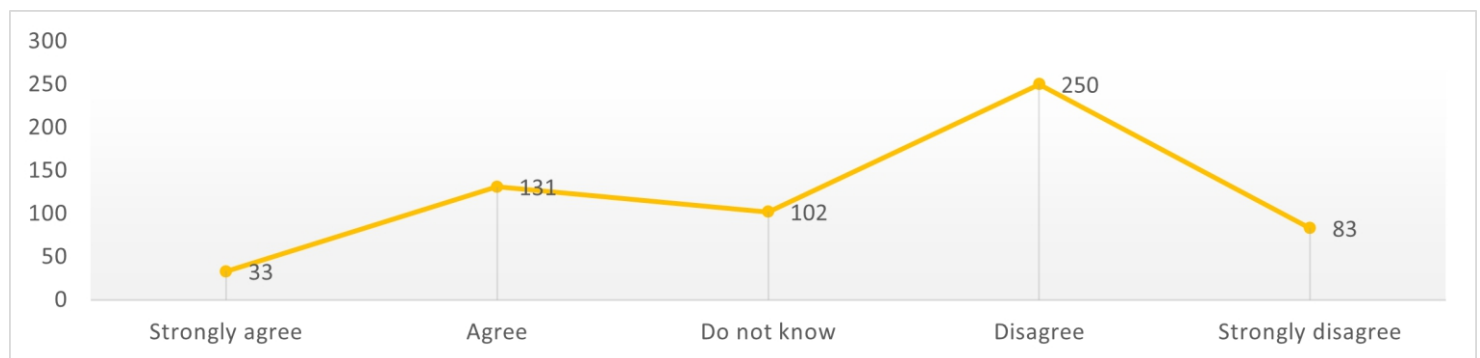


Figure 2: “Guns are a well-accepted integral part of a community?”

However, an important number also revealed in this study that while Mranaws believed that possession of firearms has become a part of their culture or tradition, figure 2 reveals that most of the respondents, two hundred fifty (250) or 41.6%, responded “disagree,” with the question, “Guns are a well-accepted integral part of a community?”. This means that in their communities, possession of firearms is not well-accepted. But there are one hundred thirty-one (131) or 21.83% respondents who have believed that possession of weapons is well-accepted as part of their community. Data shows also the following findings: 5.5% or 33 respondents answered 'strongly agree'; 13.8% or 83 respondents answered 'strong disagree'; and a remarkable 17% or 102 respondents have answered 'I don't know'. Thus, this findings implied that gun ownership is not well-accepted integral part of their respective community even though at the same time they believed that gun ownership is part of their tradition. This is a manifestation that in the present, while the Mranaw people understand that it is their tradition to possess guns or firearms because of their ancestor's historical experiences, but now, it is no longer well-accepted integral part of their communities. With this result, the research argued that Mranaw communities are now aware of the legal impacts and consequences of possessing guns or firearms.

