RISING IN THE EAST

A REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF THE ISLAMIC STATE'S OPERATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Amira Jadoon, Nakissa Jahanbani, and Charmaine Willis | July 2020

Rising in the East:
A Regional Overview of the Islamic State's Operations in Southeast Asia

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Cover Photo: A still image from an unofficial Islamic State video released in early 2016 entitled
"Bay`ah of a group of mujahidin in the Philippines to the Caliph of Muslims."

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Executive Summary

Starting in mid-2014 with Isnilon Hapilon of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines, a series of Southeast Asian militants pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Despite this early support, it was only in 2016 that the Islamic State publicly acknowledged some of these oaths of allegiance and declared Hapilon of ASG to be the regional emir.[1][2] As the Islamic State began to lose territory in 2016 and 2017, it encouraged Southeast Asian supporters to travel to the Philippines to wage jihad rather than make *hijrah* (migrate) to the Middle East.[3] Since 2016, a wave of lethal attacks, including a number of attempted and successful suicide attacks, claimed by the Islamic State across the region have led to heightened concerns about the group's mounting influence within Southeast Asian countries. In addition to containing local affiliates aligned with the Islamic State, regional authorities are concerned about the interconnectedness of Islamic State-linked activity across Southeast Asian countries and the experience provided by returning fighters from Iraq and Syria. The case of Bahrun Naim illustrates the multifaceted problem. Naim—who had joined the Islamic State's Southeast Asia fighting unit Katibah Nusantara in Syria in 2014[4]—is believed to have orchestrated connections across disparate Islamic State-linked factions in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.[5]

As the first in a series of four reports that map the Islamic State's presence in Southeast Asia, this report provides a broad regional perspective on the nature of the Islamic State threat with the remaining reports providing country-level analysis of the Islamic State in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The key question explored within this report is the following: *what are the overarching characteristics of Islamic State-linked operations across Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines between 2014 and 2019?* In answering this question, the report ascertains how the Islamic State's arrival has impacted regional militancy. This report's findings map the dispersion of Islamic State influence in Southeast Asia through a detailed examination of Islamic State-linked activity in the region.[6] *Chapter 1* of the report provides contextual information on the interconnectedness of the Islamic State in the region, notable country-level variations in the nature of the threat, and counterterrorism structures in each country. *Chapter 2* presents an overview of the geographical and operational trends of Islamic State-linked attacks between January 2014 and July 2019. *Chapter 3* maps out the Islamic State's operational alliances, and *Chapter 4* concludes the report highlighting key security implications.

Key Findings

Total Islamic State-linked Attacks and Total Lethality (Killed and Wounded) across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia Peaked in 2016 and 2017

- Collectively, across the three countries, a total of 115 successful, foiled, or failed Islamic State-linked attacks were reported between January 2014 and July 2019.

- The years 2016 and 2017 stand out as those with the heaviest Islamic State operational activity, accounting for 62% of all attacks recorded. Relatedly, the number of individuals killed and injured

1   The term emir generally refers to the Islamic State's recognized leaders of specific affiliates or provinces.

2   "ISIS Officially Recognises Pledges of Allegiance from Militant Groups in the Philippines," *Straits Times*, February 15, 2016.

3   Robert Windrem, "ISIS Recruits Fighters for the Philippines Instead of Syria," NBC News, September 12, 2017.

4   There is conflicting information on the precise date of Naim's travel to Syria: some sources report that Naim traveled to Syria in 2014, while others report the year to be 2015. For example, see "Inside the home of Indonesia's most notorious IS militant," BBC, January 18, 2016, and Irna Sinulingga and Noor Zahid, "Authorities: IS Fighter in Syria Plots Terror in Indonesia," Voice of America, December 15, 2016.

5   Edo Karensa, "Who Is Jakarta Attack Mastermind Bahrun Naim?" Jakarta Globe, January 18, 2016.

6   An attack or arrest is considered to be 'Islamic State-linked' if the individual arrested or involved in an attack was reported to be associated with the Islamic State in some capacity. See Methodology section for more details.

in Islamic State-linked attacks was the highest in 2016 (446) and dropped by almost 50% in 2017 (223).[7]

• Despite a decrease in the number of attacks in 2019 compared to 2018, there was a 31% increase in 2019 in the total lethality of Islamic State-linked attacks compared to the previous year.

Decreasing Success Rates After 2017 Peak

• After steadily increasing from 2014 to 2017, the success rate (i.e., attacks that were not foiled or failed) of Islamic State-linked attacks declined across the region in 2019, dropping from a 79% attack success rate in the peak year, 2017, to 46% in 2019.

• The declining success rate of attacks is indicative of sustained pressure on Islamic State-linked militants across the region: in the Philippines, core Islamic State-linked militants were decimated during the Battle of Marawi in 2017, while in Indonesia and Malaysia, security forces have leveraged new counterterrorism laws.

Numbers Killed and Injured per Attack in 2019 Exceeded All Previous Years, Underpinned by a Proliferation of the Use of Suicide Attacks

• With the exception of a drop from 2016 to 2017, fatalities and injuries per attack from January 2014 to July 2019 increased over time across the region. In 2019, the average number of people affected per attack surpassed prior years, averaging about four deaths and nine people injured per attack.[8]

• This pattern mirrors Islamic State affiliates' use of suicide attacks, which increased over the time period of analysis from no suicide attacks in 2014 to 54% of all Islamic State-linked attacks in 2019 (seven out of 13 attacks).

Focus on Civilian Targets, But Higher Lethality Rates Associated with State Targets

• Islamic State-linked individuals and groups across the region demonstrated a preference for civilian targets throughout the time period, except in 2016 when target preference was almost equally divided between civilian and state targets. Attacks more often occurred in public spaces such as markets and parks, as exemplified by the bombing of a night market in Davao City, Philippines, in late 2016.

• The number of casualties attributed to attacks on domestic security and military forces, however, was three times the number attributed to attacks in public spaces, with about 21 people and seven people killed/wounded per attack, respectively. This was largely due to the focus on military targets by Islamic State-linked militants in the Philippines and on local police in Indonesia.

Regional Operational Alliances

• The report identifies at least six local militant groups that committed Islamic State-linked attacks in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines between January 2014 and July 2019. A group is considered an Islamic State operational ally in this report if it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State *and* claimed an attack that was concurrently claimed by the Islamic State. While there are other groups with alleged links to the Islamic State, this report focuses on those Islamic State affiliates

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7   The Battle of Marawi in the Philippines took place in 2017, and although it included a considerable number of fatalities, the report's database only codes individual attacks reported during the time period of the battle, rather than code the entire battle as one attack. Overall, the siege of Marawi by militants included subsequent direct clashes between the army and militants, which are not considered to be attacks for the purposes of this report, as many of these were operations by security forces. Moreover, a large proportion of those killed during the time period of the battle included militants who are not included in total fatality count in this study's database. See the Methodology section for more details.

8   Lethality per attack does not include direct clashes between militants and the Philippine army during the Battle of Marawi in 2017, in which the latter attempted to take back control of the region.

that appear to have an operational link with the Islamic State. These groups, primarily based in Indonesia and the Philippines, include Jamaat Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and Mujahideen of Eastern Indonesia (MIT) in Indonesia, and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Maute Group, Ansarul Khilafah Philippines (AKP), and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in the Philippines.

An overview of the Islamic State's activity across the region highlights three main points of concern:

- upticks in numbers killed and wounded per attack in 2018 and 2019;
- a marked increase in the use of suicide attacks, especially in 2019; and
- a significant number of foiled and failed attacks in Indonesia and Malaysia as well as associated arrests.

It is also important to be cognizant of country-specific trends, such as the increased role of women in suicide attacks in Indonesia, independent plotters in Malaysia, and the general presence of returning foreign fighters. While in the Philippines and Indonesia, the most important dimension of the Islamic State threat may be the existing militant infrastructure offered by Islamic State operational alliances, in Malaysia, the primary threat exists in the form of independent plotters and radicalized individuals who present a pool of potential recruits for existing networks of militants in the region.

Introduction

In December 2015, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the now deceased leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, called on Muslims around the world to support the Bangsamoro struggle in the Philippines.[9] In late 2017, in the face of its territorial losses in the Middle East, the Islamic State released a video calling for its fighters to travel to the Philippines instead of Iraq and Syria.[10] The English-language video, made at the height of the Marawi siege, featured battle scenes and messages from various fighters and seemed to target a broad audience; it called on fighters from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and Singapore to migrate to Marawi. Another fighter in the video asks Muslims in neighboring countries, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and Singapore to join the Islamic State fighters in the Philippines. It was in 2017, however, that in an organizational redesign announced via its Al Naba news agency, the Islamic State added a new province to its list—*Wilayat Sharq Asiyya*—widely perceived to be a reference to its affiliates in Southeast Asia.[11] Such messages from the group are indicative of the importance of Southeast Asia for the Islamic State and suggest that the group perceives the region, specifically the Philippines, to be a viable option for expanding its presence.

Although the Islamic State's presence in Southeast Asia may not be known as one of its most prominent or notorious wilayat, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia have been showing increasing potential to become a prominent front for the Islamic State's global jihad. While these countries' authorities welcomed the news of al-Baghdadi's death in 2019, they expect the fight against the group's ideology and its influence to continue.[12] The overarching concern is that the demise of the physical caliphate may push the group to focus on spreading its ideology and influence through its global affiliates.

Given recent media coverage of Islamic State-linked attacks, militants, and arrests, and the five-month siege of Marawi in 2017 in the southern Philippines, it is hard to deny the presence of the Islamic State's ideology and operational presence in the region. The Battle of Marawi was the most significant Islamic State-related event in Southeast Asia, which began in May 2017 when a group of Islamic State-linked militants, led by the Isnilon Hapilon's ASG-Basilan faction and the Maute Group, captured the city of Marawi. Reportedly, about 600 militants waged an urban battle in the Lanao del Sur province of the Muslim-majority southern region of Mindanao until the city was finally recaptured by the Armed Forces of the Philippines in October 2017.[13] Against this backdrop, this report seeks to answer the following main questions:

> *How has the influence of the Islamic State shaped the contours of militancy in Southeast Asia over the past few years?*
>
> *What do trends in Islamic State-linked activity in the region reveal about the current and future status of the Islamic State in the region as a whole?*
>
> *Which local groups in the region emerge as the Islamic State's main operational alliances?*

Rising Concerns about the Islamic State in Southeast Asia

Militancy and the threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia is certainly not new. Since at least 2002, the

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9   Kirsten E. Schulze, "The Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia," *CTC Sentinel* 11:6 (2018).

10   Windrem.

11   "Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report 2019," Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report, Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, January 22, 2019; Zachary Abuza, "In Organizational Shake-Up, IS Names New Province in Southeast Asia," BenarNews, July 23, 2018.

12   Martin Petty and Rozanna Latiff, "After Baghdadi Death, Southeast Asia Expects Long Fight against Islamic State's Influence," Reuters, October 28, 2019.

13   Zachary Abuza, "Where Did the U.S. Go Wrong in the Philippines? A Hard Look at a 'Success' Story," War on the Rocks, June 2018.

Philippines, for example, has consistently ranked in the top 15 countries in the world impacted by terrorism (in terms of deaths), coming in ninth in 2018.[14] Indonesia has been plagued by militants primarily linked to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which was believed to have direct links to al-Qa`ida and linked to the deadly attack in Bali, Indonesia, in 2002 that killed 202 people, as well as the Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia (MIT). However the rise of the Islamic State and influence of its ideology has introduced new security concerns across the region. Prominent Islamic State-linked attacks include the suicide attack on a cathedral on the island of Jolo in the Philippines in 2019 and the suicide attacks in Surabaya, Indonesia, on May 13, 2018, which included several family members as perpetrators.[15] The Surabaya attacks involved the Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), which serves as an umbrella group for a number of pro-Islamic State subgroups in Indonesia; it was identified as a terrorist organization by the United States in 2017 and outlawed in Indonesia in July 2018.[16] In Malaysia, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for a series of coordinated bomb attacks and gunfights in its capital Kuala Lumpur in 2016, which has since triggered a high-alert security environment within the country.[17]

Overall, security personnel across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia have been concerned about three types of threats posed by the Islamic State: a) Islamic State-affiliated groups, specifically those that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and carry out attacks in its name; b) individual perpetrators drawing inspiration from its ideology; and c) fighters returning from Iraq and Syria who could bring violent extremism with them into their home countries.[18]

The concern about the Islamic State threat is evident in the three countries' efforts to thwart the threat via different mechanisms. All three countries have been active in their responses to tackle the threat, leveraging law enforcement and new counterterrorism laws. For example, Indonesia's parliament approved stringent anti-terrorism laws after the Surabaya suicide attacks, some of the deadliest in the country's history. Under the new laws, law enforcement can detain suspects of terrorism for much longer periods for time for investigations.[19] Indonesia also set up the Special Operations Command (KOOPSSUS) under the revised 2018 anti-terrorism law, a special military task force to support counterterrorism police units.[20] The new role for the military in internal security affairs is at least partially seen as triggered by the rising threat of the Islamic State. Similarly, Malaysia created its first multi-agency counterterrorism force National Special Operations Force (NSOF), which brings together members of the Malaysian Armed Forces, Royal Malaysian Police, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency.[21] In the Philippines, the counterterrorism focus has largely been on the use of military operations to prevent attacks from militants.

In addition, the three countries have made concerted efforts to share intelligence and conduct joint security operations to mitigate the threat of militancy since a lack of complete control over maritime traffic allows militants to move between the three countries with relative ease. In 2017, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines agreed to supplement existing maritime patrols with air patrols to secure

14   "Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism," Global Terrorism Index, Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019, p. 7.

15   Hannah Beech and Jason Gutierrez, "ISIS Bombing of Cathedral in Philippines Shows Group's Reach Into Asia," *New York Times*, January 28, 2019; *Learning from Extremists in West Sumatra* (Jakarta: Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2020), p. 12.

16   "US names Jamaah Ansharud Daulah as terrorist organization," *Jakarta Post*, January 11, 2017.

17   Beh Lih Yi, Oliver Holmes, and Luke Harding, "Isis Claims Responsibility for Jakarta Gun and Bomb Attacks," *Guardian*, January 14, 2016.

18   "Malaysia Says ISIS May Shift Operations to South-East Asia," *Straits Times*, November 27, 2019.

19   Jewel Topsfield and Karuni Rompies, "Indonesians Could Be Detained for Six Months under New Preventative Terror Laws," *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 15, 2016; Tabita Diela, "Indonesia Toughens up Anti-Terror Laws Days after Worst Attack in Years," Reuters, May 24, 2018.

20   John McBeth, "Indonesia's Military Tightens Its Anti-Terror Grip," *Asia Times*, August 8, 2019.

21   "Malaysia Creates Anti-Terror Force for Quick Response," *Straits Times*, October 28, 2016.

their shared boundaries in the Sulu Sea.[22] Such actions are intended to stem the flow of militants from Indonesia and Malaysia into the southern Philippines.

Given the ongoing concern and growing urgency about the Islamic State's influence in Southeast Asia, this report seeks to shed light on the operational trends in Islamic State-affiliated militancy across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the three countries with the highest levels of Islamic State-linked activity reported. This report is the first in a four-part series, and while it provides a regional overview of the Islamic State's operational trends in the region and background on its key operational alliances, subsequent reports in the series will provide country-level analysis and also identify how country-level trends diverge or converge with regional trends. Analysis from these two distinct perspectives allows for an assessment, to some degree, of the extent to which the Islamic State is pursuing a strategy that is coherent across the region. Moreover, the findings can help identify the overall direction of militancy in the region, which can inform collective security measures in Southeast Asia.

Components and Layout of the Report

In an attempt to better understand the regional trends of militancy associated with the Islamic State in Southeast Asia, the data and analyses presented in this report examine trends across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Although the Islamic State's Southeast Asian influence extends to Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, southern Thailand, Singapore, and Myanmar,[23] this report focuses on countries where the Islamic State's operational activity has been reported the most frequently. Outlined below are the key components of the report:

Chapter 1: The Emergence of the Islamic State in Southeast Asia

This chapter provides background information on the interconnectedness of the Islamic State in the region. For context, it also includes a brief discussion of some notable country-level variations in both the nature of the threat and counterterrorism structure in each country.

Chapter 2: Overview of the Islamic State's Operational Trends in Southeast Asia

The second chapter of the report provides an overview of Islamic State-linked activity in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia between January 2014 and July 2019, focusing on overall number of attacks, lethality, suicide attacks, and target selection. It also highlights how Islamic State-linked activity shifted across the three countries over the years.

Chapter 3: The Islamic State's Operational Alliances in Southeast Asia

Drawing on the data presented in Chapter 2, this chapter maps out the various local militant groups across the region that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and appear to have operational links with the Islamic State. The authors briefly discuss each group's motivations to align with the Islamic State.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Highlighting key regional trends in Islamic State-linked activity across the region, the final chapter discusses important regional security implications based on the findings of the report.

The analysis in this report draws on two original datasets on Islamic State-affiliated attacks and arrests that cover the time period January 2014 to July 2019, and also draws on open-source materials. Following the publication of this report, the Combating Terrorism Center will release three follow-up reports, each of which will examine the presence of the Islamic State in the Philippines, Indonesia,

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22   Kanupriya Kapoor and Fathin Ungku, "Southeast Asian Nations Step up Cooperation as Islamic State Threat Mounts," Reuters, June 4, 2017.

23   Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "The traction of transnational jihad in Southeast Asia," in *Global Jihad in Southeast Asia* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2019), pp. 7-18.

and Malaysia and the specific factors within each country that have facilitated the emergence and survival of the Islamic State.

Methodology and Definitions

The data presented in this report is based on an original database compiled by the authors. The database analyzed and coded 115 Islamic State-linked attacks (defined as all attempted attacks regardless of outcome) in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia from January 2014 to July 2019. Leveraging the attacks database, the authors also identified the Islamic State's operational alliances or affiliates in the region (i.e., groups involved in the planning or execution of attacks that were linked to the Islamic State). The sections below provide an overview of the methodology used for this report, the structure of the database, coding decisions, and, finally, data limitations.

Islamic State-linked Attacks and Operational Alliances

The event-level data is coded using English-language open-source materials on Islamic State-linked attacks in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Attacks included in the database are those in which the Islamic State was the primary or secondary group perpetrating the attack (i.e., where the Islamic State either directly claimed the attack or was suspected to be linked to these attacks by local officials).[24] As is discussed in Chapter 3, the Islamic State operated primarily through its affiliates in Southeast Asia. The methodology used to collect data on Islamic State-linked attacks as such accounts for attacks that were linked to the Islamic State, but also at times claimed by or linked to other local militant groups. Attacks that were linked to the Islamic State *and* another local group are identified as 'jointly claimed or linked attacks' and used to map the operational links between the Islamic State and local organizations.

The above components were developed in several stages. First, Islamic State affiliates in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia were identified through open-source research. For this, the authors reviewed reports from regional experts, think-tanks, and academics, such as the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), among others. This was followed by news searches (primarily through LexisNexis) to obtain relevant news articles of reported Islamic State attacks to identify which local groups were involved in the planning or execution of such attacks. Details of how relevant articles were coded are provided below. After a landscape of Islamic State activity and affiliates were collected, research assistants coded Islamic State and Islamic State-linked attacks in these three countries per the definitions provided below. For the purposes of this study, "Islamic State-linked" and "Islamic State elements" were both acceptable indicators of an Islamic State attack to be coded. Attacks that were framed as "Islamic State-inspired," in which there was no definitive connection to the Islamic State, were excluded from the database.

