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PROXIMAL CONSENSUS, DISTAL CONTESTATION: A REALIST REANALYSIS OF ISLAMIC TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MADRASAH EDUCATION AS PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE BANGSAMORO REGION, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

Madrasah education in the southern Philippines is often discussed either as a possible source of radicalization or as a resource for peace, yet little is known about which preventive outcomes its own teachers believe it can plausibly influence. This article offers a theory-driven reanalysis of a convergent mixed-methods study of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP) in the former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), now the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The source study surveyed 313 asatidz (Islamic and Arabic-language teachers) selected by proportional stratified random sampling across nine school division offices, using a 43-item, six-domain instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha = .962$), and conducted two focus group discussions with 33 school heads. Drawing on theory-of-change and realist evaluation perspectives, we reclassified the six domains into proximal (educational–relational) and distal (behavioral–structural) outcomes; computed standardized effect sizes, confidence intervals, and item-level non-response and dispersion indicators from the reported statistics; reconstructed ethno-geographic cluster profiles; and mapped school heads' accounts onto context–mechanism–outcome configurations. Endorsement was uniformly high (overall $M = 4.25$ on a 5-point scale; $d = 2.91$ relative to the scale midpoint), but it followed a clear gradient: belonging ($M = 4.37$) and ideological discernment ($M = 4.37$) were endorsed most strongly, whereas conflict resolution ($M = 4.18$) and violence reduction ($M = 4.16$) were endorsed least, and items about political disputes, clan feuds, state non-discrimination, and structural causes of violence attracted the most "no idea" and refusal responses (up to 16.9%). Across the 43 items, lower endorsement was associated with higher non-response (Spearman's $\rho = -.44$, $p = .003$). Division and ethnicity effects were small to moderate ($\eta^2 = .02–.11$), were arithmetically almost interchangeable, and converged on three ethno-geographic profiles, with the widest proximal–distal gap in the island provinces. We argue that asatidz describe the MEP as a proximal prevention resource whose reach into distal security outcomes is contingent on context, and we outline implications for Bangsamoro education policy, the national action plan on preventing and countering violent extremism, and the evaluation of education-based prevention. We also document and correct several reporting inconsistencies in the source data.

Keywords: *madrasah education; preventing violent extremism; Bangsamoro; asatidz; realist evaluation; theory of change; education and conflict; Philippines*

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INTRODUCTION

Background and context

Islamic education occupies a contested place in debates about violent extremism. After 2001, madrasahs in South and Southeast Asia were frequently portrayed as incubators of militancy, a claim that systematic reviews later found to be overstated. In Pakistan, for example, Winthrop and Graff (2010) showed that only a small minority of madrasahs had verifiable links to militancy and that the wider problems of educational access, quality, and governance were more consequential for conflict risk. Comparative scholarship on education and conflict has long held that schooling has "two faces": it can deepen division and grievance, or it can build tolerance and social cohesion, depending on its content, governance, and context (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2008).

In the Philippines, the question acquired urgency after the five-month siege of Marawi City in 2017 by fighters aligned with the so-called Islamic State, which exposed the persistence of militant networks in Lanao del Sur and the Sulu archipelago (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2019). The national government subsequently adopted a National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAP P/CVE), which explicitly addresses the religious and educational dimensions of radicalization (Anti-Terrorism Council, 2019). Within the same period, the ARMM was replaced by the BARMM under Republic Act No. 11054 (2018), and the Bangsamoro Government subsequently enacted its own education code (Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 18, 2021). Militant violence in the region declined during the transition but did not disappear (ICG, 2022), and recent assessments continue to flag the vulnerability of some madrasahs located near conflict areas while recommending stronger coordination of madrasah policy among national, regional, and local actors (Institute for Autonomy and Governance [IAG], 2024).

The state-supported Madrasah Education Program (MEP) is central to this landscape. Implemented in the ARMM through the Bureau of Madaris Education of the Department of Education, and nationally guided by DepEd Order No. 41, s. 2017, the MEP comprises three strands: Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) in public schools, integrated or pilot madrasahs, and supported traditional weekend madrasahs. Historically, the integration of Islamic education into public schooling was itself a state response to Moro grievances about cultural marginalization (Milligan, 2006). The MEP is therefore simultaneously an educational, cultural, and political project, and its teachers, the asatidz, stand at the junction of these roles.

From "madrasah as risk" to "madrasah as resource"

A growing body of work examines Islamic schools as potential protective institutions. Studies of Islamic schools in Quebec (Tiflati, 2016) and of Muslim education in Indonesia (Pohl, 2006; Woodward et al., 2010) describe schools that cultivate civic participation, religious literacy, and social capital that can work against extremist recruitment. In the Philippine context, Cayamodin (2019) argued for an integrated and holistic madrasah education system as a sustainable approach to prevention, while also documenting implementation gaps. Empirical work in Marawi City found that ALIVE teachers faced shortages of learning materials and uneven qualifications (Solaiman, 2017), and a large regional study of Muslim youth in the ARMM found no evidence of large-scale radicalization but limited understanding of the concepts extremists exploit (Durante et al., 2017). Together, these studies suggest that the preventive potential of madrasah education is plausible but conditional on resources, teacher capacity, and context.

Theories of change and the problem of outcome distance

Education-based prevention of violent extremism (PVE-E) is typically justified through an implicit theory of change: schooling is expected to strengthen identity, belonging, critical thinking, and religious literacy, which in turn are expected to reduce susceptibility to extremist narratives and, eventually, violence (UNESCO, 2017;

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Ghosh et al., 2017; Bonnell et al., 2011). Evaluation scholars have long urged that such chains be made explicit, because outcomes differ in how close they lie to what a program actually does (Weiss, 1995). We use the term *outcome distance* to describe this difference. Proximal outcomes, such as learners' sense of belonging or their capacity to question a distorted religious argument, are within the direct reach of teachers and classrooms. Distal outcomes, such as reductions in clan feuding, political violence, or violence driven by unemployment and injustice, depend on many actors and structural conditions beyond the school.