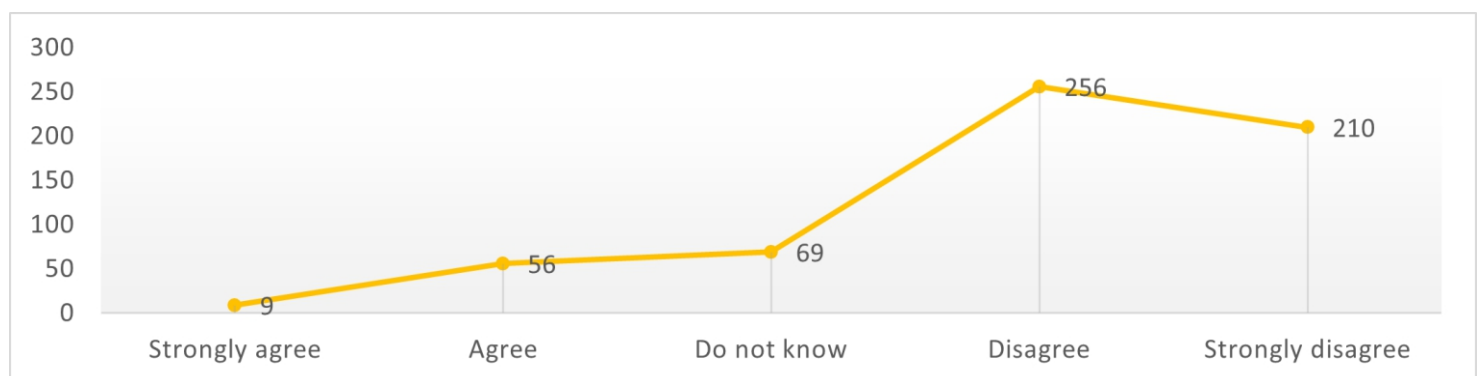


Figure 3: “Will you recommend gun ownership?”

The third figure shows the level of agree or disagreement of the Mranaws to recommend gun ownership. Data shows that most of the respondents of two hundred fifty-six (256) or 42.6%, show disagreement on recommending the possession of firearms. It is also an overwhelming number that two hundred-ten respondents or 35% strongly disagreed in recommending the possession of firearms. Data shows also the following findings: 1.5% or 9 respondents answered 'strongly agree'; 9.3% or 56 respondents answered 'agree'; and 11.5% or 69 respondents have answered 'I don't know'. Hence, this is a manifestation that the claim of the researcher is true and correct since that most of the Mranaw communities agreed not to recommend possession of guns.

However, although there is a small percentage of 10.8% combining those who answered strongly agree and agree of recommending gun ownership, it is still a threat to security that stems from Rido which is rampant in Lanao del Sur. This is considered one of the major problems in Lanao del Sur because apart from numerous casualties, Rido among the Meranao has brought about serious problems in their communities. Thus, acquisition and selling loose firearms is a common practice. This is supported with a key-informant who is a known gun-runner in Lanao del Sur, when he said:

"Firearms are easy to acquire since they are given as gifts to relatives or as part of a groom's dowry. For Mranaws, having a firearm is part of their life. **Some Mranaws grew believing that firearms are necessary as part of their wealth, a source of pride, and a tool of survival and protection.**" [Bold Emphasized] (FGD, Piagapo, June 04, 2021)

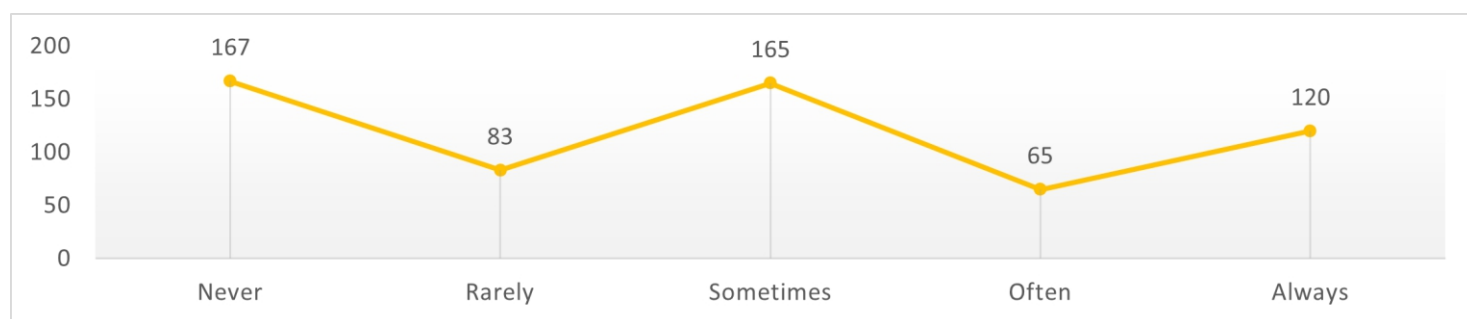


Figure 5: "Firearms are used for Rido, intimidation, and retaliation"