Islamic State-linked Attacks

The Islamic State-Southeast Asia attack database codes several variables that measure the magnitude and nature of attacks in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia between January 2014 and July 2019. As mentioned earlier, an incident was coded as an Islamic State-linked attack if it was either directly claimed by the Islamic State and/or if authorities suspected it to be linked to the Islamic State. For each of these attacks, variables pertaining to attacks' geography, operations, and lethality were coded to the extent that information was available in the public, open-source domain. Among other variables, ***location and date*** of the attack were coded at the state, province, and city level. ***Outcome of the attack*** was coded, specifically successful, failed (i.e., the attack was unsuccessfully executed by

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24   The authors are aware of the potential that at times local officials may incorrectly attribute attacks to the Islamic State, which may lead to overestimates of the Islamic State's presence in the region. However, the authors have no reason to suspect that locals may intentionally misattribute unclaimed attacks to the Islamic State in significant numbers, and relied on at least two or more sources to document the details of each attack.

attackers), or foiled. Foiled attacks include incidents where security personnel either disrupted the planning/formulation of an attack or where an attack was intercepted just before execution.[25] Specifics collected about the attacks included: whether or not an attack was *a suicide attack; type of weapon* used in the attack (i.e., explosives, direct fire, incendiary/arson, melee, or other); and *attack tactic* (i.e., area attack, direct assault, assassination, kidnapping, beheading, or other). *Attack targets* were coded, including non-combatant targets (i.e., educational institution, media organization, religious institution, health institution, NGO or aid organization, public spaces, or private citizens/property); state personnel (local law enforcement, local government, domestic national law enforcement, domestic national government, or federal government); paramilitary forces (i.e., government-sponsored paramilitary forces, non-governmental sponsored paramilitary forces); or international personnel (i.e., international security forces, including multinational forces, or foreign non-combatants, such as diplomats and international NGOs). The *lethality of each attack* (excluding attackers) was coded, including low and high estimates for total killed, as well as wounded in each attack, and lethality by targeted population, including civilians and domestic security and international security personnel. The authors define lethality as the total number of individuals killed and wounded in attacks. Lethality per attack is the average number killed and wounded per attack in a year or a month. In measuring lethality, the authors made a deliberate decision to include numbers wounded in addition to numbers killed; doing so provides a more comprehensive measure of a group's operational capacity and impact within a region, as well as a more accurate measurement of the true human cost of conflict. While it was difficult in some cases to precisely record data on the specific number of civilians killed versus security personnel and militants, the authors were able to find a sufficient number of sources that recorded overarching characteristics of incidents such as the total numbers killed and wounded, and the primary targets of attacks. As such, the data included in this report only covers variables for which the authors could find the most complete information.

Coding the Battle of Marawi

It is pertinent to note that although this study's database includes the time period of the Battle of Marawi, the report's database codes individual attacks perpetrated by militants during this time, as reported in open sources, rather than code the entire battle as one attack. This is because the siege of Marawi and direct clashes between the army and militants are not considered to be 'attacks' for the purposes of this report, as many Marawi-related incidents (and associated fatalities) included operations by the state against the militants. By disaggregating the Battle of Marawi into the individual attacks that occurred over the time period, one is better able to discern militant fatalities resulting from AFP operations from civilian fatalities.

However, the individual number of attacks that fall within the remit of this battle may be undercounted. Overall, the authors took the approach of coding individual attacks, which amounted to 13 attacks during the Battle of Marawi (May to October 2017) in the Lanao del Sur province. Of these, eight were recorded in May, one in June, and four in July and August. There was much variation in how open-source outlets reported the battle in terms of the number of attacks. Some sources reported the battle as one event, whereas others discussed individual attacks; the authors coded all attacks reported as separate events during the battle. In many cases, it was difficult to ascertain whether any fatalities occurred (e.g., where attacks were reported on medical facilities or burning down of buildings). In instances where it was not clear if any fatalities occurred, this was coded as unknown. Overall, the database records Islamic State-linked total fatalities in the tens (excluding militants killed) and total

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25   For this report's purposes, it was essential to have a holistic conceptualization of what constitutes foiled attacks. The underpinning motivation for this study is to gather a sense of the operational capabilities of the Islamic State and its affiliates in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. As such, "foiled attacks" refer to a range of cases. They include plots, whether in early stages or near-execution, uncovered by counterterrorism or law enforcement forces through various means of investigation.

wounded as over just over 100. It is certainly possible that reporters were unable to capture all of the individual attacks that took place during the Battle of Marawi, and fatalities were underreported. According to Amnesty International,[26] "restrictions on access to Marawi during the conflict have precluded any independent corroboration of official numbers." This means that the number of attacks and fatalities during the battle from open-source outlets may be underreported in the authors' database.

The Islamic State's Operational Alliances

Borrowing from commonly used definitions of operational cooperation between organizations, the authors conceptualize the Islamic State's operational alliances in Southeast Asia as those groups that (a) openly expressed support for the Islamic State or pledged allegiance, *and* (b) were reported to have been involved in some stage of conducting attacks, ranging from the planning stage to the execution stage,[27] which were also linked to the Islamic State. The authors do not include groups that may have expressed support for the Islamic State, but were not necessarily reported to have been involved in any Islamic State-linked attacks.

Data Sources and Quality Control

Over the course of several months, two research assistants coded Islamic State-linked attacks, which were then quality controlled by the report authors. Attacks were coded from a variety of English-language open sources. These included news reports, academic studies, and reports by think-tanks and researchers. For news reports, LexisNexis was employed to obtain relevant news articles, using search strings for different variations of each group's name. For example, variations of the Islamic State's name (e.g., ISIS, Islamic State, Daesh, Da'esh, ISIL, among others) and attack (e.g., attack* OR fight* OR clash* OR target* OR bomb* OR shoot* OR assault* OR assassinate* OR fire* OR explos* OR explod* OR thwart* OR shot* OR IED*) were searched together to identify Islamic State-linked attacks. Other variables were filled in through open-source searches on Google and academic databases. The authors cross-referenced and supplemented the attacks coded for the report with other databases, including the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and Jane's Intelligence. Any events not captured by the report's methodology were individually researched and included in the database to ensure completeness.

Caveats and Limitations

As previously mentioned, this database collects information on Islamic State-linked attacks, which were then used to identify the Islamic State's local affiliates with operational links to the Islamic State. As such, the database does not include, instances of attacks conducted by Islamic State-affiliated groups before these groups pledged allegiance to Islamic State Central.[28]

Once local groups like ASG pledged allegiance in mid-2014, it is possible that they continued to operate under their original name, as well as in partnership with the Islamic State. The report's database only focuses on attacks that specifically denoted some degree of Islamic State involvement. This is to

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26   "Philippines: 'Battle of Marawi' leaves trail of death and destruction," Amnesty International, November 17, 2017.

27   Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

28   This report uses the term 'Islamic State Central' to refer to the collection of individuals/entities in Iraq and Syria responsible for overseeing the Islamic State and coordinating with its global provinces. These include 1) the caliph (in the observed period, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), 2) the Shura (Consultative) Council, and 3) the Delegated Committee. 'Islamic State Central' does not refer to the leadership of the Islamic State's various *diwan* (Ministerial Departments) or the emirs (leaders) of its recognized global provinces. For more on the Islamic State's leadership structure, see Cameron Glenn, "Al Qaeda v ISIS: Leaders & Structure," Wilson Center, September 28, 2015, and Nick Thompson and Atika Shubert, "The anatomy of ISIS: How the 'Islamic State' is run, from oil to beheadings," CNN, January 14, 2015.

differentiate from attacks in which affiliates were acting of their own accord versus those in which they were Islamic State-partnered. It is possible that some attacks conducted and claimed by Islamic State affiliates (post pledges of allegiance), which were excluded from the database, did include Islamic State involvement 'behind the scenes.' However, if there was no publicly available report of Islamic State involvement, the authors erred on the side of caution and excluded such attacks. It is possible thus that the data presented in this report underestimates Islamic State's operational influence in the region, and presents a more conservative perspective.

Additionally, as mentioned above, to provide a holistic view of Islamic State involvement, the dataset includes attacks that were directly claimed by the Islamic State (as reported by the Islamic State's own news channels such as Amaq or via other media reports) as well those where local officials suspected Islamic State involvement. For the directly claimed attacks, although the authors did not acquire a complete collection of Amaq statements regarding claims to attacks conducted by Islamic State affiliates in the region, cross-references with other databases, such as the GTD, that do capture all Islamic State-claimed attacks ensured that all officially claimed attacks were included.

As with other terrorism-related data collection efforts, there is a possibility for under- or over-reporting of events. For instance, some attacks, such as the May 2018 Surabaya suicide attacks in Indonesia, deviate so markedly from the norm that there are dozens of news and academic articles about them. Others, such as those that occurred during the Battle of Marawi in the Philippines, are more commonplace in the conflict context and may be therefore underreported. Relatedly, as this database is compiled from open-source coding, it may be that data from classified sources would illustrate different trends. Additionally, because failed/foiled attacks are coded, it is possible that open-source media failed to capture those foiled/failed attacks that were not deemed newsworthy or were kept out of the public eye.

The data collected for this report was primarily from English-language, open-sources. As such, this data collection effort could have overlooked attacks reported in local language news sources. While translated news sources are included in LexisNexis searches, it is possible that LexisNexis did not include the entire spectrum of local language newspapers, especially those not considered to be 'mainstream' newspapers. However, given the publicity generated by Islamic State-linked attacks, there are likely to be only a few instances, if any, that were not reported in national newspapers.

Chapter 1: The Emergence of the Islamic State in Southeast Asia

Before providing an overview of the Islamic State's operational activity across three Southeast Asian countries, this chapter provides important background information regarding the arrival of the Islamic State across the region. In particular, the chapter outlines the interconnected nature of the Islamic State across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Yet, despite the linkages across the three countries, there are some key differences in the nature of the threat at the country-level that appear to be primarily rooted in the nature of the existing militant infrastructure in each country as well as differences in counterterrorism approaches. The authors consider it important to discuss these nuances to provide the reader with a deeper context to understand trends in the Islamic State's operational activity across the region.

Image from video released June 2016: "Bay `ah of a group of mujahidin in the Philippines to the Caliph of Muslims."

The Interconnectedness of the Islamic State across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia

The first Southeast Asian militants pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in mid-2014 with the first pledge coming from Isnilon Hapilon, a prominent leader of Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and Santoso of the Eastern Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT).[29] Soon after, pledges followed from a faction of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) under Esmail Abubakar, Ansarul Khilafah Philippines, Dawlatul Islamiyah Waliyatul Masrik (DIWM), and the Maute Group.[30] DIWM was reportedly an attempt by Hapilon's faction to join forces with other local pro-Islamic State jihadis.[31]

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29   "Chapter 2. Country Reports: East Asia and Pacific Overview," *Country Reports on Terrorism*, U.S. Department of State, 2015; Marielle Ness, *Beyond the Caliphate: Southeast Asia* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center), accessed March 20, 2020.

30   "Islamic State East Asia," Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government, accessed March 20, 2020.

31   Alexander Sehmer, "Philippines: Islamic State a Potential Unifying Factor for Militants," *Terrorism Monitor* 15:5 (2017).

In Indonesia, militant leaders Aman Abdurrahman and Abu Bakar Baasyir pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in late 2014 while making efforts to form an umbrella group of pro-Islamic State sub-groups in Indonesia the following year, JAD.[32] All of these groups adhered to a violent jihadi ideology prior to the Islamic State's existence, but since pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in November 2015, the groups composing JAD have operated under the Islamic State brand, with some of their attacks claimed by the Islamic State. Elements within the JAD network also facilitated connections between Indonesian militants and those in Mindanao.[33]

However, it was not until 2016 that the Islamic State publicly acknowledged these groups' oaths of allegiance and declared Hapilon of ASG to be the regional emir.[34] While Hapilon was named by the Islamic State as the emir, several other individuals such as Abdullah Maute and Omar Maute held leadership positions.[35] When the Islamic State started to lose territory in 2016 and 2017 in Iraq and Syria, it began to encourage Southeast Asian supporters to travel to the Philippines to wage jihad rather than make hijrah to the Middle East.[36] In 2017, the Islamic State also announced a new province named Wilayat Sharq Asiyya, widely perceived to be a reference to its affiliates in Southeast Asia.[37] Many experts worry that the declaration of a wilaya in Southeast Asia will facilitate experienced militants of the Philippines in combining forces with new recruits from Malaysia and radicalized prisoners from Indonesia.[38]

In this context, the establishment of a single Islamic State wilaya in Southeast Asia has the potential to change the contours of militancy in the region by providing a united ideological and physical platform to draw in militants of various backgrounds. There are indications that the influence of the Islamic State has enabled unprecedented cooperation amongst extremist groups across the region—cutting across national and ethnic divisions. For example, an Islamic State video that emerged in June 2016 included Indonesian, Malaysian, and Filipino militants pledging allegiance to Isnilon as the emir of the Southeast Asia region.[39] Malaysian militants who are not bound to any Filipino clan have played important roles within the Basilan faction of the Abu Sayyaf Group, providing expertise and facilitating operations.[40] The group Ansarul Khilafah Philippines benefited from the help of Indonesians; for example, Ahmad Saifullah Ibrahim, who was killed in a battle in the Philippines in November 2015, had become a channel for funding to Indonesian militants providing weapons to the East Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT).[41] Ibrahim had formally joined Jemaah Islamiyah in 1994 at the age of 20 and trained in Camp Hudaibiyah, which was a JI camp established in collaboration with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).[42] Many of these groups have operated within Malaysia; the Indonesia-based Jemaah Islamiah (JI), for example, operated a unit in Malaysia that facilitated JI's operations by fund-

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32   Rendi A. Witular, "Sons, top aides abandon Ba'asyir over ISIL, form new jihadist group," *Jakarta Post*, August 13, 2014; Muktita Suhartono and Richard C. Paddock, "Indonesia Sentences ISIS recruiter to death," *New York Times*, June 22, 2018; Schulze, "The Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia;" Kirsten E. Schulze and Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Making jihadis, waging jihad: transnational and local dimensions of the ISIS phenomenon in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Asian Security* (2018): p. 128.

33   "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2017, p. 16.

34   "ISIS Officially Recognises Pledges of Allegiance from Militant Groups in the Philippines."

35   "Islamic State East Asia."

36   Windrem.

37   "Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report 2019," *Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report* (Singapore: Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019); Abuza, "In Organizational Shake-Up."

38   David Ignatius, "Southeast Asia Could Be a Haven for Displaced Islamic State Fighters," *Washington Post*, August 18, 2016.

39   "Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia," Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, October 25, 2016, p. 13.

40   Ibid., p. 10.

41   Ibid., pp. 10-11.

42   Ibid., p. 11.

raising, transferring money, and providing space for training, especially in the state of Sabah on the island of Borneo.[43] More recently, in September 2019, Malaysian police arrested around 16 individuals with connections to the Islamic State; while three of these individuals were Malaysians, 12 of them were Indonesians. The arrested suspects were reportedly actively trying to recruit other Indonesians and Malaysians and planning attacks on specific politicians and non-Muslim groups.[44] The examples above illustrate how the activities or movement of Islamic State-linked militants are not necessarily constrained by national boundaries. What remains unclear, however, is the nature of links between Islamic State Central and pro-Islamic State groups in Southeast Asia. While Islamic State Central is believed to have provided its Philippine affiliates with support in the form of "financing, media, foreign fighters, and recognition of its leader" in earlier years, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command recently stated that it was not aware of any support from Islamic State Central in 2019.[45]

The individual and collective security responses by the governments of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia (in addition to other countries in the region) to the Islamic State threat is indicative of the gravity of the problem. Concern over the influence of the Islamic State's ideology across Southeast Asia has been growing since 2014, and there have been a series of attacks, thwarted plots, and arrests across the region—as shown by the data in this chapter. Such concerns have resulted in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia agreeing to pool resources and share intelligence to stem the rise of Islamic State influence and counter the flow of militants and terrorist financing across the archipelagic region.[46] The siege of Marawi in the southern Philippines by Islamic State-linked militants catalyzed counterterrorism cooperation in the region, especially in terms of trilateral patrolling of the Sulu-Sulawesi Sea.[47] The Sulu-Sulawesi Sea is encircled by the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, creating a relatively porous one million square kilometer tri-border area that has long been a conduit for organized crime and terrorist threats.[48] As such, a key area of concern for all Southeast Asian countries faced with the Islamic State threat is the porous borders that can facilitate cross-border attacks. To address such cross-border challenges, six Southeast Asian countries recently signed a new intelligence pact whereby defense officials agreed to meet every two weeks to exchange intelligence and data on militant groups and violent extremists.[49]

Country-Level Variation in the Nature of the Threat

Despite the cross-national connections of Islamic State-linked militants, the current nature of the Islamic State threat differs in each country. The Philippines faces a much more complex and multidimensional terrorism threat than does Indonesia, due to the sheer diversity of groups operating in the former and ongoing instability in its southern region where groups like the ASG and BIFF seek independence and sharia law.[50] While Indonesia and Malaysia have generally experienced more tolerant versions of Islam, as opposed to strict salafi interpretations, with small populations of Islamist movements, the Philippines has long experienced growing tensions and resentment within its Muslim-majority regions that have triggered nationalist-separatist/nationalist-Islamist and jihadi-salafi movements. For example, in the Philippines, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) began engaging the government for autonomy for Muslim Filipinos back in the 1970s, and the ASG, a ji-

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43   "Malaysia: Extremism & Counter-Extremism," Counter Extremism Project, June 8, 2017.

44   "Malaysia Arrests 16 for Suspected ISIL Links, Plotting Attacks," Al Jazeera, September 26, 2019.

45   "Operational Pacific Eagle-Philippines," Lead Inspector General Report to the US Congress, June 30, 2019.

46   "Islamic State: Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia Pledge to Thwart Penetration of South-East Asia," ABC News, June 22, 2017.

47   Prashanth Parameswaran, "What Did the ASEAN Trilateral Terror Meeting Achieve?" *Diplomat*, June 28, 2017.

48   Prashanth Parameswaran, "Confronting Threats in the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas: Opportunities and Challenges," *Diplomat*, June 10, 2016.

49   "Southeast Asian Nations Launch Intelligence Pact to Counter Terrorism Threats," Channel News Asia, January 25, 2018.

50   Jacob Zenn, "A Closer Look at Terrorism in Southeast Asia," War on the Rocks, August 19, 2014.

hadi-salafi group, emerged in the early 1990s.[51] While it is considered unlikely that the Philippines will again experience an Islamic State-linked attack comparable to the Marawi siege, the country has continued to experience Islamic State-linked attacks post Marawi. In June 2019, two suicide bombers who were suspected to have been trained by the Islamic State attacked a military base in Sulu,[52] the third suicide attack in that year alone. As will be discussed in the next report in this series, whether the Islamic State threat in the southern Philippines is contained in the medium- and long-term will, to some degree, depend on the success of reconstruction efforts in the post-Marawi siege era, mitigating the grievances of violence-affected Muslim populations and dismantling the existing militant infrastructure.