The wider CVE evidence base reinforces this distinction. Reviews and meta-analyses report that rigorous evaluations remain scarce, that average effects of prevention programs are modest, and that effects vary considerably across settings (Romaniuk, 2015; Pistone et al., 2019; Jugl et al., 2021). Radicalization research likewise stresses that there is no single pathway into violent extremism and that individual, group, and structural drivers interact (Borum, 2011a, 2011b; Schmid, 2013). Grievance-based accounts locate perceived injustice, alienation, and discrimination on the "ground floor" of the path toward violence (Moghaddam, 2005), while legitimacy-based accounts emphasize that trust in fair institutions shapes cooperation with the state (Tyler, 2006). An education program may plausibly influence some of these drivers directly and others only indirectly.

Teachers as frontline implementers and informants

Teachers are not neutral observers of prevention policy; they are the street-level actors through whom policy is enacted, interpreted, and sometimes reshaped (Lipsky, 2010). Studies of teachers working under counter-radicalization mandates in Norway and England show that teachers often accept a professional responsibility for prevention, yet hold divergent views on how it should be done and raise ethical concerns about being positioned as security actors (Busher et al., 2017; Sjøen & Jore, 2019; Sjøen & Mattsson, 2020). Critics warn that framing education primarily as a security instrument risks securitizing schools and the communities they serve (Davies, 2016). For these reasons, teacher perceptions are best understood not as measures of program impact but as informed, situated attributions that reveal how implementers understand the program's mechanisms and limits. Perception surveys on violent extremism in Australia, Kuwait, and Kenya have likewise shown that respondents' views vary systematically by community and context (Grossman & Tahiri, 2015; Msall, 2017; Villa-Vicencio et al., 2016).

Research gap

Three gaps motivate this article. First, existing Philippine studies of madrasah education either advocate for its preventive role (Cayamodin, 2019) or document implementation constraints (Solaiman, 2017), but they do not examine *which kinds* of preventive outcomes teachers attribute to the program, or where teachers withhold judgment. Second, perception-based CVE studies commonly report high agreement and significant group differences without standardized effect sizes, making it difficult to judge whether differences are substantively meaningful (Lakens, 2013). Third, few studies ask the realist question that has become central to CVE evaluation: what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Gielen, 2019). The source study on which this article builds (Sattar, 2019; Sattar & Arriola, 2020) established that asatidz perceived the MEP as contributing to CVE to a "great extent" and that perceptions differed by division office and ethnicity. It did not, however, distinguish outcome levels, quantify the size or overlap of the contextual differences, treat non-response as informative, or connect the qualitative mechanisms to the quantitative outcomes.

Analytical framework

We combine two complementary lenses. The first is a theory-of-change lens that orders the instrument's six domains by outcome distance. We treat *minimizing alienation or marginalization* (belonging and participation) and *disagreeing ideology* (religious and ideological discernment) as proximal outcomes, because both describe changes that teachers can foster directly in learners and families. We treat *resolving conflict* (for example, clan

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feuds and political disputes) and *reducing violence* (for example, violence linked to unemployment, injustice, or armed groups) as distal, behavioral–structural outcomes. *Removing or minimizing discrimination*, whose items mostly concern how communities understand Islam's place in the Philippines, and *promoting trust and satisfaction* in government services occupy an intermediate, cognitive–institutional position. This classification is theory-driven but was applied after the fact to an existing instrument, so the analyses that rely on it are exploratory.

The second is a realist lens, which treats outcomes as the product of mechanisms that are triggered, or not, in particular contexts (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Applied to CVE, realist reasoning shifts the question from whether an intervention works to how its effects vary across settings and populations (Gielen, 2019). In this study, contexts are represented by the division offices and ethnolinguistic communities of the asatidz, mechanisms are drawn from the school heads' accounts, and outcomes are the six attributed domains.

Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to re-examine asatidz' and school heads' perceptions of the MEP through the lens of outcome distance and context, in order to specify what kind of prevention resource the MEP is perceived to be. The study addresses four questions:

RQ1. How strongly and how consistently do asatidz attribute prevention-relevant outcomes to the MEP, and does endorsement differ between proximal and distal outcomes?

RQ2. On which outcomes do asatidz withhold or divide judgment, as indicated by item-level non-response and dispersion, and what does this suggest about the perceived boundaries of the program's influence?

RQ3. How large are differences in perceptions associated with division office, ethnicity, gender, and educational attainment, and do they form coherent ethno-geographic patterns?

RQ4. Which mechanisms do school heads describe, and how can they be configured with contexts and outcomes into a realist account of the MEP as prevention?

Significance

The study contributes in three ways. Theoretically, it proposes outcome distance as a lens for interpreting implementer perceptions in PVE-E and shows that non-response and dispersion can serve as indicators of perceived outcome distance. Empirically, it provides effect-size-based evidence on how much context matters for perceptions of madrasah education in the Bangsamoro, and it corrects several inconsistencies in the previously reported data. Practically, it offers a more realistic basis for positioning the MEP within the NAP P/CVE and the Bangsamoro Education Code: as a proximal, education-based resource that requires complementary, multi-sector action where distal outcomes are concerned.

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METHODS

Design and relationship to the source study

This article reports a secondary, theory-driven reanalysis of a convergent mixed-methods study conducted for a Doctor of Education dissertation at Basilan State College (Sattar, 2019), parts of which were published in the *American Journal of Educational Research* (Sattar & Arriola, 2020). The source study combined a descriptive quantitative survey of asatidz with a qualitative phenomenological component consisting of focus group discussions (FGDs) with school heads. No new data were collected for this article. The reanalysis draws exclusively on statistics and thematic summaries reported in the dissertation, including its item-level tables, which were only partly reported in the earlier journal article. Fieldwork took place before the dissertation was completed in March 2019, during the final period of the ARMM; exact fieldwork dates were not reported in the source.