Moreover, surprisingly, the researcher found out that the respondents were almost equally believed that guns are 'never' or 'sometimes' used for Rido, intimidation, and retaliation. Figure 5 shows that there are one hundred sixty-seven (167) or 27.8% respondents believed that guns are 'never' used in Rido, intimidation, and retaliation. However, an exceptional number also of one hundred sixty-five (165) or 27.5% of the respondents believed that 'sometimes', guns are used for Rido, intimidation, and retaliation. In addition, at the same time, one hundred twenty (120) or 20% of the respondents believed that the community always used firearms for Rido, intimidation, retaliation. The Data shows also the following findings: 13.8% or 83 respondents answered 'rarely'; and 10.8% or 65 respondents have answered 'often'. Generally, the result indicated that 58.3% or majority of the respondents believed that the reasons for possession of firearms are for Rido, intimidation, and retaliation. Hence, gun-culture in Lanao del

Further, almost everyone who took part in focus groups and key informant interviews to learn how civilians felt about the spread of weapons also said that it was "simple to get guns in their community, especially if one has money."

In the municipality of Pagayawan, according to FGD Participants:

"Guns are easy to sell since most households in the community have guns for protection. **It is rare to find a household in our community that has no guns.**" [Bold Emphasized] (FGD, Pagayawan, June 02, 2021)

In the municipality of Butig, according to FGD Participants:

"Here in Butig, **gun availability has in a way become a part of daily life of the people. It is not surprising to find farmers and goat herders with guns slinging on their shoulders or hanging from their belts.** Indirectly, gun availability has become the rule rather than an exception. Without the protection of the gun you are vulnerable and easy target." [Bold Emphasized] (FGD, Butig, June 05, 2021)

In the municipality of Marantao, according to FGD Participants:

"**In our community, we have this understanding that if we heard exchange of fires for five minutes that is normal.** If it gets longer like 30 minutes, we are on the alert and try to gauge where it is coming from or if we are in immediate danger. If it gets to more than an hour, we will slowly gather our children, pack our things and wait for a lull in the fighting to move somewhere safe." [Bold Emphasized] (FGD, Marantao, June 07, 2021)

Sur is rampant due to the traditional belief that it used for retaliation that usually resulted to violence in their communities.

Political Instability and Security Issues

In this presentation, figure 6 reveals that civilians are using gun for local elections and politics. Out of 600 respondents, one hundred seventy-three (173) or 28.8% believed that civilians never used gun for election and politics, however, one hundred sixty-six (166) or 27.6% respondents answered 'sometimes' which means that there is a high probability that civilians are using guns for election and politics. Further, it is important to note in this findings that one hundred twenty (120) or 20% respondents answered 'always', which means that the use of gun in Lanao del Sur is usually because of politics and local elections. Thus, guns or firearms in addition to being part of their tradition and used for Rido and retaliation, it is also used during local

election. This can be noted in the following section of this paper that in the Philippines, Lanao del Sur is one of its provinces that is known for political instability and related violence during local and national election.