Historically, Indonesia has primarily dealt with the militant group JI, which had cells across Southeast Asia. Prior to the threat of the Islamic State, jihadism in Indonesia was mostly linked to the JI, which was founded in 1993 after breaking off from Darul Islam in 1992, with the goal of transforming Indonesia into an Islamic State.[53] While the group has local roots, it is also considered to be a transnational movement with links to al-Qa`ida, and with affiliates in Malaysia and the Philippines. JI was linked to a bombing campaign in the 2000s, which included the 2002 Bali attacks.[54] However, since then, the JI has prioritized Islamic propagation over violence, largely due to the setbacks it experienced in the aftermath of the bombings in the early 2000s.[55] Another prominent group in Indonesia is the MIT, based just outside Poso in the Central Sulawesi region that roots its grievances in the 1998-2007 Christian-Muslim communal conflict in Central Sulawesi.[56] MIT emerged from Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid's (JAT) Poso branch and from 2010 onward, engaged in a jihad against the Indonesian police in the Poso region and between 2011 and 2015, set up several training camps.[57] JAT was formed in 2008 by former JI leader Abu Bakar Baasyir and splintered over Baasyir's support for the Islamic State.[58] Unlike the JI, however, MIT does not have a history of maintaining very deep links with transnational groups.[59] MIT's leader Santoso, who was killed in 2016, was one of the first Indonesians to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi.[60] In this way, the ideology of the Islamic State, which emphasizes the creation of a caliphate, is new to the region and one which has provided a unifying platform for multiple organizations. Additionally, while Islamist militants linked to al-Qa`ida in the past largely directed their attacks against symbols of Western influence, the Islamic State-influenced militancy in the country has been directed toward other religious minorities within the country (such as the Christian community) or Indonesian state actors.[61]

The Islamic State threat in Indonesia hardly forms a coherent and united front, which, despite making it less coherent operationally, also makes it challenging to tackle; it is largely comprised of pledges of support by individuals as well as smaller local movements such as the MIT.[62] The main Islamic State movement in Indonesia, however, began as a loose network known as Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD),

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51   Zachary Abuza and Colin P. Clarke, "The Islamic State Meets Southeast Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, September 16, 2019.

52   Kenneth Yeo, "Suicide Bombing: Is This the End of Filipino 'Warrior Culture'?" *Diplomat*, July 12, 2019.

53   Julie Chernov Hwang, "Dakwah before Jihad: Understanding the Behavior of Jemaah Islamiyah," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 41:1 (2019).

54   Mona Kanwal Sheikh ed., *Global Jihad in Southeast Asia* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2019).

55   Hwang, "Dakwah before Jihad."

56   "Marawi, 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," *IPAC Report* 38 (2017); Schulze and Liow, p. 134.

57   Schulze and Liow.

58   Greg Fealy, "Indonesian and Malaysian Support for the Islamic State," USAID Report, January 6, 2016.

59   Jacob Zenn, "East Indonesian Islamist Militants expand focus and area of operations," *Terrorism Monitor* 11:11 (2013).

60   "Marawi, 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia."

61   Sheikh, *Global Jihad in Southeast Asia*.

62   Sheikh, "The Traction of Transnational Jihad in South East Asia," pp. 7-18.

which was established in 2015[63] and is linked to the Surabaya bombings in May 2018 in East Java.[64] JAD is the largest and most prominent group in Indonesia's pro-Islamic State network, in addition to MIT (which was prominent until the death of Santoso in mid-2016).[65] It is believed that JAD, Katibul Iman, and MIT maintained their own connections with Indonesian Islamic State leaders based in Syria and received direct instructions from them in terms of conducting attacks within Indonesia.[66]

The Surabaya attacks threw a spotlight not only on JAD, but also on its willingness to use women and children in suicide attacks and the changing tactics of local extremist movements.[67] Overall though, JAD serves as an umbrella group consisting of several other subgroups, which has allowed it to extend its influence across the country.[68] Individuals affiliated with JAD have been linked to a range of activities within Indonesia including executing attacks, recruitment, and fundraising; recently, for example, the Indonesian police arrested an individual in West Sumatra who was collecting funds for JAD, which had been wired from at least five different countries including Trinidad and Tobago, Maldives, Germany, Venezuela, and Malaysia.[69] While Indonesian Islamic State-affiliated groups have largely focused their efforts locally, drawing on local grievances and striking targets locally, some Indonesian Islamic State supporters traveled to the Philippines to participate in the Battle of Marawi in 2017.[70]

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63   Some sources report that JAD was formed in October 2014. For example, see Farouk Arnaz and Heru Andriyanto, "Who Is JAD, the Group Blamed for Attacking Indonesia's Chief Security Minister?" Jakarta Globe, October 13, 2019.

64   Schulze.

65   Ibid.

66   Ibid.

67   Sidney Jones, "How ISIS Has Changed Terrorism in Indonesia," *New York Times*, May 22, 2018.

68   Schulze.

69   "Police Track Foreign Funding of IS-Linked JAD," *Jakarta Post*, July 26, 2019.

70   "Marawi, the 'East Asia Wilaya' and Indonesia."

From an Islamic State video titled "Inside the Khilafah 3," which was produced by "al-Hayat Media Center" and posted online on August 20, 2017. The video urged fighters to travel to the Philippines instead of Iraq and Syria.

In addition, foreign fighters have also played an important role in Indonesia; there have been some reports of Indonesian militant networks of Uighurs, who have arrived from China's far-western regions.[71] There are also concerns that Indonesian prisons are increasingly becoming incubators of radicalization and places of recruitment.[72] As will be discussed in the third report in this series, the evolution of the Islamic State threat in Indonesia will be largely shaped by sustained efforts to capture and prosecute Islamic State operatives within the country, as well as taking measures to prevent further radicalization and recruitment through countering violent extremism measures.

Based on the data collected by the authors, in contrast to the Philippines and Indonesia, Malaysia only experienced one "successful" Islamic State-linked attack between January 2014 and July 2019: an attack in July 2016 on a nightclub near Kuala Lumpur that resulted in eight injured.[73] Unlike the Philippines and Indonesia, Malaysia has not experienced sustained levels of extremist violence, although regional extremist groups have reportedly transited money and supplies through the country in past years.[74] Malaysia is also known to be the meeting place for a well-known conference of al-Qa`ida operatives in January 2000 who met in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the planning of the 9/11 attacks.[75]

But in contrast to the Philippines and Indonesia, there is no local group in Malaysia that has pledged allegiance or expressed support to the Islamic State. Malaysia's initial link with the Islamic State began when Malaysians started to join Katibah Nusantara, the Islamic State's Southeast Asian unit in Syria,

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71   Randy Fabi and Agustinus Beo Da Costa, "Indonesia Turns to China as Ethnic Uighurs Join Would-Be Jihadis," Reuters, January 6, 2016.

72   "Support for 'Islamic State' in Indonesian Prisons," Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, January 19, 2015.

73   Marc Lourdes, "Islamic State Launches First Successful Attack in Malaysia," CNN, July 4, 2016.

74   "Terrorism in Southeast Asia," Congressional Research Service Report, May 17, 2017.

75   "Chapter 5," *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 22, 2004.

in November 2014.[76] Many suspects arrested by Malaysian authorities in thwarted attacks have been linked to Katibah Nusantara, including in the attack in Jakarta in 2016.[77] Additionally, the Islamic State influence has largely manifested itself through online forums, as has much of its recruitment. For example, according to Malaysian officials, in 2015, 75% of Islamic State militants were recruited through social media.[78] In addition, recruitment in Malaysia includes members of the professional middle class as well as underemployed youth.[79]

While the threat of militancy in Malaysia has generally been limited compared to the Philippines and Indonesia, in the 1990s, the country did face a threat from the extremist group Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM)—which consisted of Malaysian fighters from the Soviet-Afghan war—and local networks of other regional groups.[80] Jemmah Islamiyah, in particular, is considered to have influenced Malaysia's militant landscape in important ways; JI recruited from within Malaysia, which allowed it to provide locals with physical and military training, and perhaps more importantly, introduced the notion of cross-national violent jihad to the Malaysian Muslim community.[81] The effect of these efforts was evident in the involvement of Malaysian JI operatives in several attacks such as the Bali attacks in 2002 and 2005.[82]

Since 9/11, the Malaysian government has focused on tackling these threats, which resulted in (a) a general decline of JI in Malaysia and (b) militants fleeing to Indonesia and subsequently to Syria in 2011.[83] In the era of the Islamic State, the Malaysian government is particularly concerned about the spread of Islamic State ideology and radicalization and mobilization of disparate individuals, given reports of Malaysians traveling to the Middle East and conducting suicide attacks.[84] An analysis of the Islamic State's personnel documents relating to foreign fighters between early 2013 and late 2014 revealed the presence of several Malaysian fighters.[85] Muhammad Wanndy Bin Mohamed Jedi, designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by the United States in March 2017 and killed in May 2017, was a Syria- and Iraq-based Malaysian Islamic State operative who not only claimed responsibility for the 2016 attack in Malaysia, but was also instructing Malaysia-based Islamic State cells.[86] In recent years, there have been a number of reports emerging from Malaysia of arrests and convictions of individuals linked to the Islamic State and/or planning Islamic State-linked terror plots within Malaysia. For example, in May 2015, Malaysian counterterrorism division officers arrested six men, which included two Malaysian Air Force personnel, under the penal code, which could give them a maximum of 30 years in prison.[87] Moreover, there are growing concerns in Malaysia about the Islamic State's potential to recruit women and teens in ways that JI never did.[88] The Islamic State threat in Malaysia has yet to evolve into a coherent organizational entity or develop geographical hotspots in ways that it has in the Philippines and Indonesia. Thus far, restrictions on militant Islamists through

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76   David Martin Jones, "The Rise of Islamism and Single-Party Rule in Malaysia," Middle East Institute, August 2, 2016.

77   Ibid.

78   "74% of Malaysian ISIS militants recruited through social media, says Zahid," Malaysian Insider, March 25, 2015.

79   Zachary Abuza, "Sri Lanka attacks: why the wealthy and successful become suicide bombers," *South China Morning Post*, April 28, 2019.

80   "Malaysia: Extremism & Counter-Extremism."

81   Nicholas Chan, "From Jemaah Islamiyah to Islamic State in Malaysia," in *Global Jihad in Southeast Asia*, pp. 59-74.

82   Ibid., p. 63.

83   "Malaysia: Extremism & Counter-Extremism."

84   "ISIS Threat to South-East Asia," *Straits Times*, January 14, 2016.

85   Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, and Don Rassler, *The Caliphate's Global Workforce: An Inside Look at the Islamic State's Foreign Fighter Paper Trail* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2016).

86   "Top Malaysian ISIS Terrorist Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi Is Dead: Police Chief," *Straits Times*, May 8, 2017; "Treasury Designates Indonesian and Malaysian ISIS Operatives and Leaders," U.S. Department of the Treasury, March 30, 2017.

87   "6 Charged for Plotting Terror Attacks in Malaysia," *Millennium Post*, May 1, 2015.

88   Chan.

the use of legal tools and operations by the Malaysian Special Branch have constrained the space for pro-Islamic State organizations to operate, and any thwarted attacks have attributed to lone wolves or very small cells.[89] Overall, the broader concerns for Malaysia are rooted in the threat from regional rather than local Islamic State-linked groups, maritime security, returning fighters, and individuals inspired by Islamic State ideology.

There are also differences in how the threat is being addressed in each country; for example, while counterterrorism strategies are largely implemented by the military in the Philippines, in Indonesia it is primarily the national police, led by Detachment 88, its counterterrorism unit of the police.[90] More recently though, Indonesia set up the Special Operations Command (KOOPSSUS) under the revised 2018 anti-terrorism law—a special military task force to support counterterrorism police units.[91] In Malaysia, police forces have focused on arresting and detaining returning Islamic State veterans as well as those who planned to travel to Iraq or Syria. In October 2016, Malaysia created its first multi-agency counterterrorism force, National Special Operations Force (NSOF), which combines members of the Malaysian Armed Forces, Royal Malaysian Police, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency.[92] Malaysia also has extensive counterterrorism laws that make joining the Islamic State a criminal act, which includes possession or dissemination of terrorist materials.[93]

Both the Philippines and Indonesia have received considerable foreign funds to combat the threat of terrorism.[94] While the Philippines has been a recipient of U.S. aid, training, and troops, Indonesia has also received direct training and advice from the Australian government, which has considerably enhanced its counterterrorism capability; the support was largely motivated by the Bali bombings in 2002 and subsequent attacks including the attack on the Australian embassy in Jakarta in September 2004.[95] Indonesia's special counterterrorism police unit, Counterterrorism Special Detachment 88 or Densus 88, formed in the wake of the 2002 Bali bombings by JI, has utilized its intelligence gathering and tactical capacity to made critical gains in the fight against the Islamic State.[96] Indonesia has also benefitted from intelligence sharing with the United States and Australia; for example, in late 2015, a series of raids undertaken by Densus 88, which led to the arrest of six Islamic State-affiliated militants, was a result of tips provided by the U.S. FBI and Australian Federal Police.[97] In March 2018, Australia signed an agreement with several Southeast Asian countries to share intelligence and work together on developing legal infrastructures and mechanisms to tackle extremism on social media.[98] Efforts to cooperate in this domain appear to be partially underpinned by a shared concern about returning battle-hardened fighters from Iraq and Syria.[99]

Preliminary assessments of the counterterrorism capacity of the Philippines versus Indonesia indicate that Indonesian counterterrorism efforts may be more effective than the Philippines'.[100] While the Philippines' military has made important gains, these are often unsustainable due to Philippine

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89   Schulz and Liow.

90   Zenn, "A Closer Look at Terrorism in Southeast Asia."

91   McBeth.

92   "Malaysia Creates Anti-Terror Force for Quick Response."

93   Chan.

94   Scott McKay and David Webb, "Comparing Counterterrorism in Indonesia and the Philippines," *CTC Sentinel* 8:2 (2015).

95   Ibid.

96   For a more detailed discussion about Densus 88's counterterrorism capabilities, see Ibid., p. 19; Paul Marshall, "Conflicts in Indonesian Islam," Hudson Institute, May 31, 2018; and Greg Barton, "How Indonesia's counter-terrorism force has become a model for the region," *Conversation*, July 1, 2018.

97   "Indonesian Police Hunt for More Suspects over Foiled Terrorist Attacks," *Guardian*, December 20, 2015.

98   Alison Bevege, "Australia, Southeast Asia to Share Intelligence to Fight Terror," Reuters, March 17, 2018.

99   Ibid.

100 McKay and Webb.

law enforcement, which remains a weak and corruption-ridden institution.[101] Amongst other factors, Indonesia has greatly benefited from the direct training provided to its counterterrorism units that has enhanced its investigative and forensic capabilities, as well as cyber intelligence gathering used in the prosecution of terrorists.[102] In Malaysia, the efforts and professionalism of police operations and its intelligence agency, the Special Branch, underpinned by stricter laws have contributed to its ability to arrest and detain suspects.[103] Overall, both the nature of the threat and counterterrorism strategy and capacity on the ground in each country have shaped the Islamic State threat within each country, as well as across the region. In light of the territorial dismantling of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, Islamic State survival and brand longevity are highly dependent on the group's ability to establish successful global affiliates. While prominent battles and attacks such as the Battle of Marawi and the Jolo church bombings dominate headlines, there is a need to understand the evolution of Islamic State tactics, targets, and lethality across the region since its emergence in order to assess its behavior in the medium- and long-term.

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101   Ibid.

102   Ibid.

103   "Six Charged in Malaysia over Terror Links," *Straits Times*, August 13, 2016.

Chapter 2: Overview of the Islamic State's Operational Trends in Southeast Asia

This chapter of the report provides an overview of the Islamic State's operational activity across three Southeast Asian countries, analyzing trends at the regional rather than country level. The trends and patterns presented in the next few sections aggregate the data collected for the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. While subsequent country reports in this series will examine the Islamic State's operational activity at the country level, the authors consider it important to analyze high-level trends across the region as a whole; a high-level assessment of Islamic State-linked activity across the region can provide useful insights for collective security strategies.

This chapter presents the data in the following order: (a) an overview of the geographical locations of Islamic State activity across the region and how it progressed over the years; (b) a temporal overview of attacks and numbers killed/injured; (c) outcomes of attacks; (d) target selection; and (e) use of suicide attacks.

2.1 Geographical Overview of the Islamic State's Presence across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia

This section provides a geographical depiction of Islamic State-linked attacks that took place across the region between January 2014 and July 2019. Table 2.1 presents a summary of the data, in terms of total attacks in each of the three countries, over the years. Figure 2.1 (a) shows aggregated attacks across the region, while Figures 2.1. (b) - 2.1 (f) show how the geographical location of the attacks shifted each year.

Table 2.1: Total Attacks Across the Region, 2014 - 2019

Country/Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019*	Total
Indonesia	0	5	14	7	10	6	42
Malaysia	1	2	6	5	6	3	23
Philippines	0	1	18	22	5	4	50
Total	*1*	*8*	*38*	*34*	*21*	*13*	*115*

January through July 2019

As shown in the table above, the region experienced a total of 115 attacks between January 2014 and July 2019, which includes successful, foiled, or failed attacks. The years 2016 and 2017 stand out as the years with the heaviest Islamic State operational activity, accounting for 62% of all attacks in the database.

