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UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
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Resource-based conflicts and the politics of identity in Eastern Mindanao¹

Francisco J. Lara, Jr.²

ABSTRACT ■ Property rights in relation to ancestral lands have been reinforced in recent years by legislation that enabled indigenous peoples (IPs) to lay claim over large tracts of land and to negotiate the terms for their use. Secure property rights have long been argued as a crucial ingredient in economic growth and an enduring peace, yet conflict has continued to rise in the same areas where IP groups were placed in the driver's seat, where new investments, development inputs, and royalty payments for the use of IP's ancestral lands have been secured. How is it then that, despite the passage of a law recognizing ancestral land rights, a fragile peace continues to dominate in these areas? The reasons cited for the impasse are numerous, but most point to the institutional flaws and the weak capacity of actors to implement the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) uniformly and equitably. The challenge is also magnified by the enduring armed conflict in the countryside, particularly in ancestral lands, and the history of violence between rival IP groups. This discussion paper introduces an analysis of "extreme

¹ The author acknowledges the financial support for this study provided by the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Political Economy Program (PEP), particularly for the conduct of the "extreme cases" comparative research on the municipalities of Lianga and Lanuza in Surigao del Sur. The author is also grateful to International Alert Philippines–Conflict Alert Monitoring System for the permission to use data on violent conflict in the CARAGA region of Mindanao. Finally, the author acknowledges the GIZ-CAPID and select team members for their cooperation and support for the analysis and study of displacement and radicalization that accompanied this study.

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cases,” descriptive statistics, and other qualitative evidence to show that identity conflicts are inextricably linked to resource-related political violence and rebellion. This confluence explains the recurring violence more than the institutional weaknesses in the law. It also explains the increase in resource conflicts beneath the proxy war among IP groups in ancestral domain areas.

KEYWORDS ■ Indigenous peoples rights, resource violence, identity-related violence, ancestral land conflict, Eastern Mindanao



Recent years have seen an increase in violent fights over land between indigenous peoples (IPs) and mining, agribusiness, and other firms on the one hand, and violent rivalries between IP groups on the other. The contested control and management of ancestral domain areas placed under the stewardship and control of IP groups through the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) have been seen as the cause of violence, especially in the southern and eastern regions of Mindanao, though flashpoints have also occurred in different parts of the country.

Under Philippine law, the IPRA is to be implemented by a duly constituted National Council on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), where IP representatives sit to signify the direct participation of indigenous peoples in the management of their resources. The law’s most powerful component is the requirement for businesses and investors in agribusiness, energy, and mining, foreign or domestic, to secure the “*free, prior, and informed consent*” (FPIC) of the IP groups that have been granted Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs), before they can utilize, transact, manage, and physically intervene in the development and exploitation of these areas.

The FPIC follows similar institutional measures undertaken in other countries to strengthen the claims of IP groups and upland communities to the control and use of vast land areas rich in natural resources that they occupy and utilize for their basic needs. In fact, apart from national laws such as the IPRA in the Philippines, the normative framework of FPIC rests upon a series of international legal

instruments, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the International Labour Organization Convention 169 (ILO 169), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).³

However, there have been many setbacks in the internalization, adaptation, and application of the international conventions underlying the FPIC law (Buxton 2012b; Simbulan 2016; Mac-Innes et al. 2017; Doyle 2019).⁴ One of the stronger arguments stresses the disconnect between the concepts of indigenous sovereignty and state-centric rules of eminent domain, decrying how the “participation” element in law-making of IPs as an aspect of indigenous sovereignty, does not challenge the state-centric nature of the international legal regime. The NCIP itself and the various courts of law are forced to play by the rules—honoring the state sovereignty doctrine as the foundational precept and rendering the IPRA subservient to state laws (Bayot 2016; Anghie 2005; Wiessner 2008).

As if these were not enough, the strengthening of IP rights over their ancestral lands helped to actually facilitate the entry of agribusiness firms and energy and mining investments in many ancestral lands covered by the new CADTs granted by the NCIP. Mining, agribusiness, and energy firms discovered that all they needed to do to exploit these resources was to get an FPIC from indigenous leaders who were willing to partner with them. This in turn was secured through royalty payments to local leaders who could get the support of their communities through a share in the payments or through coercion.⁵

³ Under the guidelines of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO n.d.) of the United Nations, FPIC means that consent is given freely, voluntarily, and without coercion, intimidation or manipulation; it is based on information provided prior to seeking consent; it is sought in advance of any authorization or commencement of activities on the land; and it is based on a collective decision made by right-holders and reached through a customary decision-making process in the communities.

⁴ Issues range from insensitivity to cultural traditions, the compression of the indigenous rights under national property rights, and the militarization of indigenous communities, especially in mining areas located within ancestral lands.

⁵ Interview with a senior official of the NCIP in Mindanao; name and interview date withheld.

Indeed, the FPIC clause seemed to merely perpetuate unequal power structures that have beleaguered indigenous peoples since colonial times. The growing acceptance of FPIC, while successfully advancing the IPs' cause to a certain degree, has not succeeded in correcting their disadvantaged position. As is apparent in the Philippine context, indigenous peoples are treated in a patronizing manner as groups that ought to be protected because they are a minoritized portion of the government's constituency. If they are welcomed into the heretofore state domain of international law-making, there is a potential for this relationship to be transformed into one of partnership, rather than of protection.

However, if indigenous peoples are really a partner in this "participatory and empowering" development process, why is violence recurring in the same areas where ancestral land rights have been secured?

1. The research question

Why has the recognition of indigenous peoples' right to their ancestral lands failed to lessen conflict in these areas? This is a relevant question in the face of expectations and promises made by legislated measures that are aimed at protecting and enhancing the conditions and rights of indigenous peoples and communities.

As proposed in the studies cited above, the nature and processes of the IPRA are seen as central to understanding why violence is occurring in the same areas where ancestral land rights have been strengthened and investments made.

The IPRA contains relevant provisions that amplify the protection of indigenous peoples' rights that have been assessed as inadequate and prone to violations. Under the law, the state is mandated to protect the rights of indigenous peoples (IPs) and indigenous cultural communities (ICCs) to their ancestral domains to ensure their economic, social, and cultural well-being and shall recognize the applicability of customary laws governing property rights or relations in determining the ownership and extent of ancestral domain.