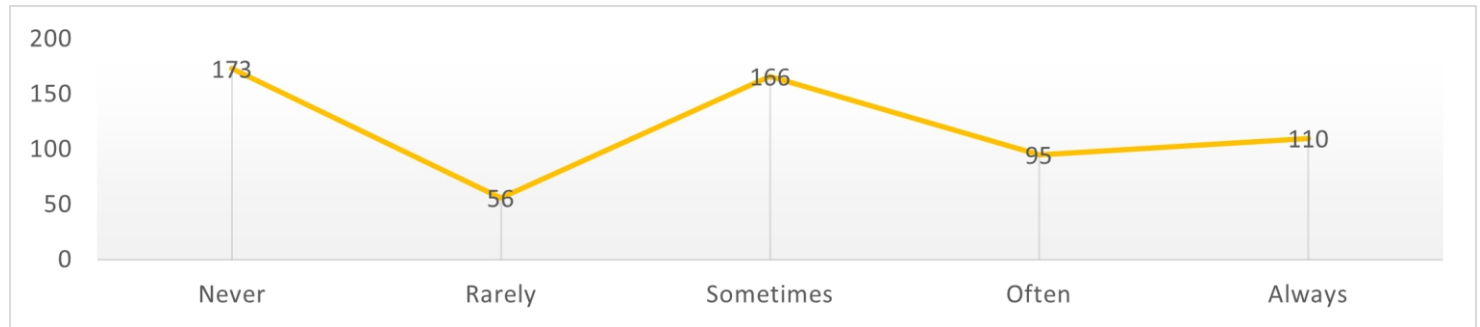


Figure 6: "Gun is generally used for election and politics"

Moreover, one of the primary factors driving the proliferation of firearms among private people is the lack of security and visibility of police forces in local communities. The government's Disarmament Demobilization Reintegration (DDR) program is being implemented among MILF ex-combatants, which has prevented the dissolution of private armed individuals. Dr. Moctar Matuan's remarks, which reflect this, are as follows:

"The Muslims felt that they needed to protect themselves, so some people purchased firearms to protect themselves and gave some of this to the 'Mujahideen' or Muslim Fighters trying to protect the Muslims from these groups

who are killing Muslims. So, that's how it started. So, when the peace talks began, the firearms went back to the civilians. It brought back to the custody of civilians. And one of the side effects of this is that the civilians or the ordinary people became brave. **The people became brave because now they had firearms. Possession of firearms is prevalent among the Moros because of the need for security. Since the state cannot protect the civilians, the civilians find ways to protect themselves from other people. Not only from the soldiers but also from the thieves and these bad people."** [Bold Emphasized] (Interview with Dr. Moctar Matuan, June 17, 2021)