Figure 2.1 (a): Regional Trends in Islamic State-linked Attacks and Total Killed and Wounded, 2014-2019
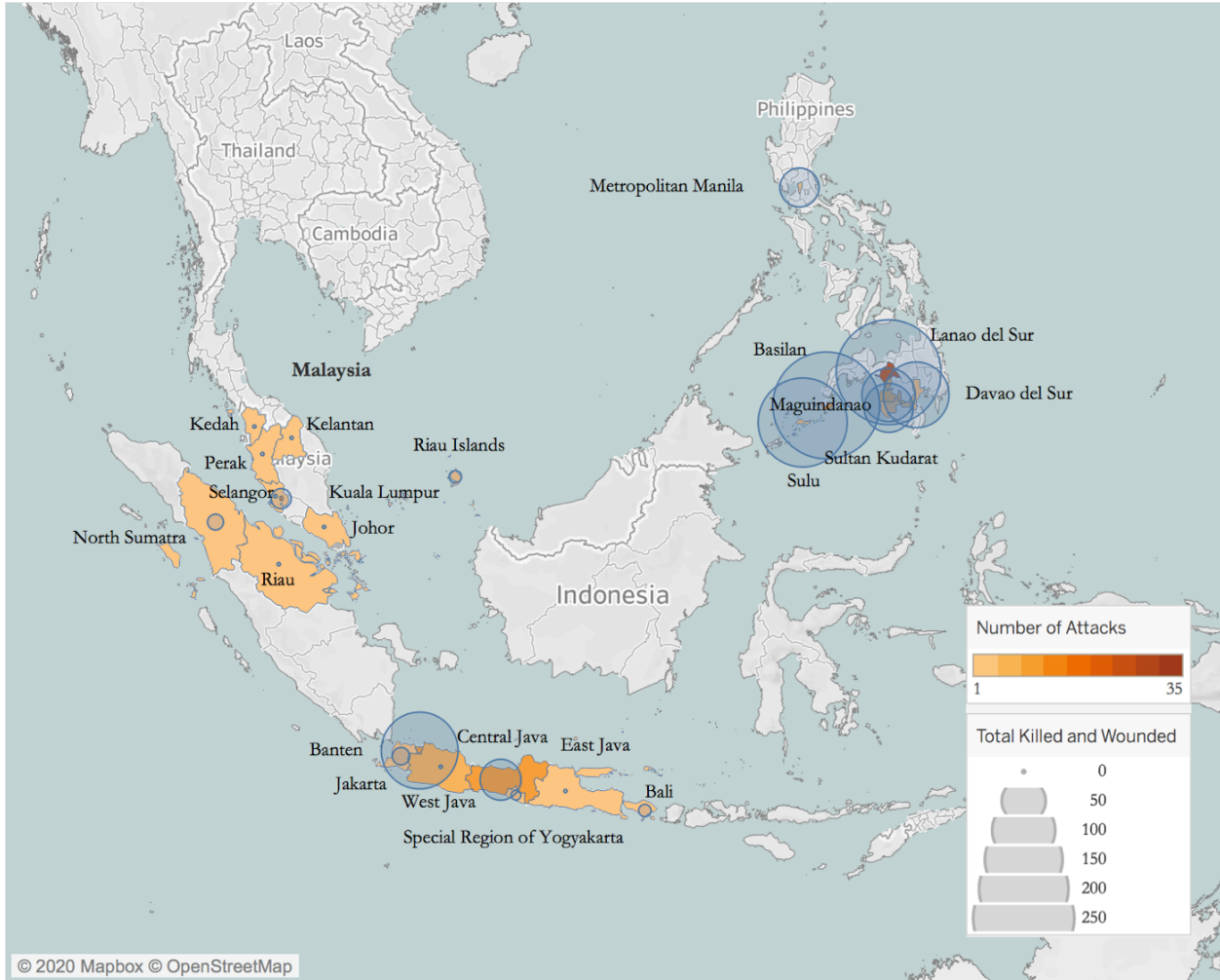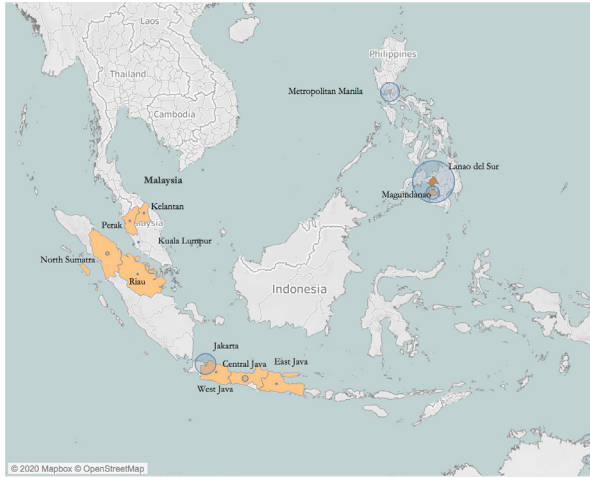

(b) 2014/2015

(c) 2016

(d) 2017

(e) 2018

(f) 2019

Note: Larger maps are provided in the Appendix.

Progression of Islamic State Activity

Overall, Figure 2.1 (a) shows that the highest intensity of attacks (attempted and successful) was in the Philippines in the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Basilan, and Maguindanao in the Mindanao region, followed by Indonesia's East, Central, and West Java provinces. The Lanao del Sur province of the Philippines experienced a total of 24 attempted attacks whereas Basilan experienced nine attacks. In contrast, Indonesia's Central Java province, its most heavily affected province, experienced at least 11 attempted attacks. Of the three countries, Malaysia had the lowest levels of Islamic State activity in terms of attempted or successful attacks.

As shown in Figures 2.1. (b) - 2.1 (f), Islamic State operational activity was first observed across the Philippines and Indonesia in 2015, with a foiled attack in Malaysia reported in late 2014.[104] In the

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104 "Malaysia Foils Islamic State-inspired Plot to Bomb Pubs, Discos and Carlsberg Brewery," *South China Morning Post*, August 19, 2014.

Philippines, there was a single attack in Sultan Kudarat that killed and wounded eight people whereas the five reported attacks in Indonesia failed to result in any casualties; two of these attacks failed while three were foiled.

The year 2016 was when Islamic State operational activity picked up across all three countries. In the Philippines, it spread to the provinces of Basilian, Davao del Sur, and Lanao del Sur, which experienced a series of attacks resulting in a total of 351 deaths and injuries. For the first time, Indonesia experienced Islamic State activity with casualties: North Sumatra and Jakarta experienced five attacks, which resulted in a total of 71 deaths and injuries. JAD was responsible for several Islamic State-linked attacks in Indonesia in that year, gaining notoriety for a gun and suicide attack in Jakarta that left four attackers and four civilians dead.[105] Malaysia experienced a series of attempted attacks in Kuala Lumpur, the majority of which failed, with one attack resulting in a total of eight injured.[106] This first successful Islamic State-linked attack in Malaysia was reportedly directed by the Malaysian Islamic State fighter in Syria, Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi.[107]

Islamic State activity in 2017 remained relatively low in Indonesia and Malaysia, with seven attempted attacks in Indonesia and five attempted attacks in Malaysia, all of which were foiled in the latter. However, Islamic State-linked activity remained high in the Philippines' Lanao del Sur province and for the first time spread to its capital region of Manila, the first time an Islamic State-linked attack occurred outside of Mindanao. Notably, it was in mid-2017 when the Battle of Marawi, the capital of Lanao del Sur, commenced and lasted for a five-month period, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of militants, security personnel, and civilians.[108] The Battle of Marawi likely played a role in concentrating Islamic State activity in the Philippines in 2017.

In 2018, Islamic State activity in Indonesia was the highest in Central Java province with a total of four attacks resulting 29 deaths and injuries. In the Philippines, Islamic State activity was primarily observed in Maguindanao where there were three attacks and a total of 41 deaths and injuries. In the first seven months of 2019, Islamic State activity was mitigated in most provinces in the Philippines but spread to Sulu province, in the southern region of Mindanao, for the first time, where two attacks resulted in a total of 156 deaths and injuries. In Mindanao, clashes between Islamic State-linked militants and the Philippine army have continued in the year 2020.[109] In Indonesia and Malaysia, there were no reported causalities in the first seven months of 2019, primarily due to a considerable number of either failed or foiled attacks in both countries. Subsequent country reports will go into further detail about the nature of the attacks in each country.

2.2 Regional Temporal Trends

This section provides a brief overview of the total number of attacks recorded in the report's database across all three countries between January 2014 and July 2019, and the corresponding deaths and injuries (total affected). Table 2.2 presents the total number of attacks and associated deaths and injuries in each year across the region, with 115 successful and attempted attacks resulting in a total of 990 deaths and injuries. Figure 2.2 depicts the number of attacks graphically over a monthly timeline.

Overall, the region as a whole experienced a total of 115 attacks (successful, failed, and foiled), which resulted in a total of 909 deaths and injuries. Table 2.2 and Figure 2.2 clearly indicate 2016 as the year with the highest levels of Islamic State activity across the region with a total of 35 attacks, and

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105　"JAD: the extremist group that recruits families to spread terror in Indonesia," *South China Morning Post*, May 14, 2018.

106　Lourdes.

107　Ibid.

108　Robert Postings, "The Battle of Marawi: A Brief Summary," International-Review.org, December 24, 2017.

109　For example, see "Southern Philippines: Abu Sayyaf Suspects Killed, Soldiers Wounded in Firefight," BenarNews, April 23, 2020.

421 deaths and injuries. The following year, 2017, came close to 2016's attack numbers at 31 attacks, however, the total number of deaths and injuries were approximately half of 2016's.

Table 2.2: Total Attacks and Numbers Killed and Wounded, 2014-2019

Year	Attacks	Killed and Wounded
2014	1	0
2015	8	8
2016	38	446
2017	34	233
2018	21	131
2019*	13	172
Total	*115*	*990*

*January through July 2019

Figure 2.2: Regional Temporal Trends in Attacks, 2014-2019
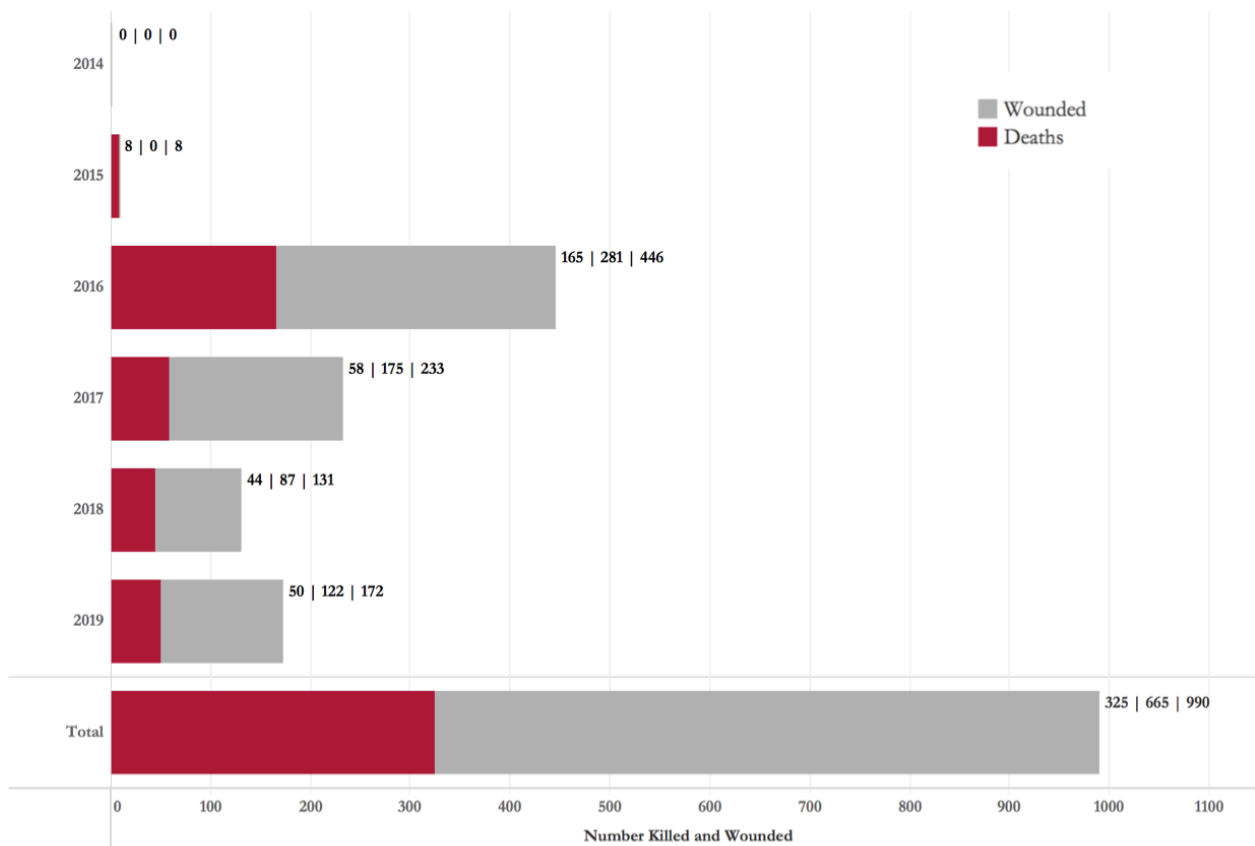

Attacks
Running Sum of Attacks
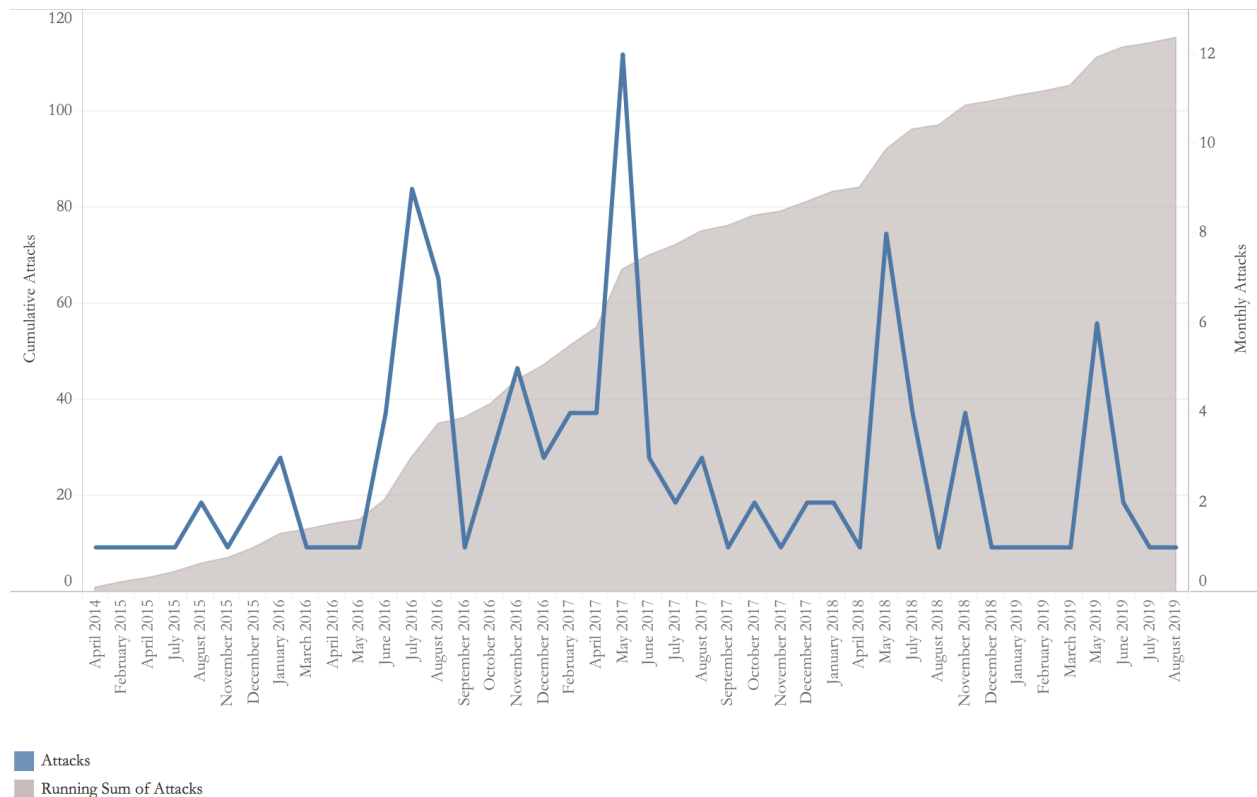
2.3 Lethality

Figures 2.3 (a) and 2.3 (b) depict the total lethality (killed and wounded) of attacks over time and the lethality rate per attack, respectively. As observed in Figure 2.3 (a), the total number of deaths and injuries steadily declined between 2016 and 2018, however the total deaths and injuries in the first seven months of 2019 exceeded the total amount in 2018, potentially indicating the beginning of an upward trend. The downward trends in years 2017 and 2018 are likely linked to the Battle of Marawi in 2017; Islamic State-linked militants may have been largely preoccupied with the siege of Marawi during the five months in 2017, and the lower number of attacks in 2018 may be a direct result of the loss

of several Islamic State affiliates' leaders during the Marawi battle, most notably Isnilon Hapilon.[110]

An analysis of Islamic State lethality per attack provides a slightly different perspective; while there was a decline in lethality in terms of both deaths and injuries per attack between 2016 and 2018, the drop is more precipitous for deaths than for injuries. In 2019, there was a much sharper uptick in injuries per attack compared to deaths, with 9.4 injured per attack reflecting an increase of more than double compared to 2018 and the highest recorded across all years. A likely contributing factor for this uptick in lethality rate could be the increased use of suicide attacks across the region. While the Islamic State affiliate in Indonesia first employed this tactic in prior years, it first emerged in the Philippines in 2018 and 2019 (discussed later).

Figure 2.3 (a): Total Killed and Wounded, 2014-2019*

January through July 2019

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110   Pieter van Ostaeyen, "OSINT Summary: Suspected SVBIED attack in the Philippines' Basilan suggests potential shift in Islamic State-affiliated militant tactics," *Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Monitor*, August 7, 2018.

Figure 2.3 (b): Wounded and Killed per Attack, 2014-2019*

Number Killed and Wounded

■ **Deaths**
■ **Wounded**
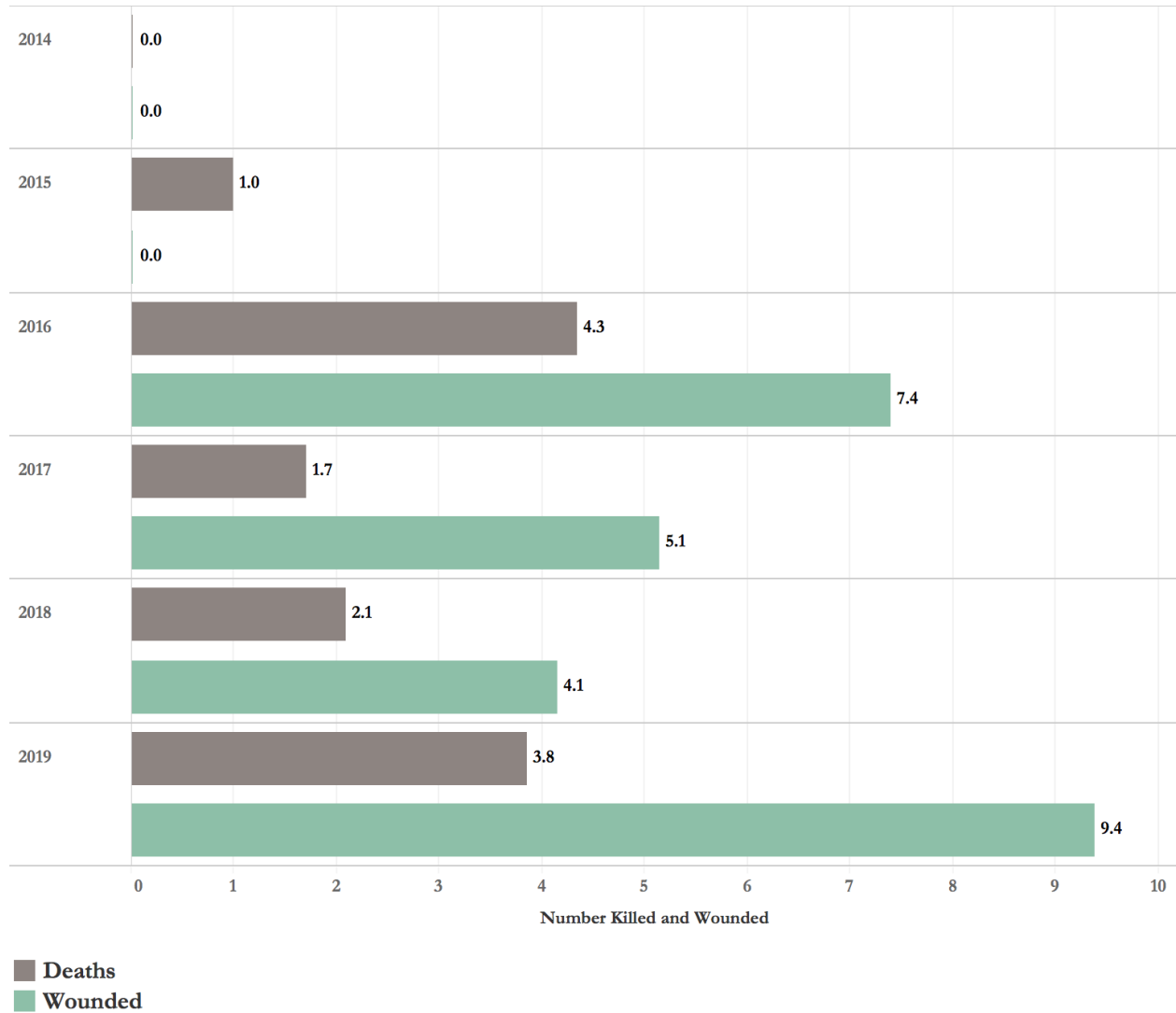
*January through July 2019

2.4 Outcomes of Attacks

Not all Islamic State-linked attacks attempted in the region were met with success from an operational perspective as a substantial number resulted in failed or foiled attacks. Table 2.4 shows the overall number of attacks in each country, which fell into the success, failed, or foiled categories, whereas Figure 2.4 depicts the trends across the region.