That protection includes recognition of IP entitlements through the awarding of the CADT, a legal document formally recognizing the IPs/ ICCS' rights of possession and ownership over their ancestral domains identified and delineated in accordance with the law, and a Certificate of Ancestral Lands Title (CALT) or the legal document recognizing the rights of ICCs/IPs over their ancestral lands.

Protection also includes, as aforementioned, the requirement to secure the FPIC of the respective IPs/ICCs before entry into their areas. FPIC refers to the consensus of all members of the IPs/ICCs, to be determined in accordance with their respective customary laws and practices, free from any external manipulation, interference and coercion, and obtained after fully disclosing the intent and scope of the activity, in a language and process understandable to the community.

Finally, the law mandates the creation of the NCIP, under the Office of the President, which shall be the primary government agency responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies, plans, and programs to recognize, protect, and promote the rights of ICCs/IPs.

However, the law is prone to violations because it contains loopholes that can be utilized to escape the strict implementation of FPIC. As we shall also see, these rules are inadequate as they neither address the fundamentally statist regime or framework that encompasses property determination in the country, nor do they counter other threats of violence that emanate from resource conflicts that are tied to identity issues and rebel predation.

2. The relevant literature

It is critical to recognize at the outset that the IPRA does not undermine the property rights framework in mainstream economics that proposes how the stable property rights minimize violent conflict and promote instead peaceful competition over the use and control of economic resources (Alchian 1965; Alchian and Demsetz 1973). Indeed, the links between secure property rights and economic growth, and consequently, a lasting peace, are an important rationale behind the IPRA and FPIC.

At a micro level, the links between livelihoods or businesses and conflict reduction were proposed by conflict theorists as an alternative or supplement political guarantees that provide rewards to those rebel leaders who accept a settlement. A recent study on the island province of Tawi-Tawi and the “business is good for peace” thesis pointed to the strong connections between trading and peace building, as traders engaged in the robust cross-sea trade played a determining role in reducing the violence that locals will tolerate (Quitoriano 2019).

However, the links are not always immediate and direct. The conflict specialist Paul Collier (2004) argued that even with the best economic and political design, risks will remain high during the first post-conflict decade. The legacy effects of conflict, usually embedded in his-torical narratives, cannot be removed overnight.

Conflict studies literature has also cited the “resource curse” as another factor that under-mines the immediate effects of a political settlement in resource-rich areas. The thesis proposed that the abundance of natural resources, particularly oil, causes poor growth and raises the incidence, intensity, and duration of conflict (Di John 2007; De Soysa 2000). In quantitative terms, conflict specialists even tagged a resource-GDP ratio of 32 percent as a signifier of looming conflict.

To be sure, recent theorizing has revised the resource curse to mean the unequal distribution or allocation of these resources, rather than their mere presence. Yet this recasting has not weakened the theorizing about their links. The unequal access to and benefits from the presence of rich natural resources, such as in cases in eastern and southern Mindanao, offer the possibility of extracting rents from the control of resources. The notion of *greed* herein appears as an extension of rent-seeking theory, which, in its simple form, posits that the existence of a valuable ‘prize’ induces individuals to spend time and resources to appropriate the ‘prize.’ Mineral resource rents (such as from oil), in this model, provide both the motivation to try to capture the state and, potentially, the means to finance rebellions.

Indeed, recent explanations of resilient violence in resource-rich regions in the Philippines have posited the role of mineral

rents in fomenting rebellion through a ‘looting’ mechanism. If rebel organizations can extract and sell resources (or extort money from those who do), then they are more likely to launch a civil war (Keen 2000). The idea that rebels can “do well out of war” has been offered as a more convincing explanation of the onset of conflict than sociopolitical grievances, income and asset inequality, ethnic rivalry, or the absence of democracy (Collier 2000).

3. Research methodology

The study is both quantitative and qualitative. It explores the conflict effects of the new property rights under IPRA and related business investments in conflict-affected areas of the eastern Mindanao or CARAGA region, and looks at the rival institutions offered by the in-surgents and those arising from traditional institutions. This was undertaken through the geotagging of conflict incidents and deaths and overlaying these with CADT areas and other business investments such as mining.

An analysis of descriptive statistics from a five-year panel data on violent conflict in the region was utilized to match incidents of violence with their causes and costs. The study acknowledges International Alert Philippines for permitting access to secondary panel data on conflict causes, intensity, and magnitude that were used extensively in this study.

The Alert database is based on a combination of quantitative data on conflict incidents from 2011 to 2015 made available by the Philippine National Police (PNP), and the database of the Eastern Mindanao Command (EASTMINCOM) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) covering the same years. Meanwhile, the data on displacement was generated from media reports and from the Mindanao Displacement Dashboard, a monthly publication of the Protection Cluster in Mindanao, Philippines which is co-led by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The statistical analysis was supplemented by in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and concluded with a case study of

“extreme cases.” The extreme cases study was the most strategic and illuminating method used here because it compared specific actors, endowments, community-level institutions, and conflict dynamics using a with-or-without analysis. The towns of Lianga and Lanuza in Surigao Sur, CARAGA region were chosen as the extreme cases.

4. Conflict dynamics and the IPRA in Mindanao

A recent study of the conflict situation in the CARAGA region, located in the northeastern section of Mindanao, offers a relevant backdrop and some startling indicators about the dynamics between resource, identity, and rebellion-related violence and the myths that have dominated the public imagery of violent conflict in ancestral domains and ancestral lands in Mindanao, especially in the eastern provinces.⁶