Setting, participants, and sampling

The survey population comprised the 930 asatidz teaching ALIVE in public elementary and secondary schools across nine schools division offices of the ARMM (Basilan, Lamitan City, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao I, Maguindanao II, Lanao del Sur I, Lanao del Sur II, and Marawi City). Many of these teachers also taught in integrated or weekend madrasahs. The minimum sample size of 272 was determined with the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, and approximately 10% was added to protect against attrition. Respondents were selected by stratified random sampling with proportional allocation by division office and sex, yielding 313 respondents. Of these, 171 (54.6%) were women and 142 (45.4%) were men; 194 (62.0%) held a bachelor's degree, 101 (32.3%) had completed at least secondary schooling without a degree, and 18 (5.8%) held or were pursuing graduate qualifications. By ethnolinguistic group, 187 (59.7%) were Maranao, 57 (18.2%) Yakan, 37 (11.8%) Tausug, 18 (5.8%) Maguindanao, 10 (3.2%) Iranon, and 4 (1.3%) Sama.

For the qualitative component, 33 school heads (ALIVE coordinators, principals, or teachers-in-charge) were purposively selected on the criterion that their schools were located in areas affected by violent extremism. They took part in two FGDs: one with 15 school heads from the island divisions (Basilan, Lamitan City, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi) and one with 18 from the mainland divisions (Lanao del Sur I and II, Marawi City, Maguindanao I and II).

For the present reanalysis, we grouped the nine divisions into three ethno-geographic clusters that correspond to the FGD grouping and to the region's main conflict ecologies: an island cluster (Basilan, Lamitan City, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi; $n = 97$), a Lanao–Marawi cluster (Lanao del Sur I and II, Marawi City; $n = 186$), and a Maguindanao cluster (Maguindanao I and II; $n = 30$). Table 1 shows that the cluster sizes correspond almost exactly to the sizes of the dominant ethnolinguistic groups in the sample. Respondent-level cross-tabulations of ethnicity by division were not reported in the source, so this correspondence is arithmetic rather than verified at the individual level.

Table 1. Respondent distribution by division office, ethno-geographic cluster, and ethnolinguistic group

Ethno-geographic cluster	Division offices (n)	Cluster n	Corresponding ethnolinguistic groups in the sample (n)
Lanao–Marawi	Lanao del Sur I (89); Lanao del Sur II (39); Marawi City (58)	186	Maranao (187)
Island (Basilan–Sulu archipelago)	Basilan (48); Lamitan City (12); Sulu (26); Tawi-Tawi (11)	97	Yakan (57); Tausug (37); Sama (4); total 98

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Ethno-geographic cluster	Division offices (n)	Cluster n	Corresponding ethnolinguistic groups in the sample (n)
Maguindanao	Maguindanao I (14); Maguindanao II (16)	30	Maguindanao (18); Iranon (10); total 28
Total		313	313

Note. Division and ethnicity counts are from Sattar (2019). Cluster assignment is introduced in this article. The correspondence between clusters and ethnolinguistic groups is based on marginal totals only.

Instruments

The survey instrument was developed for the source study because no validated measure of program contributions to CVE was available. Part I collected demographic information. Part II contained 43 positively worded statements of the form "The MEP contributes in …", organized into six domains: resolving conflict (six items), minimizing alienation or marginalization (eight items), removing or minimizing discrimination (seven items), promoting trust and satisfaction with government programs (eight items), reducing violence (nine items), and disagreeing with extremist ideology (five items). Responses were made on a five-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree / no extent of contribution*) to 5 (*strongly agree / very great extent of contribution*), with two additional codes, "no idea" and "refuse to answer", which were excluded from mean calculations. Each domain closed with an open-ended question inviting respondents to name other contributions.

Three experts on violent extremism reviewed the items for content validity and rated their suitability on a three-point scale; the source reports an F test across the experts' ratings, $F = 1.214$, $p = .217$, as evidence of agreement. A pilot administration with 30 asatidz in Isabela City produced Cronbach's $\alpha = .962$, with alpha-if-item-deleted values ranging from .960 to .965. The FGD guide contained six open-ended questions, one per domain, which were developed from the literature and reviewed by the same three experts.

Data collection procedures and ethical considerations

Permission was obtained from the Secretary of the Department of Education–ARMM, and the schools division superintendents were informed of the study. One research coordinator per division was trained by the principal investigator and administered the questionnaire through one-on-one interviews. Before the survey and the FGDs, participants were informed of the study's purpose, gave informed consent, were told they could decline to participate, and were assigned identification numbers to protect confidentiality. The source does not report review by a research ethics committee. We note this, together with the first author's administrative role in madrasah education at the time of the study (see the Disclosure Statement), as relevant to interpreting the data.

Original analyses

The source study used frequencies and percentages for demographic data; weighted means and standard deviations for item and domain scores, interpreted against fixed intervals (for example, 3.26–4.25 = "great extent"; 4.26–5.00 = "very great extent"); independent-samples t tests for gender; one-way ANOVA for division office and ethnicity; and Kruskal–Wallis H tests for educational attainment, all at $\alpha = .05$. FGD data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorizing, and constant comparison.

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Reanalysis procedures

Because respondent-level data were not available, all reanalyses use the summary statistics reported in the source. We conducted six procedures.

Data audit. We checked internal consistency between item-level tables, domain summaries, subgroup tables, and the abstract. Domain means were cross-checked by reconstructing them as sample-size-weighted averages of the division, gender, and ethnicity subgroup means, and reported test statistics were checked against their *p-values* using the appropriate reference distributions.