Overall, about 60% of all planned attacks resulted in success, whereas about 9% resulted in failures and about 30% were foiled. However, a closer look at these numbers shows intriguing variation at the country level. When it comes to the group's inability to successfully carry out the attack (absent law enforcement intervention), Islamic State-linked militants most frequently failed in their attacks in Indonesia, whereas there were no failed attacks reported in the Philippines. This may reflect the more expansive militant infrastructure available to militants in the Philippines that enhances their efficacy in terms of planning and executing attacks.

The variation in the number of foiled attacks is likely to be closely related to the nature of counterter-

rorism operations in each country. The country with the most foiled attacks was Malaysia where 86% of all attempted total attacks were foiled. Since 2014, Malaysia has been especially focused on mitigating the influence of the Islamic State, particularly focusing on individuals who traveled to Syria and Iraq. According to Ayob Khan Mydin, the former chief of Malaysia Special Branch counterterrorism division, arrested suspects linked to the Islamic State were found to have hopes of creating networks with regional and global Islamic State cells.[111] Malaysia's new terrorism law, passed in 2015—the Prevention of Terrorism Act—was specifically driven by the goal of combating the threat associated with the Islamic State.[112] Under this law, suspected terrorists can be detained for up to two years, monitored electronically, and enrolled in deradicalization programs. Empowered by new authorities, the Royal Malaysian Police has been aggressive in arresting individuals linked to terrorism. Individuals arrested in association with such foiled attacks have generally tended to be individuals who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, but are also linked to regional groups like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, ASG, Maute Group, and the Royal Sulu Force.[113] The high foil rate of attacks in Malaysia is also likely a result of a lack of an organizational Islamic State presence in the country. In comparison, although Indonesia's percentage of foiled attacks was much lower than in Malaysia, they were significant: about 31% of all reported attacks were foiled.

The Philippines stands apart from Indonesia and Malaysia in terms of the low numbers of reported foiled attacks. Rather than being an indication of the Philippines security apparatus' capacity in foiling plots, this may be more of a reflection of the fact that the fight against the Islamic State is largely conducted by the military rather than law enforcement. Given that the fight against the Islamic State in the Philippines has frequently involved direct clashes between the military and militants, it is likely that many Islamic State attacks were preempted in operations that often resulted in the killing rather than arrests of militants, and thereby were not necessarily reported as 'foiled' attacks.[114] Relatedly, the low number of foiled attacks in the Philippines could also be linked to a lack of public reporting of events due to the less transparent nature of military operations compared to law enforcement activities.

The underlying factors that potentially explain the wide variation in the outcomes of these attacks are further explored in the country reports in this series. These variations at the country level are likely a reflection of several factors: (a) training/experience of militants in each country, (b) existing militant infrastructure, and (c) counterterrorism infrastructure. In general, though, Islamic State-linked militants operating in the Philippines appear to be driving the overall 'success' rate of such attacks, whereas trends in Malaysia have influenced the overall 'foiled attacks' levels. These trends indicate that the presence of Islamic State-linked militants is the most coherent in the Philippines and the weakest in Malaysia. Indonesia seems to fall somewhere between the two where Islamic State-linked militants have had a considerable impact in terms of successful attacks and lethality, but have also faced significant challenges from the state's counterterrorism efforts.

Figure 2.4 shows how these trends varied over time. The year 2015 stands out as the year with the highest proportion of failed and foiled attacks; failed attacks made up 25% of all attacks whereas 63% of all attacks were foiled. Failed and foiled attacks both peaked in 2015, and the authors observe a lower percentage of attacks falling into these two categories in subsequent years, indicating the increasing efficacy of Islamic State-linked militants; for example, in 2017 there were no failed attacks whereas in 2016 and 2019 failed attacks only made up about 8% of all attacks. The high percentage of foiled attacks in 2015 could be due to the weak organization of Islamic State-linked militants in Southeast

111   "Malaysia foils Islamic State-inspired Plot to Bomb Pubs, Discos and Carlsberg brewery."

112   Bilveer Singh, "Prevention of Terrorism: Relevance of POTA in Malaysia," *RSIS Commentary* No. 75 (2015): p. 2.

113   Kevin Fernandez and George Lopez, "Terror Threat in Malaysia: Warning Signs," *RSIS Commentary* No. 152 (2019).

114   For example, see Amy Chew, "Philippine army kills 28 pro-IS militants, preempts Eid Fitr bombings," Channel News Asia, June 12, 2018; Jeoffrey Maitem, "Philippines: Soldier, 4 IS-Linked Militants Killed in Southern Clashes," BenarNews, March 3, 2020.

Asia in their early years. Even though the percentage of foiled attacks declined over the years, the continued trend in foiled attacks is indicative of the sustained pressure on Islamic State-linked militants across the region.

Table 2.4: Regional Foil and Failure Trends, 2014-2019

Country	Successful Attacks	Failed Attacks	Foiled Attacks	Total Attacks	% of Successful Attacks
Indonesia	21	8	13	42	50%
Malaysia	1	2	20	23	8%
Philippines	48	0	2	50	96%
Total	*70*	*10*	*35*	*115*	*61%*

*Figure 2.4: Regional Foil and Failure Trends, 2014-2019**
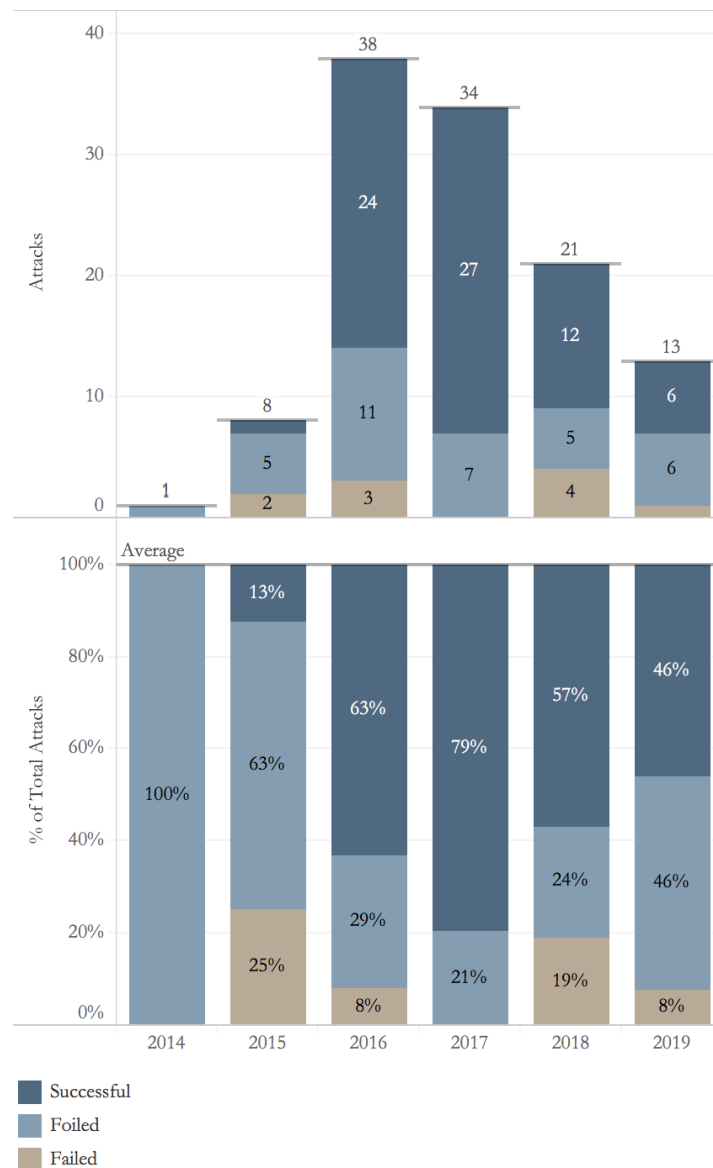
*January through July 2019

2.5 Regional Target Types

This section shows data on Islamic State top target choices across the three countries and how its lethality varied by target type. Figure 2.5. (a) shows the overall breakdown of attacks targeting civilian versus state attacks, while Figures 2.5 (b) and 2.5 (c) show attacks by specific target types within the broader categories, as well as the variation in lethality by these sub-categories, respectively.

Figure 2.5 (a): Regional State and Civilian Targets, 2014-2019*
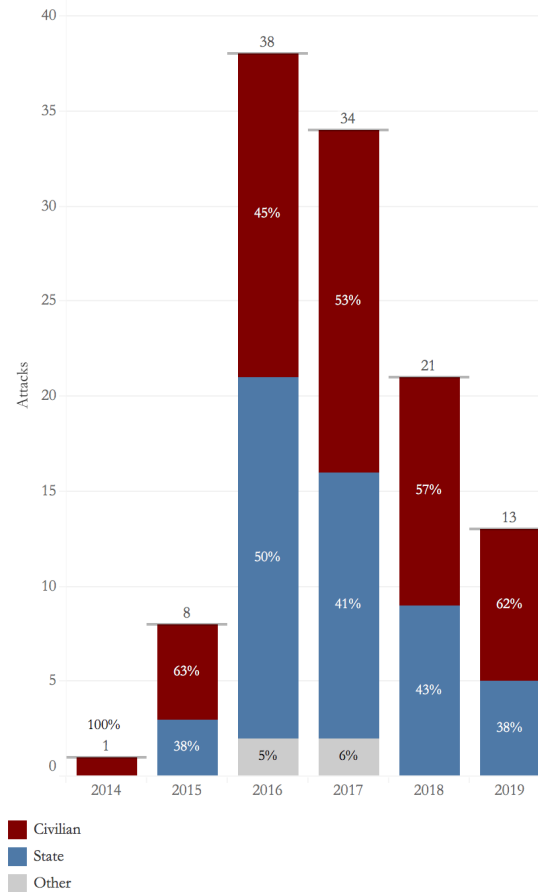
*January through July 2019

In general across the region, Islamic State-linked attacks were directed against civilian targets more frequently than they were against state targets; in 2015 and 2019, more than 60% of attacks were directed toward civilian targets. The only year where attacks against state targets exceeded civilian targets was 2016, and from 2017 onward, there appears to be a steady trend toward an increase in attacks on civilian targets. As discussed further in subsequent country chapters for the Philippines and Indonesia, the regional split is driven by trends observed in the Philippines where the vast majority of attacks were directed toward civilians post 2017.

Figure 2.5 (b): Target Breakdown, 2014-2019
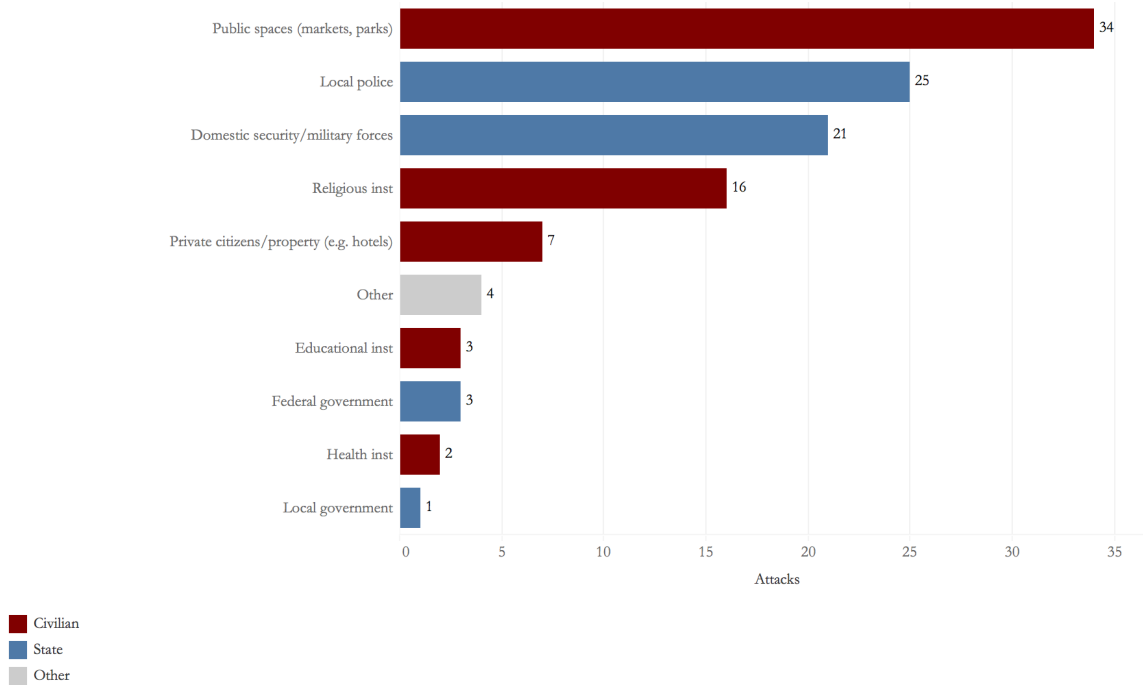
Figure 2.5 (c): Number Killed and Wounded by Target Type, 2014-2019*
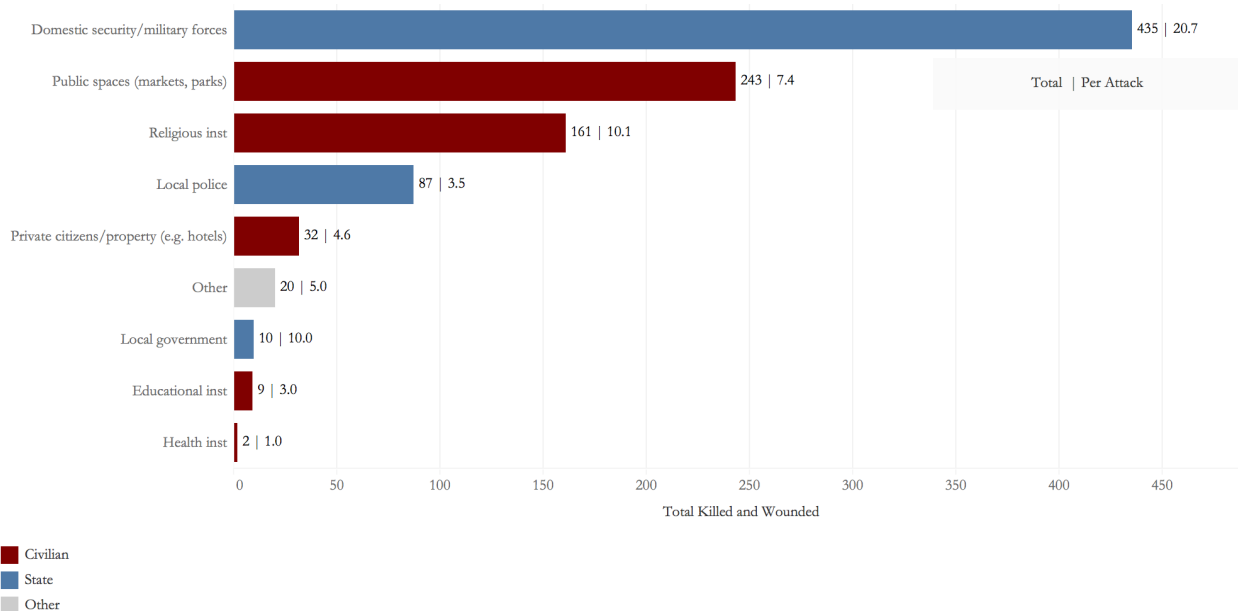
* The bars in the figure reflect total killed and wounded, as well as the numbers killed and wounded per attack in each target category.

As shown in Figure 2.5 (b), public spaces such as markets and parks were the most common targets for attacks (30% of all attacks), which is not surprising given that soft targets are easier to access. However, even though overall attacks against civilian targets made up 60% of all attacks (see Figure 2.5 (a)), Islamic State-linked perpetrators did make concerted efforts to provoke the state by frequent-

ly targeting the local police and military forces, which accounted for 40% of all attacks, especially in 2016. The remainder of the targets primarily consisted of civilian institutions such as religious, educational, and health institutions. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, attacks against domestic military forces, which tend to be a hard target, yielded the highest level of deaths and injuries, as depicted in Figure 2.5 (c). Interestingly, this is in striking contrast with the Islamic State's other affiliates, such as Islamic State Khorasan, which tends to claim high lethality primarily via its attacks against civilian targets.[115] As the authors will explore in-depth in the country-level reports, the higher casualty rate associated with military and security force targets is primarily driven by Islamic State militants' focus on the military in the Philippines, supplemented by a large number of attacks on the local police in Indonesia. In the Philippines, the high lethality was often a result of direct clashes between Islamic State-linked militants and the AFP especially between 2015 and 2017, the year of the siege in Marawi.

2.6 Regional Trends in Suicide Attacks

The Islamic State and its affiliates are generally notorious for relying heavily on the use of suicide attacks. Yet as shown in Figure 2.6, suicide attacks did not constitute the bulk of Islamic State-linked attacks in its early years, although there was a notable increase in the use of the tactic in 2018 and 2019.

Figure 2.6: Regional Trends in Suicide Attacks, 2014-2019*
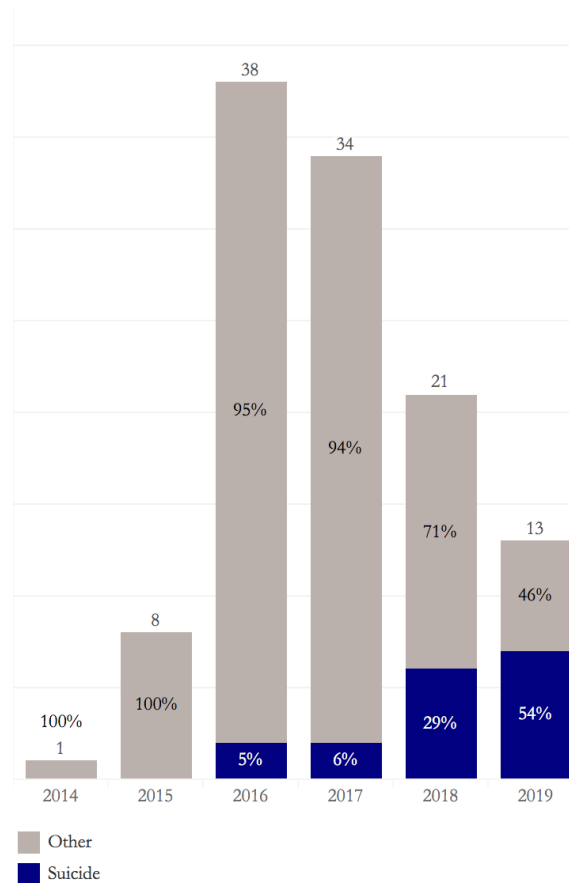
*January through July 2019

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[115]   Amira Jadoon, *Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2018).