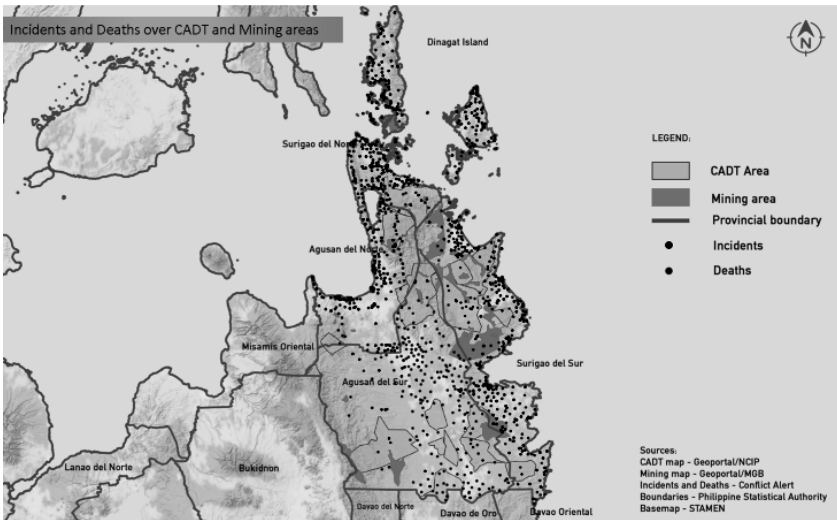
Two important caveats, however, must be kept in mind in assessing the descriptive statistics at the outset: *One*, we must note that the PNP database is more robust than the AFP database on a scale of 9 to 1. Over the five-year period from 2011 to 2015, there were 4,714 incidents of violent conflict recorded by the PNP versus the 479 incidents in the AFP database—giving the former more explanatory power over the nature of violent conflict in the region. The AFP incident reports are really a reflection of the areas where military forces operate and the nature of their targets, i.e., rebels and insurgents. *Two*, we must recognize the dominance of incidents and fatalities in the Agusan provinces, in contrast to displacement as the main indicator of human costs in the Surigao provinces, particularly Surigao del Sur. A map of geotagged violent incidents and human costs across the CARAGA region illustrates this reality (see **MAP 1** on opposite page).

The first conclusion we derive from the evidence is the mismatch between (a) the incidence of violent conflict, and (b) the intensity of displacement as an important signifier of the severe human costs associated with violent conflict in the region.

⁶ International Alert Philippines. 2019. “The nexus between displacement and radicalization in Eastern Mindanao: association, causality, and effects.” GIZ CAPID Project.

MAP 1

Geotagged violent incidents and deaths in CARAGA



Both the PNP and AFP reports point to the Agusan provinces as the site of most incidents of conflict, though the former points to Agusan del Norte while the latter focuses on Agusan del Sur (see **FIGURES 1 and 2** on page 10). The divergence between the PNP and AFP datasets is explained by the difference in the conflict monitoring priorities of the AFP, which focuses on rural areas and the communist insurgency, in contrast to the PNP, which gathers all types of conflict data.

If displacement is only based on violent conflict, then it would be realistic to assume that the more violent Agusan provinces would also experience higher displacement levels as well. Yet when it comes to displacement, both the PNP and the AFP data indicate that the province where most of the displaced are located is in Surigao del Sur. A side-by-side graph of incidents versus displacement show the divergence between the intensity of violent incidents and the magnitude of displacement (see **FIGURES 3 and 4** on page 11).⁷

⁷ In the ALERT database, the number of conflict incidents is used as the barometer for the intensity of conflict, while the magnitude of conflict refers to the human costs

FIGURE 1 PNP data on conflict incidence in CARAGA per province

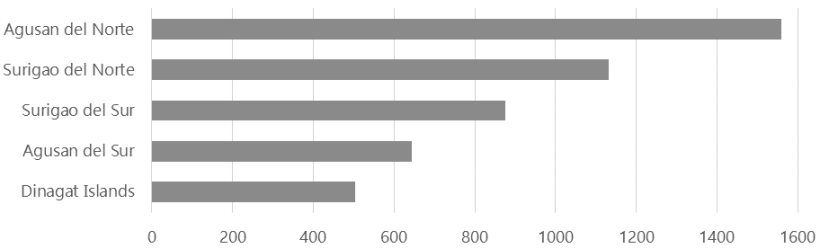
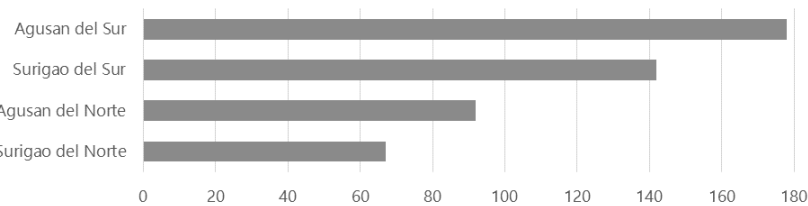


FIGURE 2 AFP data on conflict incidence in CARAGA per province



Surigao del Sur ranks fourth in the PNP database and second in the AFP sample, yet in both data sources the province registered the highest number of displaced people. In the PNP database, conflict intensity is higher in Agusan del Norte and Surigao del Norte, while in the AFP sample, Agusan del Sur is the most violent, followed by Surigao del Sur.

This finding also explains why Surigao del Sur was chosen as the province from which the extreme cases for this study were taken, as the human costs of conflict in the province enables a comparative assessment of why one locale is more peaceful than another.

The second conclusion from the study is that there are relatively few incidents of resource-based violence in areas where ancestral

of conflict, i.e., the number of people killed and injured, and the number of people displaced by conflict.

FIGURE 3 PNP data on conflict incidents and displacement in CARAGA per province, 2012–2015