Standardized endorsement. For each domain, we computed a one-sample standardized mean difference relative to the scale midpoint of 3 ($d = [M - 3] / SD$) and an approximate 95% confidence interval for the mean. Because valid *n* varied by item, we approximated each domain's *n* as 313 minus its average item-level non-response (range 278–293); the intervals change by no more than ±0.01 if $n = 313$ is used instead.

Outcome-distance comparison. We compared proximal (alienation, ideology), intermediate (discrimination, trust), and distal (conflict, violence) domains descriptively. A within-person test of the difference was not possible without respondent-level data.

Non-response and dispersion analysis. For each of the 43 items, we summed "no idea" and "refuse to answer" responses as an index of withheld judgment and used each item's standard deviation as an index of disagreement. We examined their association with item means using Spearman rank correlations across items ($n = 43$).

Effect sizes for context. We converted reported *F* statistics to eta squared, $\eta^2 = (F \times df_1) / (F \times df_1 + df_2)$, using $df = (8, 304)$ for division and (5, 307) for ethnicity, and converted Kruskal–Wallis *H* to epsilon squared, $\varepsilon^2 = H / (n - 1)$ (Tomczak & Tomczak, 2014). We interpreted η^2 of .01, .06, and .14 as small, medium, and large (Cohen, 1988), and applied a Bonferroni-adjusted threshold of $\alpha = .05/6 \approx .008$ across the six domain-level tests within each grouping factor.

Cluster profiles and realist synthesis. We reconstructed sample-size-weighted domain means for the three ethno-geographic clusters from the division-level means. We then mapped the school heads' thematic accounts, together with asatidz' open-ended responses, onto context–mechanism–outcome configurations (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Because only thematic summaries, not transcripts, were available, this synthesis is interpretive and does not add new qualitative evidence.

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RESULTS

Data audit

The audit identified three inconsistencies that affect interpretation. First, the domain means for *minimizing alienation* and *promoting trust* differ between the item-level tables (4.33 and 4.28) and the domain summary table (4.37 and 4.26); the summary-table values are reproduced exactly by the sample-size-weighted division and gender means and are therefore used here. Second, in the table of reducing-violence scores by ethnicity, the "overall" row is inconsistent with the item means in the same table: for example, Yakan respondents' nine-item means average 3.98, but the overall row reports 4.62, and the overall row implies a sample mean of 4.50 rather than the 4.16 reported elsewhere. We therefore use item-derived values (Iranon 4.61, Maguindanao 4.72, Maranao 4.22, Sama 4.08, Tausug 4.07, Yakan 3.98), which reproduce the sample mean. Third, several reported *p-values for the gender comparisons are inconsistent with their t-statistics* (Table 4). All other reported ANOVA and Kruskal–Wallis *p* values were consistent with their test statistics.

RQ1: Strength of endorsement and the proximal–distal gradient

Endorsement was high across all domains (Table 2). The overall mean of 4.25 (*SD* = 0.43) lay 2.91 standard deviations above the scale midpoint, and every domain exceeded the midpoint by at least 1.90 standard deviations. The fixed interpretation intervals of the source study, however, classified domains separated by as little as 0.03 points (4.23 versus 4.26) as "great" and "very great" extent, respectively. For this reason, we interpret the relative ordering and confidence intervals rather than these verbal categories.

Within this uniformly high range, a consistent gradient appeared. The two proximal domains, minimizing alienation (*M* = 4.37) and disagreeing ideology (*M* = 4.37), received the highest endorsement. The two distal domains, resolving conflict (*M* = 4.18) and reducing violence (*M* = 4.16), received the lowest, and their 95% confidence intervals did not overlap with those of the proximal domains. The intermediate domains, trust (*M* = 4.26) and discrimination (*M* = 4.23), fell in between. The proximal–distal difference of about 0.20 points corresponds to roughly one-third of a within-domain standard deviation.

Table 2. Endorsement, consistency, and withheld judgment by domain, ordered by outcome distance

Domain (items)	Outcome level	M	SD	95% CI	d vs midpoint	Mean item SD	Mean item non-response (%)
Minimizing alienation/marginalization (8)	Proximal: relational	4.37	0.55	4.31–4.43	2.49	0.77	6.5
Disagreeing ideology (5)	Proximal: cognitive–ideological	4.37	0.58	4.30–4.44	2.36	0.76	9.5
Promoting trust and satisfaction (8)	Intermediate: institutional	4.26	0.61	4.19–4.33	2.07	0.76	6.8

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Domain (items)	Outcome level	M	SD	95% CI	d vs midpoint	Mean item SD	Mean item non-response (%)
Removing/minimizing discrimination (7)	Intermediate: cognitive–perceptual	4.23	0.56	4.16–4.30	2.20	0.82	10.4
Resolving conflict (6)	Distal: behavioral–structural	4.18	0.61	4.11–4.25	1.93	0.88	11.0
Reducing violence (9)	Distal: behavioral–structural	4.16	0.61	4.09–4.23	1.90	0.88	10.7
All items (43)		4.25	0.43	4.20–4.30	2.91	0.82	9.0

RQ2: Where asatidz withhold or divide judgment

Withheld judgment was neither rare nor random. Across all items, an average of 9.0% of respondents answered "no idea" (5.6%) or refused (3.4%). Non-response was concentrated in the distal domains and in the discrimination domain (10.4–11.0%), and it was lowest for belonging and trust items (6.5–6.8%). At the item level (Table 3), the highest non-response occurred for statements about resolving political disputes (16.9%), eliminating threats of violent extremism (16.6%), the government not discriminating by religion or ethnicity (15.3%), and resolving *rido* or clan feuds (14.4%), followed by statements linking the MEP to reducing violence arising from socio-economic misunderstanding, dissatisfaction with government agencies, unemployment, and injustice (12.1–13.1%). The lowest non-response occurred for statements about community members' participation in local discussions (2.9%) and their role in decision-making (3.8%). Refusals, as distinct from "no idea" responses, peaked for the political-disputes item (21 refusals) and for the item about educating learners on "proper Islamic ideology" (21 refusals), suggesting sensitivity rather than lack of knowledge in these areas.