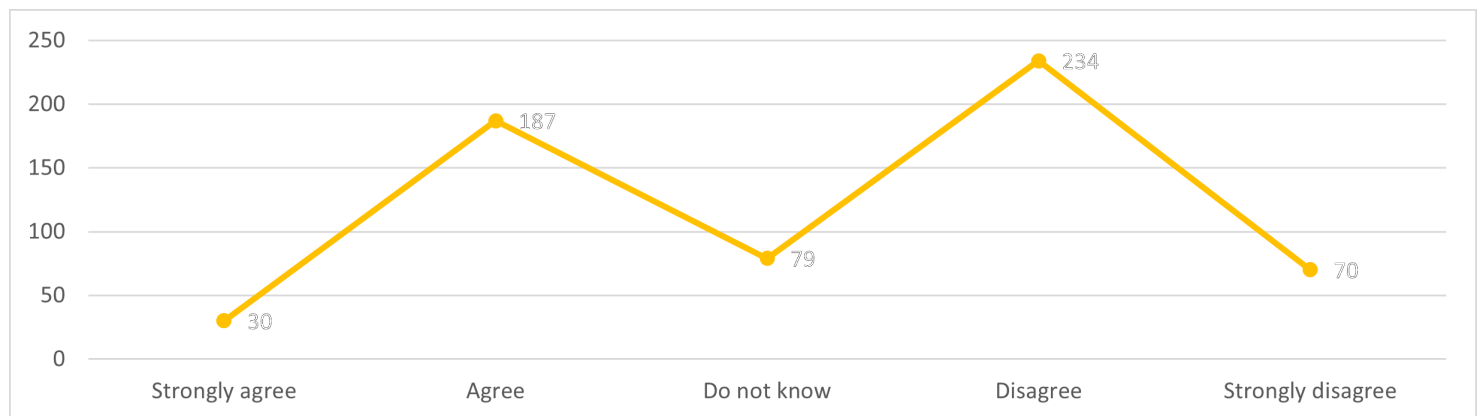


Figure 7: Gun ownership is empowering and provides a sense of security

Remarkably, figure 7 reveals the perception of private civilians if gun ownership is empowering and provides a sense of security. The data shows that two hundred thirty-four (234) or 39% and seventy (70) or 11.6% of respondents have 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' respectively that gun ownership is empowering and provides a sense of security. It is significant also to note that these respondents do not like conflict in their communities. However, one hundred eighty-seven (187) or 31.16% and thirty (30) or 5% respondents have 'agreed' and 'strongly agreed' respectively that gun ownership is empowering and provides a sense of security against people who may harm them in their community and this is the main reason why they possess firearms. Thus, this implies that since there are at least 35% of people believed that gun ownership can empower them and provide them a sense of security, this only means that the role of law enforcers (i.e. PNP & AFP) is inefficient in Lanao del Sur.

As a result, purchasing loose weapons has become ethically acceptable for self-defense against local threats like "Rido" (family feuds), for personal and family safety, and for violence related to local elections. Similar opinions and complaints were expressed during the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) in the four targeted towns, and many have stated that the absence of security makes them "don't feel safe without firearms." Administrative justice is also essentially nonexistent or inefficient.

Furthermore, a crucial finding in this study is related to where the guns or firearms coming from. Figure 8 reveals that, 270 (45%) of the respondents answered that guns are coming "definitely" from the security force or PNP and Armed Forces of the Philippines. In addition, 14.6% or 88 respondents answered "probably" and 18.16% respondents answered "possible", which means that majority of the respondents has agreed that the security force is the source of loose firearms in Lanao del Sur.

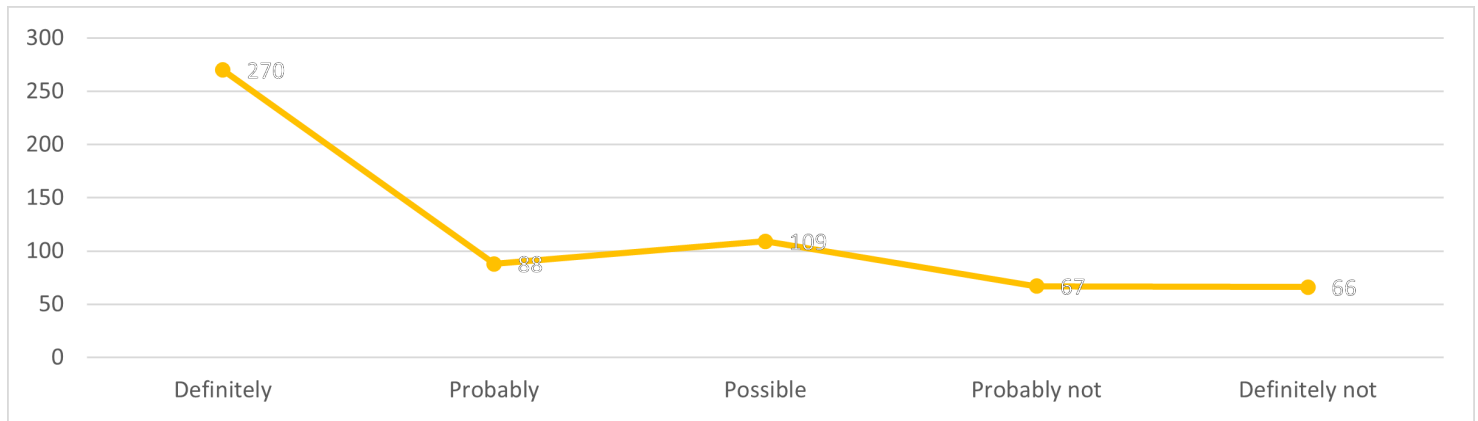


Figure 8: "In your opinion, which is the most likely sources to acquire guns?" G. PNP/AFP

Moreover, a significant finding in figure 9 shows that, 237 (39.5%) and 97 (16.17%) respondents answered "Definitely" and "Probably", respectively. This means that majority of the sample respondents believed that the source to acquire guns is from illegal gun-runners. In addition, there are also 113 (18.83%) of the respondent believed that it is possible that the proliferation of firearms are coming from the gun-runners.