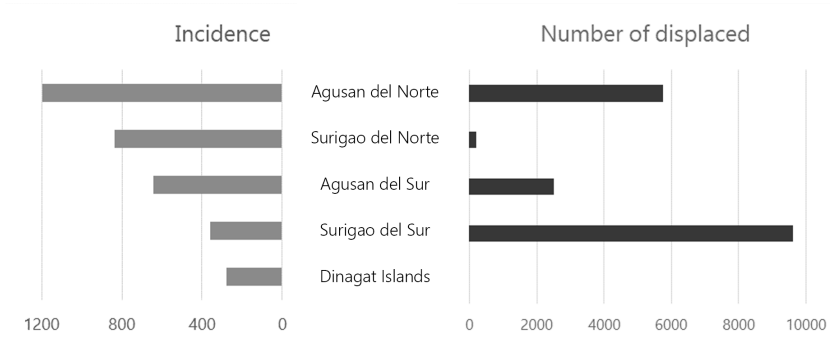
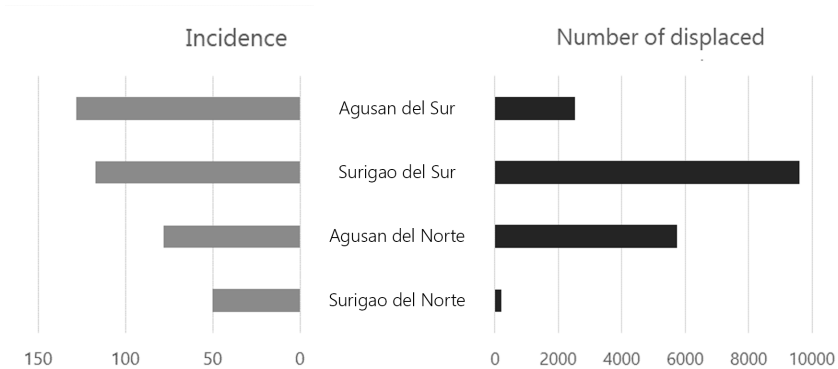


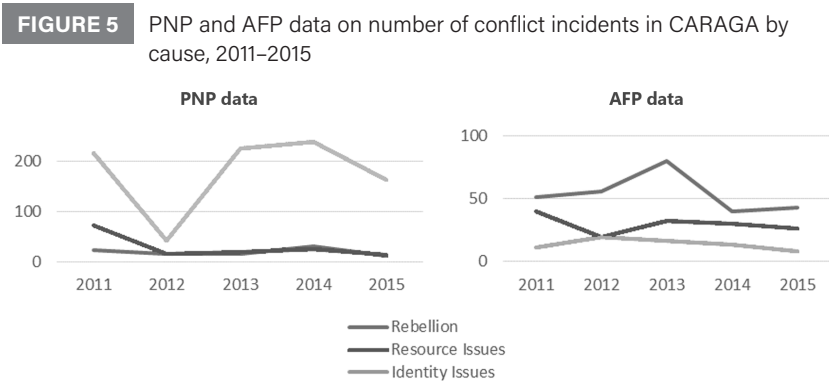
FIGURE 4 AFP data on conflict incidents and displacement in CARAGA per province



lands and ancestral domain claims are plentiful and commercial investments in mining and agribusiness are increasing. This finding undermines the notion that land issues and resource-based conflicts coupled with rebellion-related violence are the main sources of violent conflict in places like the CARAGA region.⁸ Instead, the data suggests

⁸ The notion is mainly the result of media reports and discourse on tribal wars, and conflict incident reports of the Philippine military, including civil society advocacy campaigns that sought to link resources with violent conflict in Mindanao.

that identity-related conflict in the form of clan and tribal feuding and gender violence are the more significant sources of violence (see **FIGURE 5** below).



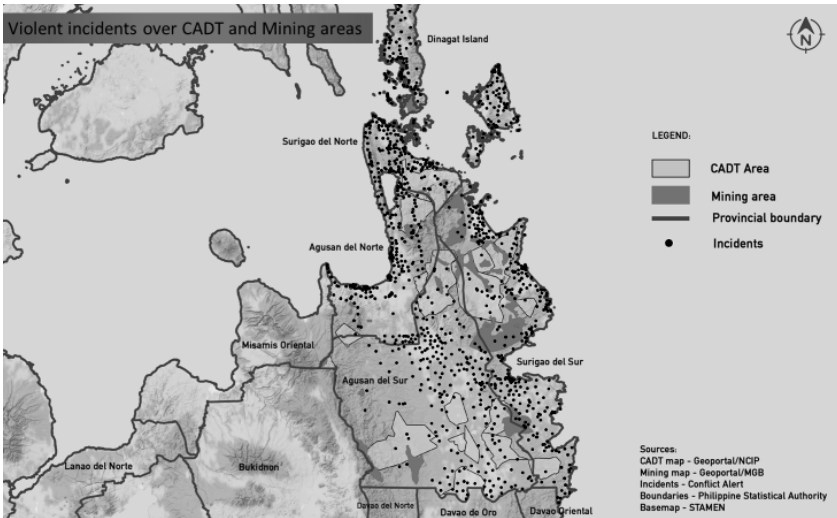
The evidence illustrates the difficulty of assuming that the intensification of violent conflict in resource-rich ancestral lands such as in CARAGA are the product of recent legislation that strengthened property rights to elevate the interests of indigenous peoples—especially because resource-based violence is dwarfed by identity-based and rebellion-related conflicts.

In fact, a mapping of conflict incidents in the CARAGA region manifests the preponderance of conflict incidence and deaths in areas where ancestral domain claims have not been resolved, which in turn indicated that only a few CADTs have been awarded (see **MAP 2** on opposite page).

It is in this regard that an extreme case study is relevant in determining the conditions that explain the emergence of violent conflict, or the absence of it. This method has been used by other conflict scholars to explain divergent outcomes from relatively similar natural resource endowments. For example, the conflict scholar Robert Bates (2001, 26–29) studied the links between prosperity and violence in East Africa through a comparative analysis of the towns of Meru in Kenya and Bugisu in Uganda. Bates introduced his cases by noting

MAP 2

Geotagged violent conflict incidents in CARAGA



how in Meru, “prosperity was undergirded by peace,” while in Bugisu, “the fear spread by violence undermined the willingness to invest or to engage in economic activity.”⁹

Using this method, the author examines whether the changes in property rights caused by the IPRA explain the increase or decline of violent conflict, and whether there are other causal indicators and links that can be made to better explain conflict outcomes. We examine the causes of violent conflict in two municipalities in the northeastern Mindanao province of Surigao del Sur and map out conflict sites to see whether there are links between land and resource claims and violent conflict.

⁹ In another study, Jean-Paul Faguet (2005, 11) explains the use of extreme cases to verify the salience of macroeconomic data and to analyze the differential outcomes of decentralization in the towns of Charagua and Viacha in Bolivia, enabling researchers to “place in stark relief the systematic differences in decision-making that characterize each, leading to their very different outcomes.”