Across the 43 items, lower endorsement was associated with more withheld judgment ($\rho = -.44$, $p = .003$) and with greater dispersion ($\rho = -.72$, $p < .001$), and dispersion was associated with withheld judgment ($\rho = .57$, $p < .001$). The mean–dispersion association is partly expected because of the ceiling of the response scale, but the association between dispersion and non-response is not a mechanical artifact. The item with the lowest mean, promoting a gun-free community ($M = 3.76$), also had the largest standard deviation ($SD = 1.22$) and an above-average non-response rate (11.2%).

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Table 3. Items with the highest and lowest withheld judgment

Item (domain)	Non-response n (%)	M	SD
6. Resolving conflict related to political disputes (conflict)	53 (16.9)	4.11	0.86
16. Eliminating threats of violent extremism (discrimination)	52 (16.6)	4.28	0.80
21. Understanding that the government does not discriminate by religion or ethnicity (discrimination)	48 (15.3)	4.31	0.76
2. Resolving *rido* (clan feud) (conflict)	45 (14.4)	4.22	0.86
35. Reducing violence due to socio-economic misunderstanding (violence)	41 (13.1)	4.14	0.80
36. Reducing violence related to dissatisfaction with government agencies (violence)	40 (12.8)	4.15	0.88
38. Reducing violence due to injustices (violence)	39 (12.5)	4.06	1.04
…			
23. Trust in the government in improving peace and order (trust)	16 (5.1)	4.46	0.72
15. Contributing to the needs and priorities of the community (discrimination)	15 (4.8)	4.10	0.75
7. Educating community members on their role in decision making (alienation)	12 (3.8)	4.25	0.79
8. Community members' participation in discussing community affairs (alienation)	9 (2.9)	4.39	0.69

Note. Item means, SDs, and non-response counts are from Sattar (2019, Tables 10–16). Percentages are of N = 313.

RQ3: The size and shape of contextual differences

Table 4 summarizes the context effects. The division office was associated with all domains except discrimination, with effect sizes ranging from $\eta^2 = .065$ (ideology) to .106 (conflict) and an overall η^2 of .070, which is a medium effect. Ethnicity showed a closely parallel pattern, with η^2 ranging from .048 (ideology) to .093 (alienation and violence) and an overall η^2 of .084, again with no effect on discrimination. After Bonferroni adjustment, the division and ethnicity effects on conflict, alienation, trust, and violence remained significant, while the effects on

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ideology became borderline. In both factors, the largest effects were for the distal domains (conflict and violence) and for belonging; the smallest were for discrimination.

Educational attainment was associated only with conflict resolution ($\varepsilon^2 = .049$), a result that falls at the Bonferroni threshold and rests on very small graduate-degree subgroups (for example, three doctorate holders). For gender, the source reported a significant difference only for trust (women $M = 4.35$, men $M = 4.15$; approximate $d = 0.33$). However, the reported t values for alienation (−4.05), discrimination (−2.32), and the overall score (−2.10) imply p values below .05 with about 311 degrees of freedom, contrary to the reported "not significant" conclusions. Women's means were higher than men's in five of six domains. The gender findings are therefore indeterminate pending verification against the raw data.

Table 4. Context effects on attributed contributions: test statistics and effect sizes

Domain	Division F(8, 304)	p	η^2	Ethnicity F(5, 307)	p	η^2	Education H(5)	p	ε^2	Gender t (reported p / implied p)
Conflict	4.51	<.001	.106	4.98	<.001	.075	15.42	.009	.049	−1.88 (.211 / .062)
Alienation	3.47	.001	.084	6.26	<.001	.093	4.94	.423	.016	−4.05 (.270 / <.001)
Discrimination	0.87	.539	.022	1.45	.207	.023	5.50	.358	.018	−2.32 (.713 / .021)
Trust	3.17	.002	.077	4.31	.001	.066	1.24	.941	.004	−2.91 (.005 / .004)
Violence	4.13	<.001	.098	6.28	<.001	.093	3.28	.657	.011	0.59 (.469 / .558)
Ideology	2.64	.008	.065	3.11	.009	.048	7.25	.203	.023	−0.22 (.664 / .828)
Overall	2.87	.004	.070	5.67	<.001	.084	6.37	.272	.020	−2.10 (.251 / .037)

Note. Test statistics and reported p values are from Sattar (2019, Tables 30, 44, 58, 72). Effect sizes and implied p-values (df ≈ 311) are computed in this study. Negative t values indicate lower means for men.

The division and ethnicity effects are best read as one ethno-geographic pattern rather than two separate findings, because the clusters and the dominant ethnolinguistic groups nearly coincide (Table 1). This convergence is also visible in the corrected ethnicity means for reducing violence: Yakan (3.98) and Tausug (4.07) respondents scored lowest, mirroring the low violence scores in Basilan (3.99), Lamitan City (3.71), and Sulu (4.04), while Maguindanao (4.72) and Iranon (4.61) respondents scored highest, mirroring Maguindanao I (4.73) and II (4.52).

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Table 5 presents the reconstructed cluster profiles. The Maguindanao cluster endorsed every domain highly (overall 4.57) with virtually no proximal–distal gap. The Lanao–Marawi cluster, which contains the city besieged in 2017, showed a flatter and lower profile (overall 4.21), with its lowest scores on conflict resolution (4.12) and trust (4.18); Lanao del Sur I had the lowest conflict-resolution mean of any division (3.96). The island cluster showed the sharpest gradient: it endorsed belonging (4.52) as strongly as the Maguindanao cluster, but it endorsed violence reduction (3.98) and discrimination (4.14) less than any other cluster, producing a proximal–distal gap of 0.35 points, compared with 0.15 in Lanao–Marawi and −0.02 in Maguindanao. Divisional ranges were widest for violence reduction (3.71–4.73) and conflict resolution (3.96–4.67), and narrowest for alienation and discrimination (0.40 points each).