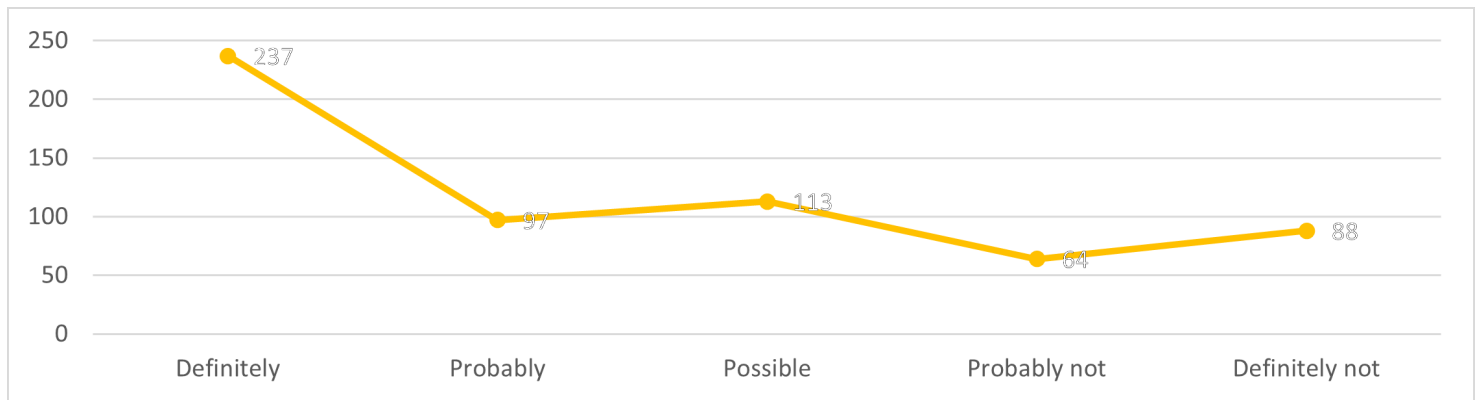


Figure 9: "In your opinion, which is the most likely sources to acquire guns?" F. Gun-runners

Thus, in particular, Lanao del Sur, which ranked second in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region Muslim in Mindanao (BARMM) with the highest crime incidents when index and non-index are combined, as shown in the graph below, further justifies the need to defend themselves from any form of violence that threatened their lives. Index crimes include murder and homicide, whereas non-index offenses include breaking the law or an ordinance.

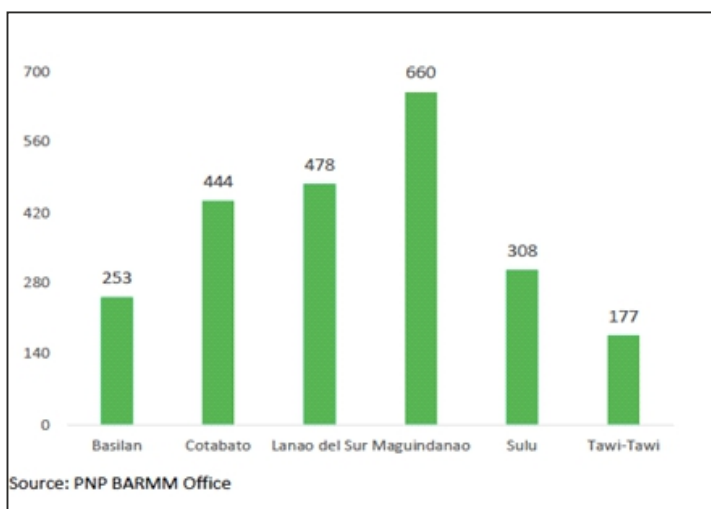


Figure 8: Index and Non-index Crime Incidents in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

Figure 8 illustrates how crimes in Lanao del Sur's outlying regions frequently go unpunished, leading family members of the victims to resort to violence out of desperation. This violence then spirals out of control for years and decades, causing instability in the neighbourhood.