5. Extreme cases: Lianga and Lanuza in Surigao del Sur

The present extreme cases study focuses on the two coastal municipalities of Lianga and Lanuza for their distinct yet interrelated characteristics. Both municipalities occupy the long coastline of Surigao del Sur province and are rich in forest and marine resources. At the same time, however, the two cases have different ethnic features and distinctive land and resources that shaped governance, development, and peace in their respective communities. More important to the present study, Lianga's and Lanuza's implementation of IPRA has yielded di-vergent outcomes in terms of conflict and displacement.

The study will explain how local leaders in both municipalities have been able to sustain their political authority despite bureaucratic underperformance and continuing insecurity from recurring violence and conflict. It will also reveal the institutional patterns that led to redistributive reforms in land and resource allocation in Lanuza, in contrast to their absence in Lianga. In the process, the study hopes to unravel the paradox of Lianga—a town that has not escaped intense violence and conflict despite its longer existence, longer economic and development interventions, and higher external investments in contrast to Lanuza.

5.1 Comparable demographic and geographic features

The coastal municipality of Lianga is centrally located in the province of Surigao del Sur. It is situated along the Lianga Bay facing the Pacific Ocean and cradled by the Diwata mountain range. The land area totals 161.12 square kilometres or 62.21 square miles, which constitutes 3.27 percent of Surigao del Sur's total area. The population, as determined by the 2015 census, was 29,493. This is 4.98 percent of the total population of Surigao del Sur province, or 1.14 percent of the overall population of the CARAGA region. Based on these figures, the population density is computed at 183 inhabitants per square kilometer, or 474 inhabitants per square mile.

Lanuza is another coastal municipality in the province, with a land area of 290.60 square kilometres or 112.20 square miles, which

TABLE 1 Demographic and geographic data of Lianga and Lanuza municipalities, Surigao del Sur

	Lianga	Lanuza
Geographic data		
Land area (sq. km.)	161.12	290.60
Barangays	13	13
Demographic data		
Population (2015)	29,493	12,001
Population density (persons per sq. km.)	183	41
Health		
DOH national health facilities	Barangay Health Stations: 12 Infirmary: 1 Rural Health Unit: 1	Barangay Health Station: 13 Hospital: 0 Rural Health Unit: 1
Youth		
Percentage of youth (15–29 years old household population; 2015 census)	25.4%	25.1%
Percentage of literate among household population (2015 census)	97.9%	98.1%

constitutes 5.89 percent of Surigao del Sur’s total area. Based on the 2015 census, its population was 12,001. This represents 2.03 percent of the total population of Surigao del Sur province, or 0.46 percent of the overall population of CARAGA region. Based on these figures, the population density is computed at 41 inhabitants per square kilometer, or 107 inhabitants per square mile.

5.2 Ethnic cleavages

Understanding the “identity” features of the province as well as the composition of indigenous groups is critical to determining whether

ethnic heterogeneity or homogeneity is an important explanatory factor in determining latent potential for identity-based conflict.

The data shows that the concentration of IP groups can be found in the four Surigao del Sur towns of Bislig, Hinatuan, Lingig, and San Miguel. These towns have a long history of logging and woodcrafts, commercial fishing, and farming. Most Manobos, Mandayas, and Mamanwas rely on farming, fishing, and gathering of forestry products. Others are also engaged in carpentry and handicrafts-making. Average household income is less the Php 1,000.

A study by the World Bank (2004) outlined the population of ICCs/IPs per municipality in the province of Surigao del Sur (see **TABLE 2** on opposite page). The data indicates the predominance of the Manobo tribe in the province, and the almost similar absolute numbers of indigenous peoples in Lianga and Lanuza, though the latter is more heterogenous than Lianga. Other identity groups in Lanuza classified according to languages used indicate a considerable number of settlers of Surigaonon, Cebuano, and Waray origin, with 90 percent Catholic. In contrast, Lianga has a majority of Manobo-Kamayo with less than five percent settlers from Surigao, Cebu, and Samar-Leyte.

Studies have shown how ethnic fragmentation has often been a precursor of violent conflict (Collier, Hoeffler, and Sambanis 2005; Armstrong 2014), which means that the relative ethnic homogeneity in Lianga may dampen violent conflict. It is important to see whether this endowment impacted on the state of conflict, or the lack of it, in the extreme cases.¹⁰

5.3 Natural and physical resource endowments

Lanuza and Lianga have similar albeit unevenly distributed resource endowments. Lanuza possesses a far bigger land area of 290 sq. km., yet its agricultural land is limited to 3,375 hectares, which is planted

¹⁰ Other scholars have argued that it is not fragmentation, but ethnic “polarization” that matters.

TABLE 2 Distribution of indigenous peoples, Surigao del Sur

City/Municipality	Estimated IP population	IP sub-tribes
Barobo	9,784	Manobo-Mandaya
Bayabas	302	Manobo
Bislig City	36,933	Manobo
Carmen	2,230	Manobo-Mandaya-Mamanwa
Cagwait	1,790	Manobo
Cantilan	2,470	Manobo
Carrascal	1,553	Manobo-Mandaya-Mamanwa
Cortes	396	Mamanwa
Hinatuan	13,360	Mandaya
Lanuza	2,713	Manobo-Mandaya-Mamanwa
Liangá	3,014	Manobo
Lingig	25,712	Manobo-Mandaya
Madrid	507	Manobo
Marihatag	1,850	Manobo
San Agustin	1,561	Manobo-Mandaya
San Miguel	18,242	Manobo
Tagbina	8,912	Mandaya
Tago	1,527	Manobo
Tandag City	1,217	Manobo-Mandaya-Mamanwa

with rice, coconut, vegetables, and abaca. Meanwhile, Liangá only has 160 sq. km., yet the municipality has 4,846 hectares of agricultural land, planted rice, coconut, banana, vegetables and root crops. Livestock and poultry in both municipalities sustain local demand, which is higher in Liangá due to its bigger population.

Marine resources are important sources of income as well, and again, mostly in Liangá where commercial vessels generate at least 695 metric tons of fish, in contrast to Lanuza's much lower yield of

93 metric tons. Lianga has five commercial fishponds producing fish, apart from the rich waters of Lianga Bay. The municipality sells fish to urban areas as far away as Butuan and Davao City.