Table 5. Reconstructed domain profiles by ethno-geographic cluster

Domain	Island (n = 97)	Lanao–Marawi (n = 186)	Maguindanao (n = 30)	Range across nine divisions (lowest–highest)
Minimizing alienation (proximal)	4.52	4.25	4.50	4.16 (Lanao del Sur I) – 4.56 (Lamitan City)
Disagreeing ideology (proximal)	4.31	4.35	4.71	4.19 (Sulu; Marawi City) – 4.76 (Maguindanao I)
Promoting trust (intermediate)	4.32	4.18	4.57	3.98 (Lanao del Sur II) – 4.63 (Maguindanao I)
Removing discrimination (intermediate)	4.14	4.27	4.29	3.90 (Lamitan City) – 4.30 (Lanao del Sur II)
Resolving conflict (distal)	4.16	4.12	4.63	3.96 (Lanao del Sur I) – 4.67 (Maguindanao I)
Reducing violence (distal)	3.98	4.18	4.62	3.71 (Lamitan City) – 4.73 (Maguindanao I)
General mean	4.24	4.21	4.57	4.14 (Lamitan City) – 4.63 (Maguindanao I)
Proximal–distal gap	0.35	0.15	−0.02	

RQ4: Mechanisms described by school heads and asatidz

The school heads' accounts described six mechanisms through which the MEP was believed to contribute to prevention (Table 6). The first was an *authoritative religious counter-narrative*: the MEP was described as a pivotal tool for correcting misused religious precepts, teaching forgiveness over revenge, and presenting Islam as rejecting aggression and injustice. The participants stressed that this works gradually, by changing perspectives over time, rather than by resolving conflicts immediately. The second was *guided socialization and early*

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identification, in which asatidz correct stereotypes, identify and counsel vulnerable learners, and involve parents whose suspicion of school activities is thereby reduced. The third was *intergroup and interfaith contact*: the program was said to foster mutual respect among Tausug, Yakan, Sama, Maguindanao, Maranao, and Iranon learners and to address intra-Moro discrimination, and non-Muslim coordinators and school heads were reported to have revised their own prejudices through involvement in the program.

The fourth mechanism was *state presence and service signalling*: school heads described the MEP as a visible model of improved government service, a channel for linking madaris with government resources, and a possible vehicle for expansion to out-of-school youth. The fifth was *structured use of time*: by occupying children and youth productively, the program was said to reduce their contact with undesirable groups. The sixth was *livelihood and role provision*: the program offered employment to some victims of insurgency, who could then serve as facilitators of peace education.

The asatidz' open-ended answers added a micro-level emphasis. Asatidz most often linked the MEP to resolving personal conflicts and conflicts arising from ignorance of Islam, including backbiting and envy; to reducing violence involving gangs and fraternities and between Islamic sects; to self-discipline, self-respect, and explaining religious practices such as wearing the niqab to other groups; to a correct understanding of jihad and of the ideologies of the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front; and to living together in multi-faith and multi-tribal communities. Several also acknowledged the small allowance they received, while expressing trust that the program would improve.

Table 6. Context–mechanism–outcome configurations of the MEP as prevention

Mechanism (source)	Contexts that condition it	Outcome domain(s) and attributed level
Authoritative religious counter-narrative (FGD; open-ended responses)	Credibility of asatidz as religious authorities; teacher preparation and materials, which were uneven (Solaiman, 2017); sensitivity of doctrinal topics (high refusal on "proper Islamic ideology")	Ideology (proximal; 4.37); religious conflict item (4.48)
Guided socialization and early identification of vulnerable learners (FGD)	Parent–school trust; teacher time and counseling skills	Alienation/belonging (proximal; 4.37); lowest non-response
Intergroup and interfaith contact (FGD)	Multi-ethnic school populations; involvement of non-Muslim coordinators and school heads	Discrimination (intermediate; 4.23); no context effect
State presence and service signaling (FGD; open-ended responses)	Asatidz' status as government-paid teachers; small allowances; perceived performance of other public services	Trust (intermediate; 4.26); lower in Lanao–Marawi; higher among women

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Mechanism (source)	Contexts that condition it	Outcome domain(s) and attributed level
Structured use of time; livelihood and role provision (FGD)	Local armed-group presence, clan feuds, and unemployment, which lie largely beyond the school	Conflict and violence (distal; 4.16–4.18); highest non-response and widest regional range

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DISCUSSION

This reanalysis set out to specify what kind of prevention resource the MEP is perceived to be by those who deliver it. Four findings stand out: endorsement is high but graded by outcome distance; withheld judgment marks the perceived boundary of the program's influence; context matters moderately and takes an ethno-geographic form; and the mechanisms described by school heads are overwhelmingly proximal and relational. We discuss each in turn and then consider how the evidence should and should not be used.

High endorsement as attribution, not impact

The very large standardized endorsement (overall $d = 2.91$) should be interpreted as a strong collective attribution by implementers rather than as evidence of effect. Several features of the source design favor high agreement: all items were positively worded statements about the program's contributions, which invites acquiescence; the questionnaire was administered face-to-face by trained coordinators; the respondents were government-paid program teachers; and the study was led by a senior official of the bureau responsible for the program. Each of these conditions is a recognized source of common-method and social-desirability bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Studies of Islamic schools in other settings similarly find that insiders frame their institutions as protective (Tiflati, 2016; Woodward et al., 2010), whereas community perception surveys that include non-implementers report more varied views (Grossman & Tahiri, 2015; Villa-Vicencio et al., 2016). The analytical value of the data therefore lies less in the absolute level of agreement than in its *variation*: the distribution of endorsement across outcomes, items, and contexts.