Comparative Crime Statistics Jan – Aug 2020 & 2021			
	Jan – Aug 2020	Jan – Aug 2021	Variance
Crime Volume	368	370	2
Index Crime	89	93	4
Non-Index Crime	128	76	-52
Special Laws	136	182	46
Shooting Incidents	23	66	43
Murder	57	44	-13

Shooting incidents increased by 186.95%

Lanao del Sur Police Provincial Office - Intelligence Branch

Figure 9: Shooting Incidents from 2020 to 2021 in the Province of Lanao del Sur

In figure 9, a recent study by the PNP of Lanao del Sur Police Provincial Office indicated that the shooting incidents from 2020 to 2021 have exponentially increased by 186.9%, which implies that guns are easily accessible in the market. Because the locals were demanding, this encouraged gunrunners to trade loose firearms among them. As a result, any efforts to promote peace continue to be

undermined by the violence's vicious cycle. And this affects normalization, and if security problems aren't addressed, they could get worse. This raises the question of who should be in charge of ensuring security and a secure environment. However, it is obvious that the Philippines National Police (PNP) has the mandate to enforce the law, which clearly stated in RA No. 6975, "An Act Establishing the Philippine National Police under a reorganized Department of the Interior and Local Government and Other Purposes" and by RA 8551 "An Act Providing for the Reform and Reorganization of the Philippine National Police Reform and Other Purposes, Amending Certain Provisions of RA No. 6975." However, PLGU and MLGU have an important role in implementing security measures to ensure public safety.

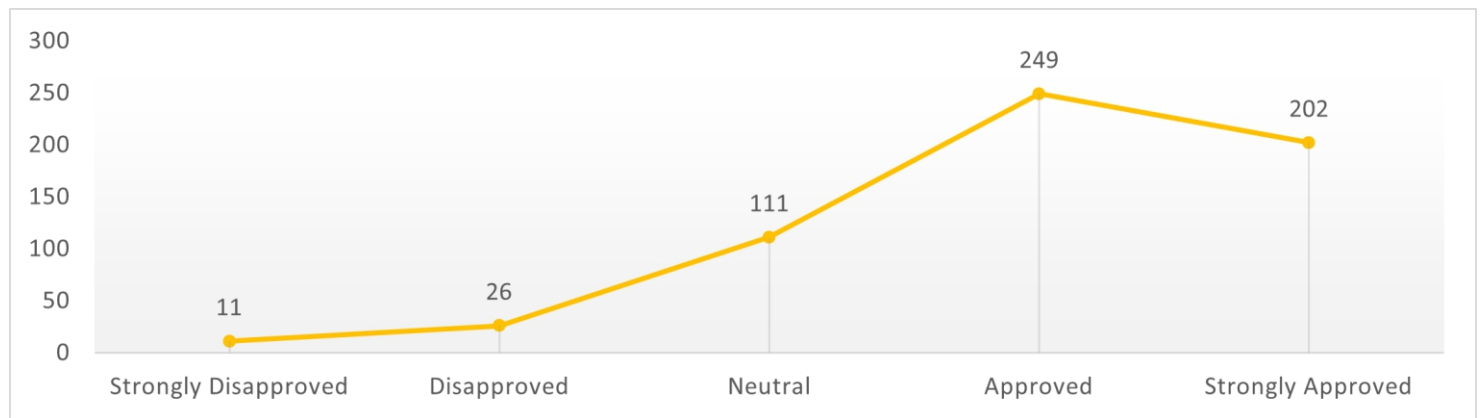


Figure 10. "What is your level of approval on the presence of the AFP and PNP for safety and security in the community?"

Figure 10 shows that two hundred forty-nine 249 (41.5%) of the respondents answered "approved" on the presence of AFP and PNP for safety and security in their community. Two hundred two 202 (33.6%) answered: "strongly approved." These findings implied that the people wanted to be secured through the presence of the military and policemen because that is the only way to feel safe in their community. And this can also lessen or, if not eradicate the proliferation of loose firearms.