In general, across the region, the data shows an increase in the proportion of suicide attacks versus other types of attacks. While no attempted or successful suicide attacks were reported in 2015, suicide attacks made up 29% of all attacks in 2018 and more than 50% in the first seven months of 2019.

It is interesting to note that the initial presence of the Islamic State was not necessarily associated with its trademark tactic of suicide attacks and that it became more prevalent in 2018 and 2019. This could be due to two reasons. First, it is possible that returning or foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria post-2017 imported the tactic into the region. In the Philippines, for example, many of the suicide bombers post mid-2018 have been foreigners not just from other Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, but also from Morocco and Egypt.[116] Another possibility is that the tactic was adopted more broadly out of desperation due to an increased crackdown on Islamic State militants across the region over time, or to increase the overall lethality of the Islamic State in Southeast Asia.

The growing trend in the use of suicide attacks by Islamic State affiliates in Southeast Asia is interesting as it runs parallel to that of Islamic State Khorasan, the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[117] Often, groups rely on the use of suicide attacks to sustain high levels of causalities in their attacks. As the authors will discuss in the next three reports in the series, much of the use of suicide attack tactics can be attributed to Indonesia across the years (in terms of year of adoption and in overall magnitude) while the Philippines only experienced suicide attacks in 2018 and 2019, and Malaysia's only reported suicide attack attempts were in 2019. In the country reports, the authors will shed light on other factors that could be driving these trends.

The Islamic State's Southeast Asian Front

While the Islamic State's Southeast Asian presence is not limited to the three countries included in this regional analysis, the authors focused on Islamic State-related activity in Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia since the Islamic State has notably been the most active (operationally) in these three countries. Overall, the arrival of the Islamic State in the Southeast Asian region appears to be reshaping the local landscape. For one, it has enabled cooperation amongst disparate groups, which has heightened concerns about cross-national movement of militants and provided militants with the resources to become more lethal. In addition to sharing tangible resources, linking to an overarching Islamic State narrative provides a common ideological platform for regional groups to cooperate and cast a broader recruitment net.

The arrival of the Islamic State has also impacted militancy in terms of tactics and actors employed; for example, there has been a notable rise in the use of suicide attacks as a tactic across the region, as well as the use women and children as perpetrators in both Indonesia and Malaysia. While the Islamic State's total lethality across the region dropped overall after peaking in the year 2016, its lethality per attack in 2019 exceeded all previous years. The generally high number of failed/foiled attacks by Islamic State-linked militants in Malaysia and Indonesia (and associated arrests) is also a cause for concern and indicates a real need to develop effective preventive measures to mitigate the threat of radicalization of individuals in the medium and long term. In the country reports in this series, the authors examine the contextual factors within each of the three countries that have facilitated the growth of radicalization and militancy. The trends highlighted in this chapter overall indicate that Islamic State-linked militancy in the region remains a potent threat; countering the Islamic State threat requires both a localized approach as well a regional coordinated effort. Many of the attacks examined in this chapter are primarily based in Indonesia and the Philippines. In the next chapter, the authors examine the six operational alliances that form a part of the Islamic State's Southeast Asian front.

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116   Zachary Abuza, "Suicide Bombings Take Root in the Southern Philippines," BenarNews, November 12, 2019.

117   Jadoon.

Chapter 3: The Islamic State's Operational Alliances in Southeast Asia

The insurgent landscape in Southeast Asia includes groups claiming affiliation with the Islamic State. Given the lethality of the attacks perpetrated by Islamic State-affiliates, as well as high Islamic State-related arrest rates in this region, as well as failed and foiled attacks, this chapter provides a brief overview of the Islamic State's operational links in the Philippines and Indonesia. The authors conceptualize those groups as the Islamic State 'operational affiliates,' which were reported to be linked in some capacity to the attacks recorded in the attack database. In other words, from the universe of Southeast Asian militant groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, the authors identify groups that have perpetrated attacks that have also been claimed by the Islamic State. For example, several attacks claimed by the Islamic State were reported to involve ASG or JAD members. This establishes a connection and indicates a relationship between the Islamic State and the affiliate group. Of course, rival militant groups will often claim the same attacks out of competition; however, in this case, the authors only consider groups that have publicly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and have positioned themselves as aligned with the Islamic State rather than in opposition to it.

Though the stated connections of these groups indicate that Islamic State-inspired thinking has penetrated the region, the depths of these relationships are not immediately clear. A demonstrated relationship between the two in the form of a jointly claimed attack indicates (although certainly does not prove) that the nature of the relationship is operational, but it does not necessarily indicate the level of material support these affiliates may have received from Islamic State Central. At the very least, these connections help identify which groups at the local level are carrying out attacks that are being claimed by the Islamic State, regardless of the logistical support provided by Islamic State Central. Finally, identification of Islamic State operational alliances in the region does not imply that there are not several other groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State or invoke the Islamic State's name.[118]

Although the militant groups discussed below are primarily based in Indonesia and the Philippines, they are not necessarily operationally confined to their respective states. Although groups have not orchestrated attacks in neighboring countries, there is evidence of a cross-border flow of personnel; that is, individuals from Islamic State-affiliated groups have traveled across borders not only to reach Islamic State Central (Iraq and Syria), but also to support other Islamic State-affiliated groups in neighboring countries. For example, the siege of Marawi not only featured many Filipino Islamic State affiliates but also foreign fighters from Indonesia and Malaysia.[119] Foreign fighters and other Islamic State-linked individuals are likely to flock to the Philippines though because that is where Islamic State affiliates have the highest chances of controlling territory and consequently potentially increasing fighters' likelihood of being part of the caliphate. Having said that, while there is evidence of movement of militants across countries, there is no evidence of a centralized command-and-control center across the Islamic State's Southeast Asian affiliates. Additionally, there appears to exist some fluidity between in-state groups, although they may come into conflict.[120]

The next sections discuss the background and origins of each group, followed by a discussion of existing evidence regarding each group's connection to the Islamic State, possible motivations for supporting the Islamic State, and prominent attacks perpetrated by the groups.

- *Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD)*

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118 Muh Taufiqurrohman, "How Indonesian Jihadists Travel to Iraq and Syria: How Indonesian Jihadists Travel to Iraq and Syria," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7:4 (2015): pp. 17–25.

119 Van Ostaeyen, "OSINT Summary.

120 Taufiqurrohman, p. 24.

- *Mujahidin Indonesia Timor (MIT)*

- *Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)*

- *The Maute Group*

- *Ansarul Khilafah Philippine (AKP)*

- *Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)*

Screenshots from a video released in mid-2014, "Bay'a from Indonesia to the Islamic Caliphate." The video features a gathering of "more than a thousand" individuals of a group named "Ikhwan Man Tha`Allah in Indonesia" that organized a conference, during which participants pledged bay`a to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Indonesia

The authors' database identifies 42 attacks conducted in Indonesia between January 2015 and July 2019. This data includes attacks by either exclusively Islamic State cells or Islamic State-affiliated groups. Thirty-one of the attacks were linked to 'exclusively Islamic State' cells, while the remaining 11 were executed by Islamic State-affiliated groups. The authors code those attacks to be conducted by 'exclusively Islamic State' cells where the attackers were not linked to any other local group and appeared to act directly on behalf of the Islamic State rather than through a local organization. Of these latter 10 attacks, the authors identified only one Islamic State-affiliated group responsible for carrying out attacks: Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) is also discussed in brief because open-source media indicates it has supported attacks, though the operational capacity (i.e., militants involved) is not explicitly stated, which is why it does not have a presence in the attack database.

Jamaat Ansharut Daulah (JAD)

Jamaat Ansharut Daulah (JAD) is the largest Islamic State affiliate in Indonesia.[121] It started out as an umbrella organization comprised of two dozen Indonesian extremist groups, becoming more coherent over time.[122]

JAD was designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization in January 2017 and was banned by Indonesia in July 2018.[123] Though JAD's leadership is centralized, the lower levels of the organization are semi-autonomous and can conduct operations independent of the top leadership.[124] It is divided into different wilayat, or regions, which include Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek), Banten, Central Java, East Java, West Java, Lampung, Kalimantan, Toli Toli (Sulawesi), and Medan (Sumatra).[125] The group was founded by Aman Abdurrahman with support from Iwan Darmawan (alias Rois) in 2015 while the two served sentences at Kembang Kuning Prison. While in jail, Abdurrahman has become a prominent advocate of the Islamic State's ideology[126] and has popularized the Islamic State doctrine of *takfir mu'ayyan* that deemed local government officials to be infidels and permissible targets.[127] Abdurrahman was sentenced to death in 2018, but is yet to be executed.[128] Bakar Baasyir, who was also involved in JAD's founding, has been in prison since 2010, charged with having links to the militant training camp in the Aceh region.[129] While the pair remained in prison, they leveraged external militant networks through a combination of couriers and subordinates who had been previously released, in addition to family members who visited them. These pre-existing networks allowed

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121 "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," p. 11; Schulze, "The Surabaya Bombings and The Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia."

122 *Disunity among Indonesian Supporters and The Risk for More Violence* (Jakarta: Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2016); "Sixth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat," United Nations, January 31, 2018; Alexander Sehmer, "Indonesia: Influential Islamic State Cleric Goes on Trial," Jamestown Foundation, February 26, 2018; Karina Tehusijarana and Moses Ompussungu, "What Is JAD? Terror Group behind Mako Brimob Riot, Surabaya Bombings," *Jakarta Post*, May 14, 2018.

123 Adi Renaldi, "Is This the End of JAD, Indonesia's Largest ISIS-Linked Terrorist Group?" VICE, accessed December 13, 2019; "State Department Terrorist Designation of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah," U.S. Department of State, accessed March 20, 2020.

124 Renaldi, "Is This the End of JAD, Indonesia's Largest ISIS-Linked Terrorist Group?" Schulze, "The Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia."

125 Schulze and Liow, p. 134.

126 Ibid., p. 134.

127 Fealy.

128 Muktita Suhartono and Richard Paddock, "Indonesia Sentences ISIS Recruiter to Death," *New York Times*, June 22, 2018; Adi Renaldi, "Why We Still Know So Little About JAD, the Terrorist Group Behind the Surabaya Attacks," Vice, May 16, 2018.

129 "Abu Bakar Bashir sentenced to 15 years on terror charges," *Guardian*, June 16, 2011.

them to spread their message, coordinate a national meeting, and fund military trainings.[130]

While some instructions for operations between 2016 and 2018 emerged from JAD's imprisoned leaders, many attacks have been planned at the local level. More recently, JAD has been affected by a series of arrests, and appears to be operating as a "network of autonomous cells" but the organization still appears to have more members than any other organization in the country.[131]

Motivations and Links to the Islamic State

Aman Abdurrahman pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and al-Baghdadi in 2014.[132] He is the spiritual leader of JAD, which was established to create a militant group for Islamic State sympathizers in Indonesia.[133] A November 2015 meeting, organized by Saiful Munthohir, brought together Islamic State supporters in Indonesia and established JAD with the intention of making it the official Islamic State province.[134] To give more structure to the pro-Islamic State network in Indonesia, the umbrella organization Ansharud Daulah Islamiyyah (ADI) was formed in August 2015, which later became JAD.[135] It appears that affiliation with the Islamic State was intended to boost the "jihadi credentials and agendas of some clerics and personalities."[136] Abdurrahman has been in prison for almost the entirety of JAD's existence; despite this fact, he remains the group's de facto leader. As such, he constitutes one of JAD's most important nodes in its connection to the Islamic State. Abdurrahman, allegedly inspired by the 2015 Paris attacks, believed that any Indonesian JAD member unable to travel to Syria should wage jihad in Indonesia.[137]

Though Abdurrahman is the foundation of the group's initial connection with the Islamic State, the relationship has been strengthened by other actors. Most prominent among these actors are Abu Jandal and Bahrun Naim, both of whom were students of Abdurrahman and were in Iraq and Syria.[138] The former operated in Iraq and served as one of Abdurrahman's main connections to Islamic State Central; his death is believed to have hindered the connection between the two groups.[139] The latter, prior to his death, worked more to set up individual cells within Indonesia in addition to working directly with JAD to coordinate attacks.

Joint Attacks with the Islamic State

JAD's structure is largely autonomous at lower levels yet is led by an emir and maintains local command structures,[140] which makes it different from more strictly hierarchical insurgent groups. Though JAD leadership may operationalize its relationship with the Islamic State by mobilizing its members to conduct Islamic State-related attacks, individual groups retain autonomy such that they can conduct

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130 Muh Taufiqurrohman, Muhammad Ali Usman, and Ardi Putra Prasetya, "Extremism beyond Nusa Kambangan Prisons," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9:10 (2017): p. 8.

131 "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia."

132 Fealy; "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," p. 21.

133 Fealy; "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," p. 15; Farouk Arnaz and Heru Andriyanto, "Who Is JAD, the Group Blamed for Attacking Indonesia's Chief Security Minister?" Jakarta Globe, October 13, 2019.

134 Adi Renaldi, "The Inside Story of JAD, Indonesia's Newest, and Deadliest, Terrorist Group," Vice, May 31, 2018; "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," p. 15.

135 Schulz and Liow.

136 Ibid.

137 Renaldi, "The Inside Story of JAD, Indonesia's Newest, and Deadliest, Terrorist Group."

138 V. Arianti, "Aman Aburrahman: Ideologue and 'Commander' of IS Supporters in Indonesia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9:2 (2017): p. 6.

139 Ibid., p. 6.

140 "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," p. 15; Schulze, "Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia."

attacks without the authorization of the central leadership.[141]

According to the current data in the database, there are 10 confirmed attacks carried out by JAD members that have been claimed by the Islamic State.[142] The group's first attack took place on January 14, 2016, supposedly at the behest of Islamic State Central.[143] Abu Jandal was critical to communicating Islamic State Central's desire that JAD conduct an attack in Indonesia.[144] There is media and police speculation that Bahrun Naim was one of the masterminds of this attack.[145] The attack came two months after the meeting during which JAD established itself as the Indonesian caliphate of the Islamic State. The attack culminated in the deaths of four citizens and four attackers.[146]

Additionally, JAD is notorious for carrying out attacks that involve either husband-wife pairs or entire family units. Most notable were the May 2018 Surabaya bombings—the first time an entire family unit, including women and children, carried out a coordinated suicide bombing attack.[147] The first bombings targeted three churches and were carried out by a family of six, including two sons (aged 16 and 18) and two daughters (aged 9 and 12).[148] Each family member individually detonated their own suicide belt. The coordinated attacks by the family on May 13 killed eight at the Surabaya Pentecostal Church, five at Saint Mary Immaculate Church, and one at the Diponegoro Indonesian Christian Church.[149] The police foiled a second May 13 attack, during which eight potential attackers were killed.[150] The following day, a second family, including two teenage sons and an eight-year-old daughter, drove through a police station and detonated explosives; only the daughter survived and no police officers or civilians were killed.[151] In this attack on May 14, four attackers were killed.[152] Though the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, calling it a 'martyrdom operation,' the extent to which there was an operational relationship in the execution of this attack appears to be limited.[153]

Mujahidin Indonesia Timor (MIT)

Mujahidin Indonesia Timor (MIT) is an Islamic State-affiliated group in Indonesia established in around 2010/2011 by former Jamaat Ansharut Tauhid commander Abu Wardah (alias Santoso), and the first group to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State in Indonesia. MIT was formed from JAT's Poso branch, of which Santoso had been the military commander.[154] Starting around 2010, MIT waged a jihad against the Indonesian police from its base in the Poso Mountains, and in subsequent years,

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141 Schulze, "Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia"

142 Note, even though these attacks are claimed by the Islamic State does not mean the group was necessarily involved in the *planning* of the attacks. Given the decentralized organization and relative autonomy allowed to operate JAD cells, some attacks do not have a direct operational line to the Islamic State; rather, the attackers are affiliated with JAD and evidently support both JAD and the Islamic State. Therefore, despite not necessarily having a direct operational connection in all cases, it is clear that these attacks are connected to Islamic State ideology, which is why the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for them.

143 Arianti, "Aman Aburrahman," p. 6.

144 Ibid., p. 6.

145 "8 Things to Know about Muhammad Bahrun Naim, Alleged Mastermind of Jakarta Attack," *Straits Times*, January 15, 2016.

146 Gayatri Suroyo and Stefanno Reinard, "Indonesia Makes Arrests as Islamic State Claims Jakarta Attacks," Reuters, May 26, 2017.

147 "Sidoarjo Bomb Also Involved Family of Six: E. Java Police," *Jakarta Post*, May 14, 2018. There was a third family involved that also planned to conduct an attack, but a premature explosion of one of their IEDs tipped off authorities, who promptly subdued and arrested the perpetrators in their home.

148 Schulze, "The Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia."

149 "Church Security Officer Latest Fatality of Surabaya Church Bombings," *Jakarta Post*, May 19, 2018.

150 "Sidoarjo Bomb Also Involved Family of Six."

151 "Surabaya Attacks: Family of Five Bomb Indonesia Police Headquarters - BBC News," CNN, May 14, 2018.

152 Ibid.

153 "Indonesia: ISIS Suicide Bombers Use Children in 4 Attacks," Human Rights Watch, May 15, 2018.

154 Schulz and Liow.

between 2011 and 2015, the group also established training camps for Indonesian jihadi groups.[155]

MIT has a working relationship with two Indonesian Islamic State-affiliated groups, Jamaat Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and Ansarul Khilafah Philippine (AKP).[156] Despite being the first in Indonesia to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State, since it began operations the group has remained relatively small (around 78 members at maximum in 2015) and controls very small tracts of land in Poso.[157] An operation to find and kill Santoso in July 2016 ended successfully with his death and the capture or killing of many of his followers.[158] His successor, Mohamad Basri, was captured a few months later, and the group is now led by Ali Kalora, a former foot-soldier whose leadership is contested.[159] The death of Santoso certainly diminished the group's strength in terms of operational capacity because its numbers were significantly depleted; however, local reports indicate that the group is still operating and recruiting in the Poso region of Indonesia.[160]

Motivations and Links to the Islamic State

Santoso pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in July 2013.[161] It is believed that Santoso was radicalized during the Christian–Muslim communal conflict in Central Sulawesi, which led him to join local mujahidin affiliated with JI.[162]

It appears that Santoso's motivations to align with the Islamic State are somewhat rooted in a desire to gain more attention. Initially, Santoso reached out to al-Qa`ida's Global Islamic Media Front and then to the Islamic State in order to attract resources and enhance his own credibility.[163] In his video pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in June 2014, Santoso stated he awaited further instructions and sought both material and financial support from the Islamic State.[164] After pledging allegiance, MIT began using the Islamic State's black flag on its media statements and videos and maintained direct connections with the Islamic State in Syria. According to one source, MIT's capabilities increased in the following months, which indicates some form of operational and financial assistance funneled through Indonesian foreign fighters operating in Iraq and Syria.[165] Indonesian police believe that MIT benefitted in important ways from its Islamic State links: the group received money to purchase weapons from the Philippines and had many Uighur foreign fighters directed to Poso through the broader Islamic State network.