The forestry sector is the most important natural resource in both municipalities and plays a vital role in the economies of these towns. The 32,236.57 hectares in Lanuza devoted to forestlands serves as the source of lumber materials for the construction industry. A local company called the Surigao Development Corporation operates a timber land concession occupying 21,072 hectares. Meanwhile, forestland in Lianga occupies 19,000 hectares of land even after forestry suffered a downturn after the closure of the Lianga Bay Logging Corporation in 1990s.

In recent years, the growth of mining and quarrying operations has increased in the province, affecting people in both municipalities. The mountainous part of Lanuza has been the target of several applications for mining exploration, but none is operational except for quarrying activities in several quarry sites or rivers. Receipts from quarrying activities are minimal, though local residents enjoy the abundance and lesser prices of filing materials for construction needs. Meanwhile, there is a long history of coal mining in Lianga that started back in the 1980s, involving the Semirara Mining and Power Corporation. There are new existing claimants, but all prospective mining investors were unable to sustain their extractive industries in Lianga, including recent attempts to extract gold within ancestral domain claims.

5.4 Poverty and social services

Lianga and Lanuza are fourth class municipalities with comparable health services and human resource endowments. Lianga has a bigger population, higher poverty incidence, and earns less revenues than Lanuza. Yet the latter gets a bigger internal revenue from the national government.

Lianga and Lanuza offer the same health services, measured in terms of barangay health stations and rural health units, even if

Lianga's population and density are double that of Lanuza.¹¹ Childbirth is largely dependent on the support of traditional birth attendants in the community, referred to locally as *bilot*. However, because of inaccessibility and financial constraints, some Manobo-Mandaya-Mamanwa women are not at all assisted by trained and traditional birth attendants, and have to rely on their husbands or other family members for support during childbirth.

Despite relatively similar endowments when it comes to human resource indicators such as age and literacy, poverty incidence increased in both municipalities from 2012 to 2015 and was even a point higher in Lianga.

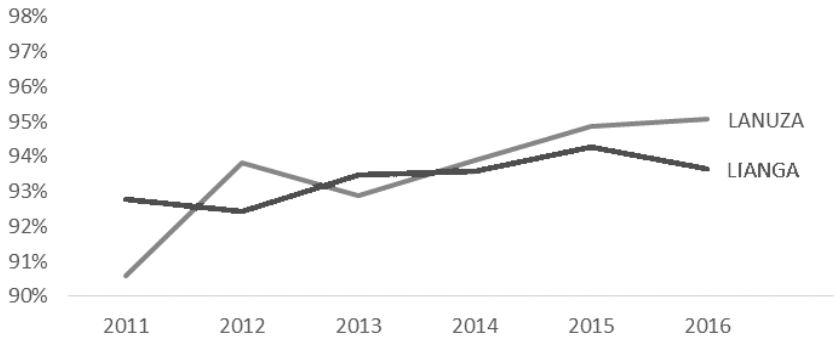
As a measure of bureaucratic performance in fourth class municipalities, Lanuza overtakes Lianga significantly when it comes to net incomes, where Lanuza is at Php 12 million versus Php 5 million for Lianga (see **TABLE 3**). Still, Lanuza is becoming more dependent on internal revenue allotments (IRA) for its government's activities and projects compared to Lianga. Lanuza started with a lower IRA dependency in 2011 but outpaced Lianga in 2014.

TABLE 3 Economic data in the extreme cases

	Lianga	Lanuza
Economic data		
Poverty incidence among population (PSA small area estimates; 2012 and 2015)	2012: 29.2% 2015: 38.7%	2012: 33.1% 2015: 37.3%
LGU income class	4th class municipality	4th class municipality
Estimated net income (COA 2017)	Php 5 million	Php 12 million

¹¹ In fact, while both municipalities have a similar number of barangays at 12, Lanuza has 13 barangay health centers in contrast to Lianga's 12 health stations. Lanuza is obviously better-resourced when it comes to this merit good.

FIGURE 6 Internal revenue allotments (IRA) dependency as percentage of funds, 2011–2016



5.5 Resource-redistribution in the extreme cases

There are many unresolved issues pertaining to land conflicts and contested claims on ancestral lands and ancestral domain areas. These unresolved conflicts have been addressed in divergent ways by the local governments and other actors in the case study areas.

5.5.1 Land conflicts in Lianga

In Lianga, IP groups have opposed the entry of the military operations in their communities out of fear that their ancestral domains that are allegedly coal rich, among other deposits, may be taken away from them. Repeated attempts to build roads to penetrate the area have been blocked by indigenous peoples' groups as well as New People's Army (NPA) insurgents who fear that accessibility will usher in a stronger military presence.

There is also an ongoing political boundary conflict between the towns of San Agustin and Lianga. Politicians and investors from both towns are gunning for the timberland areas of a barangay (Barangay Gata) that used to be part of Lianga, but was later classified as part of San Agustin to enable the latter to create a separate municipality. However, IP groups from both San Agustin and Lianga have been

cultivating the area prior to the transfer and have now challenged the geographic distortion, leading to militarization.

No attempt has been made by the political elites of both municipalities to settle the land conflict. Instead, there have been repeated attempts to block the application of the IPRA in the area. The impasse accounts for why no CADTs and only mining tenements have been granted in Lianga, despite the presence of CADTs in neighbouring municipalities such as Marihatag and San Miguel. The situation worsened after the director and two other staff persons of an IP school in the contested area were killed by paramilitary groups after accusing the victims of being communist sympathizers.

5.5.2 Redistributive reforms in Lanuza

Typical land disputes involving IPs and other settler-farmers revolve around cases of illegal occupants in ancestral domains. However, these disputes have been resolved through the allotment of three hectares to any migrant who wants to live within the domain, provided that they abide by the tribe's rules and regulations. To date, disputes involving so-called illegal occupants were settled through legal measures.

In contrast to Lianga, there were several potential sites in Lanuza that were explored and proven to contain gold, nickel, and iron deposits, but there has been little to no development undertaken in these areas. The last recorded small-scale mining operation happened in the 1950s to 1960s. In fact, the Lanuza local government has taken a strict anti-mining stance, preferring to strengthen tourism, agriculture, fisheries, and processing—hence, the absence of mining investors and industries. Most of the threats to their natural resources come from the extractive industries of nearby municipalities (i.e., siltation due to mining). However, illegal logging continues and is reportedly allowed by communist rebels in the area as a source of revolutionary taxation.