Proximal consensus and distal contestation

The clearest pattern is a gradient from proximal to distal outcomes. Asatidz were most confident that the MEP fosters belonging, participation, and ideological discernment, and least confident that it resolves clan and political conflict or reduces violence rooted in unemployment, injustice, or armed groups. This is consistent with theory-of-change accounts of education-based prevention, which locate education's most direct influence in identity, belonging, religious literacy, and critical reasoning (Bonnell et al., 2011; Ghosh et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2017), and it is consistent with evaluation evidence that prevention programs tend to produce modest and variable effects rather than large behavioral changes (Jugl et al., 2021; Pistone et al., 2019). It is also consistent with grievance-based models in which alienation and perceived injustice are early, malleable conditions, whereas actual violence is shaped by later and more situational factors (Moghaddam, 2005; Borum, 2011b).

The non-response and dispersion results deepen this interpretation. Teachers who answered "no idea" or declined to answer were, in effect, drawing the same boundary that evaluation scholars draw between what a program does and what it can only hope to influence (Weiss, 1995). Withheld judgment was highest for political disputes, clan feuds, the state's non-discrimination, and structural causes of violence, which are matters that depend on politics, policing, the economy, and customary dispute settlement more than on classrooms. The high refusal rate on the political-disputes item also suggests that some topics were sensitive to discuss, particularly in an interview conducted on behalf of a government bureau. To our knowledge, non-response has not previously been used as an indicator of perceived outcome distance in perception-based CVE research. We suggest that it be treated as substantive information rather than as missing data to be discarded.

The intermediate domains require separate comment. Trust in government services was endorsed fairly strongly and attracted little non-response, even though it is conceptually distant from classroom teaching. One plausible reading, consistent with legitimacy theory (Tyler, 2006) and with the historical role of madrasah integration as state accommodation of Moro identity (Milligan, 2006), is that the MEP is experienced as a tangible form of state recognition. Another is that government-employed teachers find it easier to affirm trust in government. The data cannot distinguish between these readings. The trust items also asked about health, employment, and livelihood

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services, which raises questions about whether the domain measures the MEP's contribution or respondents' general evaluation of government.

Context as a realist: "for whom and in what circumstances"

The original analyses reported significant differences by both division and ethnicity. Our reanalysis suggests that these are largely one finding: in this sample, division clusters and ethnolinguistic groups nearly coincide, and the corrected ethnicity scores reproduce the division pattern. Context explained a moderate share of variance, about 7–8% overall and up to 11% for conflict resolution, while the remaining variation lay within contexts. Context therefore matters, but it does not override the shared perception that the MEP contributes.

Read through a realist lens (Gielen, 2019; Pawson & Tilley, 1997), the cluster profiles suggest that the same program mechanisms may meet different conflict ecologies. In the island cluster, asatidz endorsed belonging very highly but violence reduction least of all; this is a setting where kidnapping-for-ransom networks and armed violence associated with the Abu Sayyaf Group persisted at the time of the study (ICG, 2019), and where such violence may be perceived as lying well beyond the reach of a values-education program. In the Lanao–Marawi cluster, lower scores on conflict resolution and trust coincide with the aftermath of the 2017 siege, during which displacement and slow rehabilitation became major sources of grievance (ICG, 2019). The uniformly high Maguindanao profile might reflect proximity to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's peace process and the creation of the BARMM, but it rests on only 30 respondents. These contextual explanations are hypotheses consistent with the pattern of results, not findings tested by the data, which contain no measures of local conflict exposure.

The weak and uneven role of individual characteristics adds to this picture. Educational attainment was largely unrelated to perceptions, which suggests that attributions reflect shared professional and community experience more than formal qualifications. The one robust gender difference, women's higher endorsement of trust, is intriguing in light of research on women's roles in community-level prevention (Ellis & Abdi, 2017), but the inconsistencies in the reported gender statistics mean that it should not be generalized.

Mechanisms and their conditions

The mechanisms described by school heads align closely with those proposed in the PVE-E literature: counter-narratives grounded in credible religious authority, belonging and guided socialization, intergroup contact, and structured activity (Aly et al., 2014; Davies, 2008; UNESCO, 2017). Three features of their accounts are notable. First, the participants described these mechanisms as gradual and developmental, not as rapid conflict resolution, which corroborates the quantitative gradient. Second, the asatidz' open-ended responses located the MEP's influence largely in everyday, intra-community conflict, such as backbiting, envy, gang and fraternity violence, and sectarian tension, rather than in insurgent or terrorist violence. Third, each mechanism depends on conditions that the participants themselves identified as fragile: counter-narratives depend on credible and well-prepared teachers, yet earlier research documented gaps in teacher qualifications and materials (Solaiman, 2017); service signaling depends on adequate teacher welfare, yet asatidz mentioned small allowances. From a street-level perspective (Lipsky, 2010), these resource conditions shape how far mechanisms can operate in practice.

A further caution concerns securitization. Framing a cultural and religious education program primarily as a counter-extremism instrument can stigmatize the communities it serves and can turn teachers into informal security actors, a concern raised in research on teachers working under prevention mandates elsewhere (Davies, 2016; Sjøen & Jore, 2019). The present findings suggest a more balanced positioning: the MEP is perceived by its teachers as an educational and relational good with plausible preventive by-products, not as a security intervention.