MIT's connection with AKP allowed the former leader of AKP to leverage his connections with the Indonesian-Malaysian cell in Islamic State Central, Katibah Nusantara, to channel material and operational support for attacks through Indonesian associates, Brekele and Hendro Fernando.[166] Santoso's connection to the Islamic State through AKP also contributed to increased local recruitment

155   Ibid., p. 134.

156   Rina Chadijah, "Indonesia: MIT Militants Still Recruiting Despite Setbacks, Analysts Say," BenarNews, March 25, 2019; "Islamic State - Indonesia and Malaysia," Global Security, accessed March 20, 2020.

157   "Islamic State - Indonesia and Malaysia;" Chadijah; V. Arianti, "Analysing Use of Sharp Weapons in Terrorist Attacks in Indonesia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10:4 (2018): pp. 12–16.

158   "Indonesia's Most Wanted Islamist Militant 'Killed in Shootout,'" *Guardian*, July 19, 2016.

159   Chadijah.

160   Ibid.

161   "Mujahidin Indonesian Timur (MIT)," United Nations Security Council, March 30, 2017; Jack Moore, "Who Was Santoso, Indonesia's Most-Wanted Radical Islamist Militant?" *Newsweek*, July 19, 2016.

162   Schulze and Liow, p. 133.

163   V. Arianti and Jasminder Singh, "ISIS' Southeast Asia Unit: Raising the Security Threat," *RSIS Commentary* No. 220 (2015); Schulze and Liow, p. 133.

164   Arianti, "Analysing Use of Sharp Weapons in Terrorist Attacks in Indonesia," p. 14.

165   Ibid., p. 14.

166   Ibid., p. 15.

in Indonesia.[167]

Joint Attacks with the Islamic State

The assistance provided by the Islamic State to MIT following its pledge of allegiance appears to be more in the material and logistical support area than that of directing operations.[168] At least in the limited data provided by open-source media, there does not appear to be a direct operational connection between the two groups.[169] That said, there is certainly evidence of material and logistical support to conduct attacks, but no evidence that there were specific instructions from the Islamic State regarding how these materials and finances should be used by MIT. Additionally, there is evidence that MIT likely mirrored the Islamic State's behavior and was thus influenced by Islamic State tactics. Most notably, there was a period during which MIT executed and recorded beheadings, which it then sent to the Islamic State to demonstrate its 'accountability' to the group.[170]

The Philippines

The authors' database identifies 50 attacks conducted in the Philippines between 2015 and 2019. This data includes attacks by either exclusively Islamic State cells/individuals or Islamic State-affiliated groups. Twelve of the attacks were executed by exclusively Islamic State cells, while the remaining 34 were executed by Islamic State-affiliated groups. Of the 34 attacks, the authors identified three Islamic State-affiliated groups responsible for carrying out attacks: Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Maute Group, and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). Ansarul Khilafah Philippine (AKP) is also discussed in brief because open-source media indicates it has supported attacks, though the operational capacity (i.e., militants involved) is not explicitly stated, which is why it does not have a presence in the attack database.

Abu Sayyaf Group

ASG was founded in 1991 as an Islamic separatist organization that seeks independence for the Muslim minority in the Philippines.[171] It was founded by Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, who had preexisting connections with Usama bin Ladin, following a split from the Moro National Liberation Front.[172] Accordingly, ASG was loosely affiliated with al-Qa`ida until Janjalani's death in 1998, at which point ASG fractured into two factions—one led by Radulan Sahiron in Sulu and the other led by Isnilon Hapilon in Basilan—and lost al-Qa`ida's support.[173] Though the crackdown on groups with lingering or existing ties to al-Qa`ida, including ASG, by the United States following 9/11 created significant losses for both factions, it helped unify the group by killing off polarizing figures. From the mid-2000s onward, the group was composed of factions operating on separate islands in the Philippines; although there is some coordination between them, it is believed these groups primarily operate as independent entities.[174] The group is known to have operational ties to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), post 2005, with some

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167 Ibid., p. 15.

168 Ibid., p. 14.

169 Ibid., p. 14.

170 Ibid., p. 14.

171 "Abu Sayyaf Group," Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations, accessed March 20, 2020.

172 Ibid.; "Abu Sayyaf Group," National Counterterrorism Center, accessed March 20, 2020.

173 Ted Regencia, "Marawi Siege: Army Kills Abu Sayyaf, Maute Commanders," Al Jazeera, October 16, 2017. This analysis is concerned with Hapilon's group, which is the faction that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2014.

174 Peter Chalk, "The Islamic State in the Philippines: A Looming Shadow in Southeast Asia?" *CTC Sentinel* 9:3 (2016).

claiming that the groups have gone as far as to merge together.[175]

The Islamic State named Hapilon the leader of its affiliates in the Philippines in December 2016, prompting regional authorities to increase efforts to capture him.[176] Hapilon was neither the first to pledge allegiance in Southeast Asia nor the first to do so in the Philippines; however, the Islamic State chose to name him as a leader of its affiliates in the region.[177] He eventually relocated to Marawi, and Philippine authorities launched an operation in 2017 that resulted in the Battle of Marawi. Hapilon was killed, and the battle ended shortly thereafter.[178] According to open-source media, Hatub Hajan Sawadjaan—former ASG commander—was installed as the head of the Islamic State in the Philippines either in 2018 or 2019.[179]

Motivations and Links to the Islamic State

Despite ASG's initial connections to al-Qa`ida, the faction led by Hapilon has become a prominent Islamic State affiliate in the Philippines.[180] The Islamic State affiliate has since expanded operations outside of Basilan and now includes operations in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi provinces as well.[181] The group has used Islamic State-related iconography since mid-2014 and officially pledged allegiance to Islamic State Central and al-Baghdadi in a video featuring the then-group leader, Isnilon Hapilon, on July 23, 2014.[182] Islamic State Central released a video supporting Hapilon as the leader of the Islamic State in Southeast Asia in June 2016, calling on all individuals who could not travel to Syria to travel to the Philippines and instead fight under Hapilon.[183]

Both academics and policymakers in the Philippines have characterized ASG's Islamic State affiliation as a means to obtain financial support.[184] However, according to the Secretary of National Defense of the Philippines, direct contact between the Islamic State and Hapilon was established in December 2016 with the former calling for the latter to establish a caliphate in the Philippines, based out of Mindanao.[185] In the following months, Hapilon attempted to unite the Islamic State affiliates in the Philippines under ASG[186] as an umbrella organization, with the Maute Group playing a central role.[187]

Joint Attacks with the Islamic State

ASG's affiliation with the Islamic State has not precluded it from using the group's well-known "kidnap and ransom" strategy; rather, it has likely enhanced its reliance on this operational tactic.[188] These tactics have been part of ASG's operational playbook since 2000 (and likely earlier), following the loss

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175 Chris Rottenberg, "The Brewing Storm: The Merger Between Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf Group," Osgood Center, November 18, 2011, p. 4.

176 Carmela Fonbuena, "ISIS Makes Direct Contact with Abu Sayyaf, Wants Caliphate in PH," Rappler, January 26, 2017.

177 "ISIS Officially Recognizes Pledges of Allegiance from Militant Groups in the Philippines."

178 Euan McKirdy and Joshua Berlinger, "Philippines' Duterte Declares Liberation of Marawi from ISIS-Affiliated Militants," CNN, October 17, 2017.

179 Jim Gomez, "Amid Loss of Leaders, Unknown Militant Rises in Philippines," Associated Press, February 21, 2019.

180 Joseph Franco, "Philippines: Addressing Islamist Militancy after the Battle for Marawi," International Crisis Group, July 17, 2018.

181 "Terrorism Profile – Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)," Mackenzie Institute, November 13, 2015.

182 Franco, "Philippines: Addressing Islamist Militancy after the Battle for Marawi." Note, ASG-Sulu did not declare allegiance until March 2016.

183 "ISIS Recruits in SE Asia Is a Rising Threat despite Weak Attacks," Associated Press, July 14, 2016; Angelica Barang Habulan, "The Emergence of IS Philippines: Isnilon Happilon," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 8:11 (2016): pp. 20–23.

184 Soutik Biswas, "Philippines Unrest: Who Are the Abu Sayyaf Group?" BBC, June 14, 2016.

185 Fonbuena, "ISIS Makes Direct Contact with Abu Sayyaf."

186 The degree of ASG's overall affiliation with the Islamic State remains unclear since it is uncertain whether all of its factions pledged *bay`a* to Islamic State. ASG's affiliation with the Islamic State is discussed further in the country-level report on the Philippines.

187 Fonbuena, "ISIS Makes Direct Contact with Abu Sayyaf."

188 Habulan, p. 21.

of financial support from al-Qa`ida, as a means by which it could increase its funds.[189] These tactics have continued to be a favored method of operation since ASG became affiliated with the Islamic State, especially in Sulu.[190] In 2015, for example, the group beheaded Bernard Then, a Malaysian hostage, following a breakdown of negotiations, and in 2016, it beheaded Canadian citizens John Ridsdel and Robert Hall after their ransom requests were ignored.[191]

ASG is most well-known for the Battle of Marawi, which lasted between May and October of 2017. The Philippine military launched an attack on May 23, 2017, to capture Hapilon who was sheltering in Marawi.[192] The battle lasted five months and was fought in conjunction primarily with the Maute Group, although other ancillary Islamic State-affiliated Philippine groups supported the efforts, including AKP and BIFF, as well as some militants from JAD in Indonesia.[193] Hapilon was eventually killed and the battle ended shortly after, but the Islamic State-affiliated groups managed to inflict significant casualties on state security forces, including 168 killed and more than 1,400 injured soldiers.[194] The Battle of Marawi had two important consequences for Islamic State affiliates in Southeast Asia: first, the Islamic State called for militants unable to make the journey to Iraq or Syria to fight in Southeast Asia and, second, the region's prominence in relation to the Islamic State increased following a propaganda video detailing the Battle of Marawi as part of the Islamic State's "Inside the Caliphate" series.[195]

Most recently, a suicide bombing in Sulu orchestrated by a husband and wife resulted in the deaths of three soldiers and three civilians; the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, which marked the second time an Islamic State-claimed suicide attack was used in the Sulu region in 2019.[196] The database identifies eight suicide attacks since 2018, which is a marked increase given the fact that ASG, according to the database, did not use this tactic in years prior.[197] These suicide attacks are the first to ever take place in the Philippines, as noted in the previous chapter, and a significant proportion of these suicide attackers were foreigners. This data indicates an increased adoption of Islamic State tactics by ASG.[198]

Maute Group

The Maute Group, also known as Daulah Islamiyah Fi Ranao (DIFR) or Islamic State of Lanao, is an Islamic State-affiliated group in the Philippines.[199] It is conventionally referred to as the Maute Group because its leadership structure is composed of the entirety of the Maute family.[200] The Maute Group

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189 "Abu Sayyaf Group;" Biswas; "Abu Sayyaf Group," Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations."

190 Biswas; "Abu Sayyaf Group." "Abu Sayyaf Group," Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations."

191 Charlie Campbell, "Sun, Sea and ISIS: Insurgency in the Southern Philippines," *Time*, May 13, 2016. For more background about ASG's kidnapping and ransom strategy, particularly with regard to nationality of its victims, see McKenzie O'Brien, "Fluctuations Between Crime and Terror: The Case of Abu Sayyaf's Kidnapping Activities," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24:2 (2012): pp. 320-336.

192 "Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Abu Sayyaf Group," Refworld.

193 For more details, see Thomas Sanderson, "Black Flags Over Mindanao: Terrorism in Southeast Asia," Testimony, House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, July 12, 2017.

194 Carmela Fonbuena, "Gov't Death Toll in Marawi Siege Rises to 168," Rappler, January 10, 2018; Carmela Fonbuena, "Government Throws out Last-Minute Negotiations with Maute," Rappler, September 6, 2017.

195 Abuza, "In Organizational Shake-Up."

196 Michael Hart, "Abu Sayyaf Is Bringing More of ISIS' Brutal Tactics to the Philippines," *World Politics Review*, July 22, 2019.

197 Ibid.

198 Ibid.

199 Rommel Banlaoi, "The Maute Group and Rise of Family Terrorism," Rappler, June 15, 2017.

200 Ibid.

was formed in 2012 by brothers Abdullah and Omarkhayam Maute.[201] The group is mostly made up of ethnic Maranao and has a stronghold in Marawi city, where it has successfully attracted students and teachers from the Mindanao State University.[202] The United States added the Maute Group to its list of foreign terrorist organizations in 2018.[203]

The Maute group's activities are best understood in the context of the decades-long Moro insurgency and the military's aggressive tactics, which facilitated recruitment by the Maute Group.[204] The Moros, who are various Muslim clans in Mindanao, took up armed resistance in the 1960s under a new nationalist movement. Initially, the Maute brothers formed an alliance with the MILF, which provided them with access to one of their training camps. Additionally, familial ties between the two groups enhanced the Maute Group's legitimacy.[205] But after a dispute with a MILF commander in 2014, the Maute brothers established their own camp in Butig and began their own recruitment drive in Butig, Piagapo, and Marawi, and also attracted former MILF members.[206]

The Mautes employed Qur'an study lessons to indoctrinate and recruit, offering paramilitary training in Butig between 2013 and 2015.[207] Two armed groups were formed to further their interests in the Philippines—Khilafah sa Jabal Uhod and Khilafah sa Ranao—which are headed by the two aforementioned Maute brothers.[208] According to a 2016 Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict report, the members of the Maute Group are comparatively better educated than members of other affiliate groups because of the group's connection to Mindanao State University in Marawi City.[209]

Although many commanders of the Maute Group are well educated, drawn from universities and other groups, its ranks also include poor farmers or small businessmen, some which of which were former members of the MILF or were deeply familiar with the notion of violent jihad.[210]

Motivations and Links to the Islamic State

The Maute Group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in April 2015.[211] Both sons, Omarkhayam and Abdullah, were educated in the Middle East, but it is unclear whether this had any influence on their decision to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State.[212] The trigger and causes for their radicalization remain unclear at this point.[213]

Prior to its affiliation with the Islamic State, the Maute Group acted more like a private militia. It has been argued that the group raised the black Islamic State flag to intimidate local rivals and burnish its credentials after the loss of a favored local official.[214] Other scholars have argued the Maute Group developed strong incentives to align with the Islamic State for the purposes of garnering attention and

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201 "Maute Group / Islamic State of Lanao / Daulat Ul Islamiya / Daulah Islamiyah (ISEA)," Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium, accessed March 20, 2020.

202 "Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia," p. 14.

203 Chad de Guzman, "U.S. Gov't Adds Maute Group, ISIS-PH to List of Foreign Terrorists," CNN, February 28, 2018.

204 Julie Hwang, "Relatives, Redemption, and Rice: Motivations for Joining the Maute Group," CTC Sentinel 12:8 (2019).

205 "Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia," p. 16.

206 Hwang, "Relatives, Redemption, and Rice."

207 Ibid.

208 Banlaoi, "The Maute Group and Rise of Family Terrorism."

209 "Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia," p. 14.

210 Hwang, "Relatives, Redemption, and Rice."

211 Joseph Franco, "The Maute Group: New Vanguard of IS in Southeast Asia?" RSIS Commentary No. 107 (2017): p. 1.

212 Raju Gopalakrishnan and Manuel Mogato, "The Mautes of the Philippines: From Monied Family to Islamic State," Reuters, June 22, 2017.

213 Hwang, "Relatives, Redemption, and Rice."

214 Joseph Franco, "Philippines: Addressing Islamist Militancy after the Battle for Marawi.".

gaining funding.[215] The Marawi siege, which started in May 2017, was masterminded by Omar and Abdullah Maute, funded by both the Islamic State and local supporters.[216]

Joint Attacks with the Islamic State

The Maute Group, in conjunction with ASG and other support groups, is responsible for the Battle of Marawi, which lasted from May to October 2017. Notably, Islamic State Central financially and materially supported this conflict.[217] During the course of the battle, all seven Maute brothers—the bulk of the group's leadership structure—were killed.[218] In addition to its leadership losses, the Maute Group suffered significant losses to its corps, but have sought to regroup in its home province of Lanao del Sur.[219]

The battle was perceived as both a strategic and propaganda success by Islamic State Central.[220] Islamic State Central seized upon this specific conflict, which has contributed to the attraction of the Philippines as a destination for Islamic State sympathizers.[221] As noted above, the battle resulted in significant casualties not only on the side of the Islamic State-affiliated groups involved but also state security forces, and increased the prominence of the Philippines as an Islamic State destination for those who could not travel to Iraq and Syria.

Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)

The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) was formed in December 2010 by Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato when it split from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2007-2008, given the latter's willingness to negotiate with the government for an autonomous region.[222] Kato continued to espouse a more extreme stance and favored an independent Islamic state over autonomy, which generally made his group ideologically more in line with the Islamic State's goals. Kato died from pneumonia in 2015, and the group's leadership was passed to Ismael Abu Bakar, who is characterized as "more radical" than Kato.[223] Following this appointment, BIFF split into smaller factions and, subsequently, its organization became much less hierarchical.[224]

Motivations and Links to the Islamic State

BIFF released a video in August 2016 pledging allegiance to Islamic State Central.[225] According to a BIFF spokesperson, the two organizations have communicated via phone to set up and manage the alliance.[226] Interestingly, a BIFF source stated in 2014 that the group received no financial support from the Islamic State, noting instead that its funding comes from businessmen who "believe [BIFF

215 Hwang, "Relatives, Redemption, and Rice."

216 Franco, "Philippines: Addressing Islamist Militancy After the Battle for Marawi."

217 Hwang, "Relatives, Redemption, and Rice."

218 Julmunir Jannaral, "7 Maute Brothers Confirmed Dead," *Manila Times*, December 6, 2017.

219 Michael Hart, "A Year After Marawi, What's Left of ISIS in the Philippines?" *Diplomat*, October 25, 2018.

220 Charles Knight and Katja Theodorakis, *The Marawi Crisis—Urban Conflict and Information Operations* (Barton: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, July 2019).

221 Ibid.

222 "Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters," Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations, August 2018; Hart, "Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters;" Chalk, "The Islamic State in the Philippines."

223 Chalk, "The Islamic State in the Philippines."

224 Michael Hart, "Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters Assume ISIS' Mantle in the Philippines' Troubled South," *Geopolitical Monitor*, February 12, 2018.

225 "No Activities Monitored after BIFF Pledge of Allegiance to ISIS – Army Official," Good Morning America, September 20, 2014.