Apart from the government prohibitions against extractive industries, there were several development agencies working on conservation of marine resources in Lanuza, such as the Haribon Foundation and RARE Philippines. In fact, Lanuza, along with seven

other towns, is part of what is known as the Lanuza Bay Alliance, where each municipality is tasked to maintain their own sanctuary within Lanuza Bay.

Finally, in contrast to Lianga, about 70 percent of Lanuza's total land area has already been covered by a CADT. IP groups in the CADT areas have also drafted their respective Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP), in coordination with the national government, various line agencies, and local development actors. When asked why Lanuza's CADTs were quickly processed as compared to Lianga's, the informants answered that their local officials took the initiative to do the legwork in the processing of the CADT. IP groups also narrated how the communist insurgents failed to stop the legitimate claims of the IP groups and the grant of CADT in the areas. The NPA, in their view, was opposed to the IPRA because if implemented properly, it could strengthen support for the local and national government in the area.

5.6 Clan and dynastic rule

The consistency of clan and dynastic control over political office follows much of the experience everywhere else in the Philippines. There are recurring surnames of political families in the 2013, 2016, and 2019 mayoral elections. In Lianga, members of the Sarment clan were elected as mayors in 2013 and 2019. In Lanuza, members of the Azarcon clan have been rewarded with political office from 2013 to 2016.

In Lianga, Roy Sarment lost the 2016 mayoral election to Kid Pedrozo, but another relative, Novelita Sarment, was able to snatch it back in 2019 against Homer Pedrozo. In Lanuza, Salvacion Azarcon was unable to transfer the position to another Azarcon in 2019 despite having been in office for two consecutive terms prior the election. The current local chief executive is Jack Dawog.

5.7 Violent conflict in the extreme cases

The towns of Lianga and Lanuza have also been vulnerable to violence and lawlessness because of their rich forest areas, access to rivers and

the sea, and a big and remote upland area. Some studies have shown a distinct association between the remoteness and inaccessibility of a place and armed conflict (Kalyvas 2006, 4–5; Collier, Hoeffler, and Sambanis 2005, 7–9). Indeed, the rugged mountains and thick forests in these areas may be predictors of insurgent activity. Both municipalities are ethnically diverse, though Lanuza is more fragmented. One can argue that the division between various ethno-linguistic groups is fueling inter-ethnic and intertribal conflicts—a reality that stares people in the face in light of the brutality and impunity that has visited eastern Mindanao in the past five years. Indeed, the ethnic diversity plus the favorable terrain for guerrilla warfare have induced a long, drawn-out conflict.

FIGURE 7 Number of conflict incidents in Lianga and Lanuza, 2011–2015

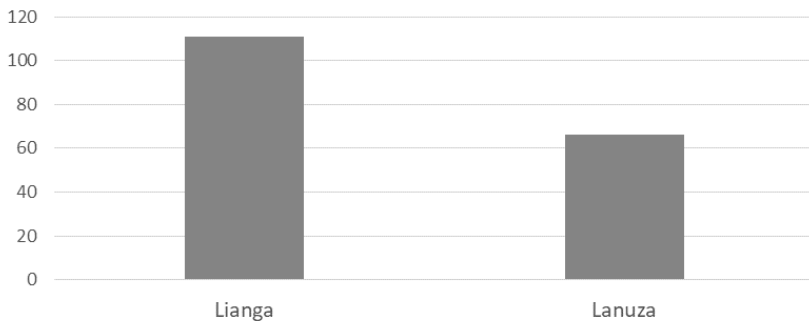
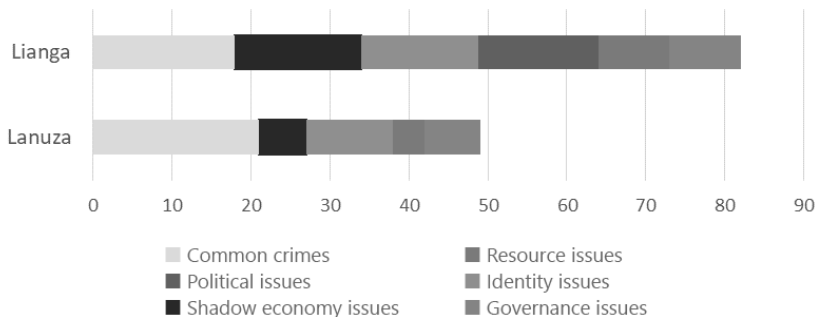


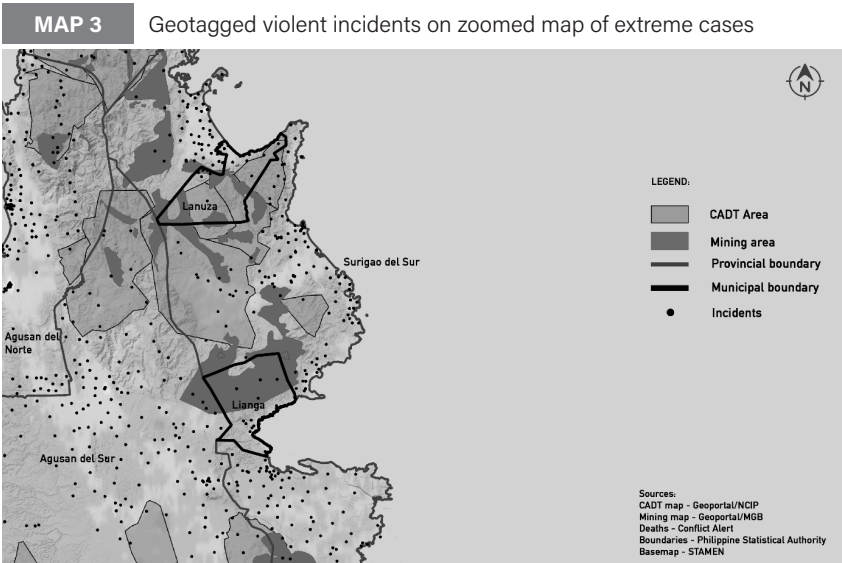
FIGURE 8 Number of incidents by main cause, 2011–2015 (PNP data)



The conflict data shows that Lianga has encountered more incidents of violent conflict than Lanuza from 2011 to 2015, and most of the conflicts are related to common crimes and identity conflicts, followed by resource and governance conflicts. In terms of displacement, Lianga saw 3,211 people displaced in total due to violent conflict from 2012 to 2015, all resulting from identity issues. Lanuza, on the other hand, recorded no case of displacement due to conflict.