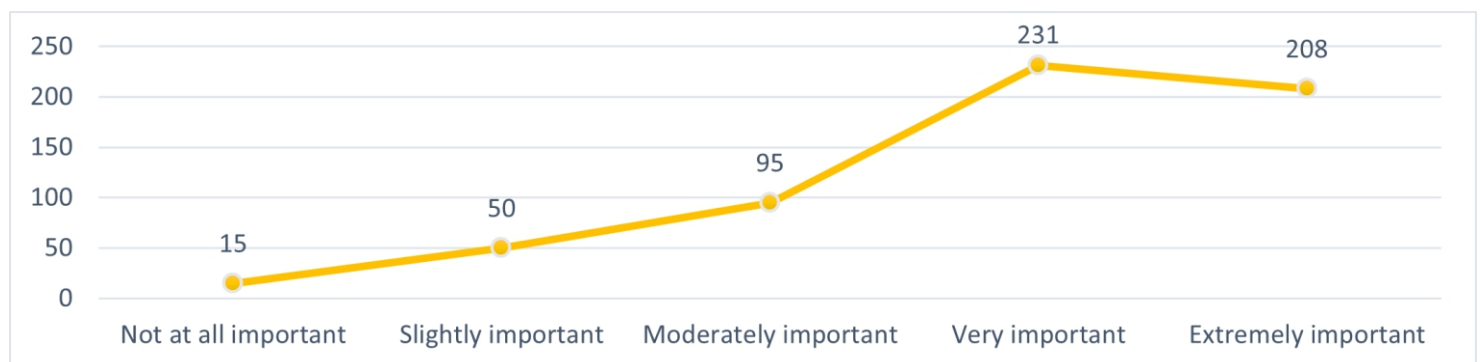


Figure 11. Who do you think should be responsible for maintaining peace and security in your community?

Results from figure 11 is supported when the respondents ask "Who do you think should be responsible for maintaining peace and security in your community?" Figure 11 reveals that two hundred thirty-one (231) or 38.5% of the respondents believed that the presence of AFP and PNP is 'very important' to their safety and security. Two hundred eight (208) or 34.6% of respondents have also answered that the presence of AFP and PNP in their community is 'extremely important'. The Data shows also the following findings: 2.5% or 15 respondents believed that their presence is 'not at all important'; 8.3% or 50 respondents have also answered their presence is 'slightly important'; and lastly, 15.8% or 95 respondents believed that their presence is 'moderately important'. Thus, this suggests that peaceful community can only be achieved if there is the presence of the security forces.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Mranaws and the Bangsamoro people in general have had unique historical and cultural experiences that have been extremely important in shaping their society's 'gun culture' and the widespread use of firearms in Lanao del Sur. As we can see from history, the Bangsamoro resistance to the Spanish, Americans, and Japanese as well as the beginning of the Bangsamoro armed struggle for self-determination from the Philippine government, the decades-long Rido in the province, political instability, and security issues have led to the possession of guns by the population as a means of survival, which unintentionally contributed to the gradual development of a culture of violence.

Moreover, civilians are driven to acquire weapons for defence by a sense of unease among them and a perception of mistrust toward the security forces. This means that situations of insecurity, injustice, oppression, violation of human rights, and underdevelopment frequently drive the need for guns. While this is true, it is ironic that while owning a gun makes individuals feel secure, having more of them might actually make people feel less secure. The already turbulent social, political, and economic divisions in the Bangsamoro region could be made worse by more guns being in use. With these factors, gun-culture has developed in the society of the Bangsamoro people especially the Mranaws in Lanao del Sur which has resulted to the legitimization of the use of violence that leads to insecure

environment and poverty.

Therefore, to develop effective interventions and long-lasting initiatives from the local, regional, and federal governments, it is necessary to comprehend the reasons and conditions that the availability of guns and the gun culture creates.

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