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Comparison with the original analysis and originality of the present perspective

The source study concluded that the MEP contributes to CVE to a "great extent" and that perceptions differ by division and ethnicity but not by gender or educational attainment (Sattar, 2019; Sattar & Arriola, 2020). The present reanalysis does not contradict the first conclusion but qualifies it. Endorsement is graded by outcome distance; it is bounded by withheld judgment, and fixed verbal categories exaggerate the differences between domains. The second conclusion is refined: division and ethnicity effects are moderate, overlapping, and ethno-geographic, and the gender conclusion is uncertain. The original perspective was descriptive and program-centered; the present one is explanatory and context-centered, asking what kind of outcome the MEP is believed to influence, where, and through which mechanisms.

Conclusion

In response to RQ1, asatidz attributed strong preventive contributions to the MEP across all six domains, but their endorsement followed a clear proximal–distal gradient, being highest for belonging and ideological discernment and lowest for conflict resolution and violence reduction. In response to RQ2, asatidz most often withheld or divided judgment on political disputes, clan feuds, state non-discrimination, and structural causes of violence, and lower endorsement went hand in hand with more non-response and disagreement across items, marking the perceived limits of the program's influence. In response to RQ3, contextual differences were small to moderate, were concentrated in the distal domains and in belonging, and formed three ethno-geographic profiles, with the steepest gradient in the island provinces. Individual characteristics played little consistent role, and the gender findings could not be verified. In response to RQ4, school heads described six mechanisms, chiefly religious counter-narrative, guided socialization, intergroup contact, and state presence, all of which are proximal and relational and all of which depend on teacher capacity and resources. Taken together, the evidence positions the MEP, in its teachers' eyes, as a proximal, education-based prevention resource whose reach into distal security outcomes depends on context and on complementary action by other sectors.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical implications

First, the study proposes *outcome distance* as an organizing concept for interpreting implementer perceptions in education-based prevention and shows that it can be operationalized post hoc through domain classification, item-level non-response, and dispersion. Second, it suggests that withheld judgment is substantively informative in perception research on sensitive topics, where it may signal both perceived distance from an outcome and topic sensitivity. Third, it specifies an initial context–mechanism–outcome theory of madrasah education as prevention in the Bangsamoro that can be tested in future realist evaluations (Gielen, 2019; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Fourth, it illustrates that, in regions where administrative and ethnolinguistic boundaries coincide, "division" and "ethnicity" effects should be theorized jointly as ethno-geographic context rather than reported as independent findings.

Practical, policy, and educational implications

For the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education of the BARMM, implementing the Bangsamoro Education Code, and for the Department of Education outside the region, the findings support positioning the MEP within the NAP P/CVE as a proximal component, one that strengthens belonging, religious literacy, and intergroup respect, rather than as a stand-alone instrument for reducing violence. Distal outcomes such as the settlement of *rido*, reductions in political violence, and responses to unemployment-related violence call for deliberate links between madrasah programs and other sectors: customary and formal dispute-resolution bodies, local peace and order councils, livelihood programs, and rehabilitation efforts in conflict-affected areas.

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The ethno-geographic profiles suggest that support should be differentiated. In the island provinces, where belonging is strongly endorsed but violence reduction is not, madrasah programs could be connected to community violence-reduction and clan-conflict mediation initiatives. In Lanao del Sur and Marawi City, the relatively lower endorsement of trust and conflict resolution suggests that madrasah programming be aligned with post-siege rehabilitation and visible improvements in public services. Following the Supreme Court's 2024 ruling that Sulu is not part of the BARMM, coordination between the Department of Education and the regional ministry will be needed to ensure that asatidz in Sulu are not left between two administrative systems.

For teacher policy, the mechanisms described by school heads depend on asatidz' credibility, preparation, and welfare. Investments in teacher qualifications, learning materials, counseling skills, and regular compensation are therefore preventive investments in their own right. For program monitoring, the findings support adopting separate proximal indicators (for example, learners' sense of belonging and religious literacy) and distal indicators (for example, community conflict incidents), measured through independent instruments and multiple informants rather than teacher self-report alone. Finally, policy communication should avoid portraying madrasahs mainly as security assets, so as not to stigmatize the communities and teachers on whom the program depends.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has important limitations. First, it is a secondary analysis of aggregate statistics; without respondent-level data, we could not test within-person differences between domains, model clustering by school or division, examine the factor structure of the instrument, or analyze ethnicity and division jointly. Second, the data are teacher and school-head perceptions, not measures of learner or community outcomes, and they were collected through positively worded, interviewer-administered items in a study led by a senior official of the implementing bureau; endorsement levels are therefore likely to be inflated. Third, the very high internal consistency ($\alpha = .962$), estimated on a pilot sample outside the ARMM, suggests item redundancy and raises doubt about whether the six domains are empirically distinct, so the outcome-level classification should be viewed as conceptual. Fourth, several subgroups were very small (for example, 4 Sama respondents, 10 Iranon respondents, and 3 doctorate holders), and the Maguindanao cluster comprised only 30 respondents. Fifth, the audit identified reporting inconsistencies; although we used values that are internally consistent, some uncertainty remains, especially for gender. Sixth, approximate valid sample sizes were used for confidence intervals. Seventh, the qualitative synthesis relied on thematic summaries rather than transcripts; the FGD questions presupposed that the MEP contributes, and separate island and mainland themes were not reported. Finally, the data predate the BARMM and the post-2019 policy changes, and they do not cover traditional madrasah teachers outside the ALIVE program.

Future research should (1) reanalyze the respondent-level data, if available, using confirmatory factor analysis and multilevel models with ethnicity and division entered jointly; (2) develop balanced instruments with negatively worded and behaviorally anchored items, administered by independent enumerators; (3) collect learner-, parent-, and community-level outcome data and compare MEP and non-MEP schools; (4) use longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to examine whether proximal outcomes translate into distal ones; (5) conduct realist case studies in contrasting conflict ecologies to test the context–mechanism–outcome configurations proposed here; (6) examine asatidz' working conditions, including compensation, as conditions of program mechanisms; and (7) include traditional and private madrasah teachers and the post-2019 BARMM policy environment.

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