FIGURE 8 (on previous page) also shows the resilience of violence related to the war on drugs and trade of illicit weapons. However, most of the local population in both towns are less engaged in criminal and illicit activities that make up the areas’ “shadow economy,” than they are in survival and coping economies, such as unregistered trade in food commodities (especially rice) or unlicensed transport of equipment and services to support livelihoods and augment rural incomes.

Finally, a close-up image of the Surigao Sur provincial map with Lianga and Lanuza ring-fenced and highlighted indicates where (a) most violent incidents are occurring, (b) the areas where CADTs have been distributed, and (c) the mining tenements already opened for resource exploitation.



To be sure, there are violent incidents happening within ancestral domain areas as well as the mining tenements. Noteworthy, however, is that the concentration of violent incidents is found outside the areas where CADTs have been distributed and other economic investments have been made (e.g., mining). Notice also the glaring absence of CADT areas in Lianga, in contrast to Lanuza, and the potential causal explanations that lurk behind episodes of violence in the province and the region.

6. Conclusions and policy implications

There are at least three significant findings that can be deduced from this study.

First, *resource-related violence is not the main source of violence even in ancestral domain areas and is in fact submerged under cases of rebellion- and identity-related violence.* The latter appears to be the more important determinants of violent flashpoints, rather than the implementation of IPRA, or the lack of it.

In fact, even in the areas already covered by the IPRA, ancestral domain development plans that were designed for investments have not been acted upon not because they invited violent retribution, but rather because of the paucity of economic actors that are willing to commit funds to a conflict-affected area. Indeed, the IPRA, FPIC, and CADT instruments did not produce insurgent or rebel behavior, it was hampered by it. One clear evidence is how many CADTs have remained unexplored, uninvested, and unproductive because of the insurgency.

Second, *the experiences of the extreme cases suggest that CADT coverage contributes to reduced violence. The conflict analysis of Lianga and Lanuza has turned up some interesting empirical evidence about how the differential impact of access to ancestral lands may predict the onset of identity-based conflict.* Indigenous peoples' groups in Lanuza have been able to secure CADTs in their areas, while IP groups in Lianga have not.

Third, *the extreme case studies of Lianga and Lanuza provide evidence that demographic differences in population and language composition make Lanuza more fragmented than Lianga yet less vulnerable to tribal/ethnic conflicts.* This outcome raises questions as to much of the theorizing on the conflict effects of social fragmentation, but may be supportive of the alternative thesis that ethnic polarization is a better predictor of violence.

But why does conflict persist despite less uncertainty and more security in the redistribution of ancestral lands to indigenous peoples? *The answer is that the IPRA is not a universal instrument that can cause the resolution of all violent conflicts occurring in ancestral domain areas—especially those conflicts that are tied up to communal identities, embedded in grand narratives of resistance to the state.*

Different actors carry these agendas, and external actors have even turned inter and intra-tribal conflicts as proxy wars between the government and communist insurgents. When the CADT process was used to open lands for cultivation, production, exploitation, and residence by the indigenous peoples themselves, or to force investors to secure an FPIC, and to utilize traditional conflict resolution measures to prevent flashpoints, they have turned out to be predictors of reduced violence.

The extreme cases illustrated how Lanuza's political leaders have been able to reduce the incidence of violence and mobilize revenues from the local economy. The town is starting to be recognized by national and international development agencies as a good case of environmentally sensitive development, IPRA implementation, and conflict management in Eastern Mindanao. On the other hand, Lianga continues to experience cycles of political violence, insurgency, and violent land disputes—stalling more development interventions and economic investments.

Both Lanuza and Lianga are part of the epicenter in eastern Mindanao where the CPP-NPA-NDF operate and are therefore vulnerable to unending rebellion-related violence, displacement, government neglect, and investor abandonment. Yet Lanuza has remarkably low levels of violence compared to Lianga, and local

people boast of traditional and hybrid conflict-resolution methods used to resolve differences in the former, and their absence in the latter.

In the meantime, Lianga fits more easily into the description of a conflict-ridden fragile state, with its poor revenues, inequitable land distribution, resilient underground economy, and ubiquitous violence. Inter- and intra-tribal and clan feuding remains an enduring source of violence in the town.

There are at least four important and strategic policy implications underlined by this paper.

First, *there is a need to fully examine and evaluate the causal linkages and effects outlined in this paper that has emanated from a confluence of identity and rebellion-related conflict impinging upon resource disputes and contestation.* These studies should expand to other places outside Mindanao where the IPRA has been implemented.

Second, *the NCIP must be empowered to act immediately on IP's ancestral domain claims despite the unwillingness of local government units to undertake the same in their areas.* Further delays in the design and implementation of a counterpart law in the Bangsamoro and in other places of extreme conflict will lead to an escalation of violence, such as what is currently happening in areas of Maguindanao and North Cotabato.

Third, *it is important to prevent the further militarization of the IPRA process especially in CADT areas located in rebellion or insurgency hotspots, to avoid a convergence of land disputes, tribal conflicts, and insurgent and counter-insurgent violence.* The military and other top national security officials, including the officers of the country's intelligence and police forces must be removed from the IPRA implementation process. This is urgent and relevant because under the Duterte government, the NCIP was placed under the thumb of the counter-insurgency agencies that are engaged in a total war to eradicate communist insurgency.

Finally, *the process of monitoring conflict incidents and costs beyond the Bangsamoro region and beyond the five-year panel data*

for southern and eastern Mindanao used in this study must be achieved as soon as possible. Conflict monitoring must be expanded across other areas of the country, using platforms such as the Conflict Alert database of International Alert Philippines. ■

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