226 Karlos Manlupig, "The BIFF-ISIS Connection and Social Media," Rappler, September 19, 2014.

is] fighting the right war."[227] It follows that its initial pledge of allegiance was meant to signal locally that it was a group to be taken seriously.[228]

Joint Attacks with the Islamic State

According to Philippine government sources, BIFF supported both the Maute Group and ASG during the Battle of Marawi,[229] but this runs contrary to the official stance of BIFF and MILF, who claim the former did not send fighters to Marawi.[230] However, following the Battle of Marawi, BIFF increased its attack presence in the Philippines. Given the routing of both ASG and the Maute Group at the Battle of Marawi, BIFF has increased its presence in the vacuum left by both groups, launching IEDs and attacking targets from police patrols to civilians.[231] One analysis in 2018 argues that BIFF may have become the local group of choice for the Islamic State's continued spread into the Philippines following the near-destruction of ASG and the Maute Group.[232] Even so, the operational relationship between BIFF and Islamic State Central remains muddled. Despite increased attacks, there is little evidence that points to tangible operational support in the realm of operations planning or support. BIFF's main concern remains undermining MILF's peace agreement with the Philippine government, launching attacks against the Philippine military, and achieving Bangsamoro independence.

Ansarul Khilafah Philippines (AKP)

Ansarul Khilafah Philippines (AKP) is a homegrown Islamic State-affiliated militant group in the Philippines that was founded in 2008.[233] It was led by Mohammad Jaafar Maguid (alias Tokboy)—initially a member of MILF—until his death in 2017.[234] AKP has historical connections with groups in Malaysia and Indonesia, and Tokboy's direct connection to Islamic State Central through two contacts (discussed later) likely enhanced its role as a recruitment and training camp in Southeast Asia.[235]

Motivations and Links to the Islamic State

AKP pledged allegiance to Islamic State Central and al-Baghdadi in September 2014.[236] Tokboy had an operational and financial link to an Indonesian militant, Ahmad Saifullah Ibrahim (alias Sucipto), until the latter died in 2015. Mohamaad Reza Kiram served as Tokboy's second critical link to the Islamic State and their relationship was likely ongoing until Tokboy's death in 2017.[237] Both of these ties are likely to have been important to Tokboy's direct connection to Islamic State Central.[238] Additionally, AKP has an unusually high number of fighters who are originally from Indonesia or Malaysia, likely because the group functions to provide training for regional and foreign fighters.[239] Tokboy was killed

227 Ibid.

228 Hart, "Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters Assume ISIS' Mantle in the Philippines' Troubled South."

229 Hart, "A Year After Marawi, What's Left of ISIS in the Philippines?" Peter Chalk, "The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters: The Newest Obstacles to Peace in the Southern Philippines?" *CTC Sentinel* 6:11 (2013).

230 Jeoffrey Maitem, "Autonomy Could Strip Foreign Fighters of Southern Philippine Sanctuaries: MILF Chief," BenarNews, July 25, 2017.

231 Hart, "Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters Assume ISIS' Mantle in the Philippines' Troubled South."

232 Ibid.

233 Joseph Jubelag, "Police Arrest Suspected Islamic State-Linked Militant in Southern Philippines," BenarNews, September 18, 2019; "Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia," p. 10.

234 "Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia," p. 10.

235 Ibid., p. 14.

236 "Marawi, The 'East Asia Wilayah' and Indonesia," p. 2.

237 "Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia," p. 14.

238 Ibid., p. 11.

239 Ibid., p. 14.

in 2017; there is limited information regarding a new leader, though the group remains operational.[240]

Joint Attacks with the Islamic State

AKP was the smallest Islamic State affiliated group to provide operational support to the Maute Group and ASG during the Battle of Marawi.[241] Although it has been accused of beheadings and other attacks, including IEDs that target civilians, its support for the Islamic State has historically been to facilitate recruitment and training camps.[242] Given its capacity as an Islamic State training camp, there are militants from surrounding states under its guard.[243]

Overall, this chapter provides an overview of six of the Islamic State's operational alliances in the region that collectively constitute the basis of the Islamic State's Southeast Asian front, in addition to other exclusively Islamic State cells and individuals in the region. These six affiliate groups provide the Islamic State with the militant infrastructure it needs to establish a credible and lethal presence in Southeast Asia. Not only have these affiliate groups publicly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, but they have also reportedly been involved in many of the attacks claimed by the Islamic State. Moreover, a large number of the arrests discussed throughout this report include individuals who are affiliated with the groups discussed in this chapter. The presence of these affiliates demonstrates the Islamic State's reliance on local actors that have deep connections with local communities within the region, understand local actors and conflict dynamics, and can tie their agendas to the transnational goals of the Islamic State. In the next chapter, the authors bring together the insights from chapters two and three to discuss the security implications of the Islamic State's Southeast Asian front.

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240   "Ansar Al-Khilafah Philippines (AKP) / Islamic State Philippines (ISEA) | Terrorist Groups | TRAC," Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium, accessed March 21, 2020.

241   Hart, "A Year After Marawi, What's Left of ISIS in the Philippines?"

242   Ibid.; "Ansar Al-Khilafah Philippines (AKP) / Islamic State Philippines (ISEA) | Terrorist Groups | TRAC."

243   "Ansar Al-Khilafah Philippines (AKP) / Islamic State Philippines (ISEA) | Terrorist Groups | TRAC."

Chapter 4: Conclusion

While it was only in 2017 that the Islamic State mentioned its Wilaya Sharq Asiyya (widely perceived to be a reference to its affiliates in Southeast Asia), the Islamic State's influence in the region has been observed since at least 2015. In this report, the authors examined regional trends in Islamic State-linked activity. While a high-level regional perspective is critical to understanding the scope of the Islamic State threat in Southeast Asia, the authors delve deeper into the threat at the country-level in the next reports in the Southeast Asia series. Collectively, the regional and country-level perspectives provide a more nuanced understanding of not only the broader contours of transnational jihadism in Southeast Asia, but also the factors within each country, which constitute its infrastructure. Having said that, it is important to note that despite linkages between groups in Southeast Asia, the Islamic State's presence in the region presently has no central command-and-control center, and many pro-Islamic State groups within the Philippines are separated physically, ideologically, and pragmatically. Below, the authors discuss some of the most important trends at the regional level.

Important Trends in Islamic State-linked Attacks

Overall, across the region, the peak years of Islamic State-linked activity in terms of attacks and total affected were 2016 and 2017, with the highest number of attacks recorded in 2016 with 446 people affected. While the number of attacks in 2018 and 2019 were lower than in the peak years, the activity remained higher than it was in 2016 (38 in 2016 out of a total 115 attacks). The case of Malaysia is especially interesting as it is the country that had the least number of successful plots with a significant number of failed/foiled attacks and associated arrests. This underscores the importance of using different metrics to assess the influence of the Islamic State in the region. While in the Philippines and Indonesia, the most important dimension of the Islamic State threat may be the existing militant infrastructure offered by Islamic State operational alliances, in Malaysia, the threat exists in the form of radicalized individual plotters not formally a part of any local militant group. Such individuals may become a useful resource for existing networks of militants in the region and present a pool of potential recruits.

The Philippines remains the epicenter of Islamic State activity and lethality

In terms of the highest number of attacks, the Philippines experienced 22 out of 50 of its attacks in the year 2017, the majority of which took place in the Lanao del Sur province of which Marawi is the capital. Even though 2017 was the year with the highest number of attacks, 2016 was the year when the country experienced the highest numbers killed and wounded, especially in the first half of the year. In 2016, Islamic State-linked attacks affected a total of 353, which made up an astounding 43% of all affected across the five years. Across the region, this made up 79% of all those affected across the three countries in 2016, which demonstrates that the Philippines is the epicenter of Islamic State-linked activity in Southeast Asia. This appears to be rooted in the ability of militants to control territory in the Philippines, compared to Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as the relatively weaker law enforcement capacity in the country. Why did 2016 end up being one of the Islamic State's most active years across the region? One key reason could be that it was only in early 2016 that the Islamic State acknowledged the pledges of *bay`a* from multiple Southeast Asian groups with Abu Sayyaf Group's Hapilon as the regional emir.[244] Another trigger for this could also be rooted in the failure of the Philippine legislature to pass the Bangsamoro Basic Law at the time, which was subsequently ratified in January 2019.

Across the region, the total annual lethality of Islamic State-linked attacks appeared to drop post-

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244 Abuza, "In Organizational Shake-Up."

2016; with a decrease of more than 50% in 2017 compared to 2016 (from 446 to 233), although in 2019, total lethality exceeded that of 2018. In the Philippines, while the numbers of killed and wounded dropped in 2017 and 2018 compared to a very deadly 2016, there was sharp increase in 2019—a 95% increase compared to the previous year. Overall, this suggests that Islamic State-linked activity in the Philippines has played a considerable role in contributing to the Islamic State's lethality across the region and in reversing the downward trend in 2019.

Foiled attacks in Indonesia and Malaysia indicate sustained pressure against the Islamic State

A significant portion of the total attacks recorded across the three countries were foiled. As noted in Chapter 2, Malaysia was the country with the most foiled attacks where 86% of all attempted total attacks were foiled. In Indonesia, a significant number of attacks were foiled at 31% of all attacks, with only two attacks foiled in the Philippines. The high number of foiled attacks in both Malaysia and Indonesia is promising and indicative of the seriousness with which the threat has been addressed across the region. Moreover, it highlights the important role played by law enforcement in these countries in combating the influence of the Islamic State.

The difference in the number of attacks foiled in Indonesia and Malaysia compared to the Philippines is notable. There are a few potential explanations for the low number of foiled attacks recorded for the Philippines. First, militants based in the Philippines have long-running experiences of conducting operations within the Philippines and may be more proficient in planning and executing attacks. Second, a low number of foiled attacks may be rooted in the difficulty faced by the Philippine counterterrorism structure to fight the decentralized operations of jihadis, as demonstrated in the Battle of Marawi.[245] In comparison to the Philippines, counterterrorism efforts in Indonesia are largely driven by law enforcement instead of the military.[246] Given that the fight against the Islamic State in the Philippines has involved direct clashes between the military and Islamic State militants, it is likely that many of the Islamic State attacks were preempted in operations that resulted in the killing rather than the arrests of militants.[247]

Paying attention to the rise in suicide attacks in 2018 and 2019

As is widely known, the Islamic State and its affiliates' trademark tactic is the use of suicide attacks. For example, the Islamic State's affiliates in West Africa[248] as well as in Afghanistan and Pakistan have heavily relied on suicide attacks to maintain a high level of lethality. But as presented in Chapter 2, regional trends of suicide attacks do not indicate that it is the overwhelming tactic of choice in the Southeast Asian context.

Having said that, the use of suicide attacks has gradually increased over the years; regionally, while actual or attempted suicide attacks made up less than 6% of attacks until 2017, there was a sharp increase in their use in 2018 and 2019 where they accounted for 29% and 54% of all attacks, respectively. These regional trends indicate the potential increased use of such tactics across the region in the future. For example, the Philippines has generally not experienced suicide attacks, and the recent rise in the use of the tactic has been directly tied to the Islamic State's influence. In contrast to the Philippines, suicide attacks in Indonesia have been a consistent part of the tactics employed by Islamic State-linked entities since 2016; the use of suicide attacks steadily increased in subsequent years. The

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245 McKay and Webb.

246 Ibid., p. 18.

247 For example, see Chew.

248 Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, *Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram's Suicide Bombers* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2017); Jadoon.

increase in suicide attacks across the region in later years could be associated with foreign fighters who imported the tactic into the region. The introduction of new tactics is one of the many risk factors associated with returning fighters, or simply foreign fighters in this case. As Daniel Byman argues, battle-hardened returning foreign fighters cannot only bring new skills, tactics, and ideas into their home countries, but also facilitate transnational linkages between militants, which can promote co-operation in the future.[249] Additionally, foreign fighters can also play an important role in radicalizing and recruiting new fighters, especially if fighting overseas enhances their credibility as jihadis. In the case of the Philippines, foreign fighters infiltrating the country arrived from a multitude of places including Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as other regions including Central Asia, Northern Africa, and the Middle East.[250] Islamic State-linked foreign fighters facilitated linkages between the traditionally siloed groups in the Philippines and are believed to have recruited and trained new Islamic State followers in the Philippines.[251] Many foreign and foreign-trained fighters fought under the command of Isnilon Hapilon, declared the emir of the Islamic State in Southeast Asia, in the Battle of Marawi.[252]

Additionally, the use of suicide attacks in Indonesia, and female involvement in these, has been a matter of growing concern. In particular, the Surabaya attacks in May 2013, which involved women and children, seem to have paved the way to an increase in use of suicide attacks. As research indicates, groups can gain significant strategic and tactical benefits by using female attackers.[253] One likely outcome of increased counterterrorism measures against Islamic State-linked militants may result in its increased willingness to deploy more women and children in its operations.

Security Implications

An overview of the Islamic State's activity across the region highlights three main points of concern: upticks in numbers killed and wounded per attack in 2018 and 2019; increased use of suicide attacks, especially in 2019; and the high level of arrests of Islamic State-linked individuals strongly imply that the threat from Islamic State-affiliated groups and individual plotters inspired by Islamic State ideology is still potent. While coordination across the countries is key to mitigating the threat, it is also important to be cognizant of country-specific trends, such as the increased role of women in suicide attacks in Indonesia or the presence of foreign fighters, which the authors explore in the next three reports in this series.

In general, the trends and scale of Islamic State-linked activity in the region, along with the Battle of Marawi in the Philippines and increase in use of suicide attacks, showcase how the emergence and entrenchment of the Islamic State in Southeast Asia may exploit the existing militant infrastructure in the region to reorient the nature of local conflicts. The Islamic State's six operational alliances, as highlighted in this report, shed light on how pledges of allegiance to the Islamic State can result in militant groups undertaking operations in the name of the group and provide longevity to the Islamic State brand and its ideology. For example, prior to its pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State, ASG had a long history of militancy in the region with considerable links to al-Qa`ida. Regardless of the nature of ASG's relationship with Islamic State Central, ASG has sought to gain a reputational boost by aligning itself with the Islamic State brand. Further, the five-month long siege of Marawi by Islamic State-linked militants starting in 2017 indicates the potential dangers of Islamic State affiliates con-

249 Daniel Byman, "The Homecomings: What Happens When Arab Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria Return?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38:8 (2015): pp. 581-602.

250 Banlaoi, "The Maute Group and Rise of Family Terrorism."

251 Rommel Banlaoi, "ISIS Followers in the Philippines: Threats to Philippine Security," *Security & Defense Magazine*, October 13, 2015.

252 Van Ostaeyen, "OSINT Summary."

253 Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Burcu Pinar Alakoc, "Femme Fatale: The Lethality of Female Suicide Bombers," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2018): pp. 1-19; Karen Jacques and Paul J. Taylor, "Female terrorism: A review," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21:3 (2009): pp. 499-515.

trolling territory in pockets of Southeast Asia and challenging the security apparatus in urban areas. While many consider it unlikely that there will be a repeat of the Marawi siege, the battle highlights the challenges of demolishing militant strongholds in urban regions. Interestingly, the Islamic State's approach of operating via local alliances runs parallel to its approach in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the Islamic State established strong operational links with groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar that contributed significantly to its lethality and geographical reach.[254] Both cases illustrate the potential security implications of the linkages between local actors and conflicts with international jihadism.

The significant numbers of failed and foiled attacks reported are strong indicators of the perils of a strengthening Islamic State Southeast Asian front. It is thus imperative that the affected countries not only account for the local dimensions of the threat but also identify critical commonalities of the threat across the region, which can be addressed via measures of collective security. Dismantling the network of Islamic State alliances and cells in Southeast Asia not only requires preventing territorial control by militant groups and stemming the movement of militants between countries, it also requires a continued effort to address local environmental factors that are conducive to radicalization and recruitment.
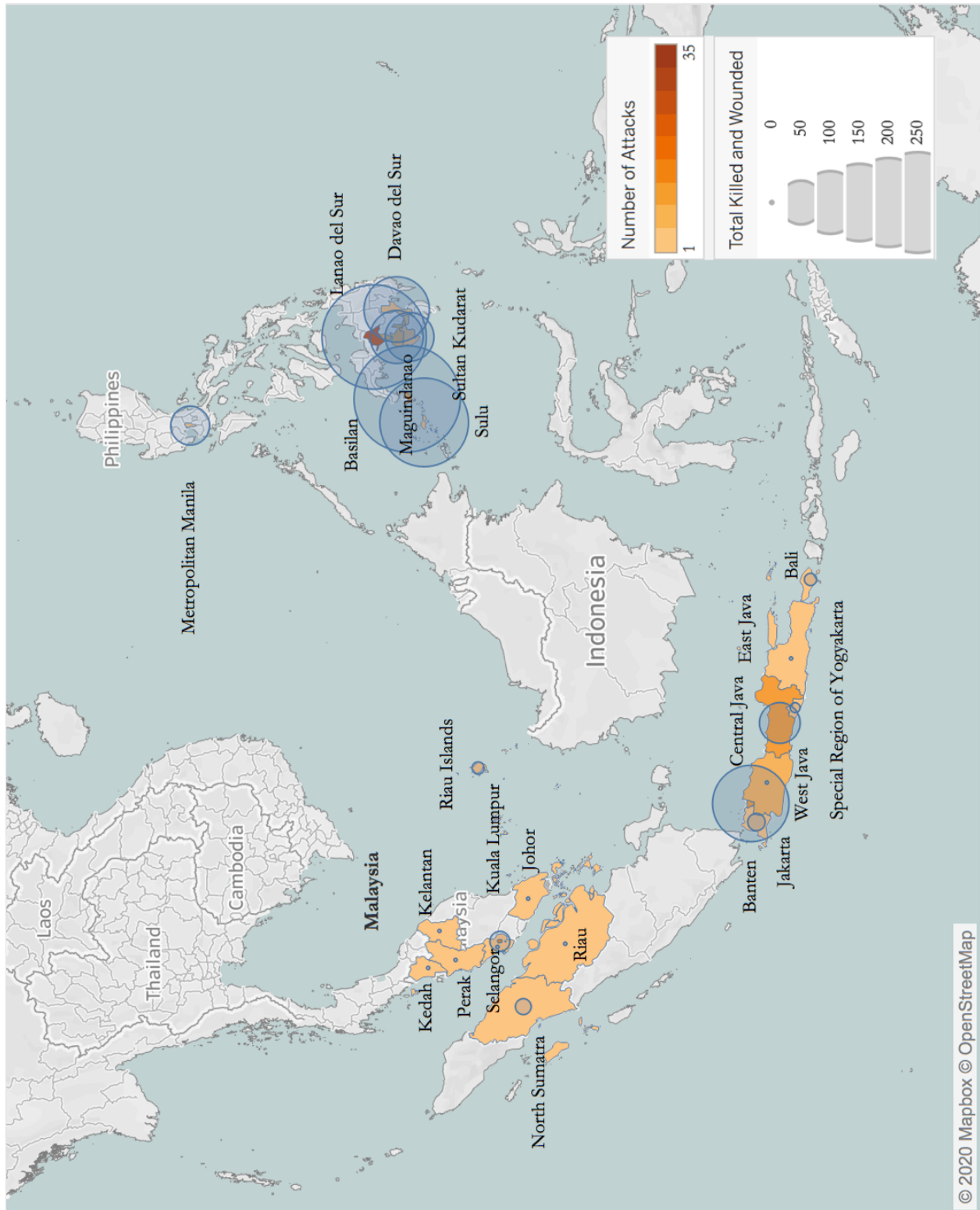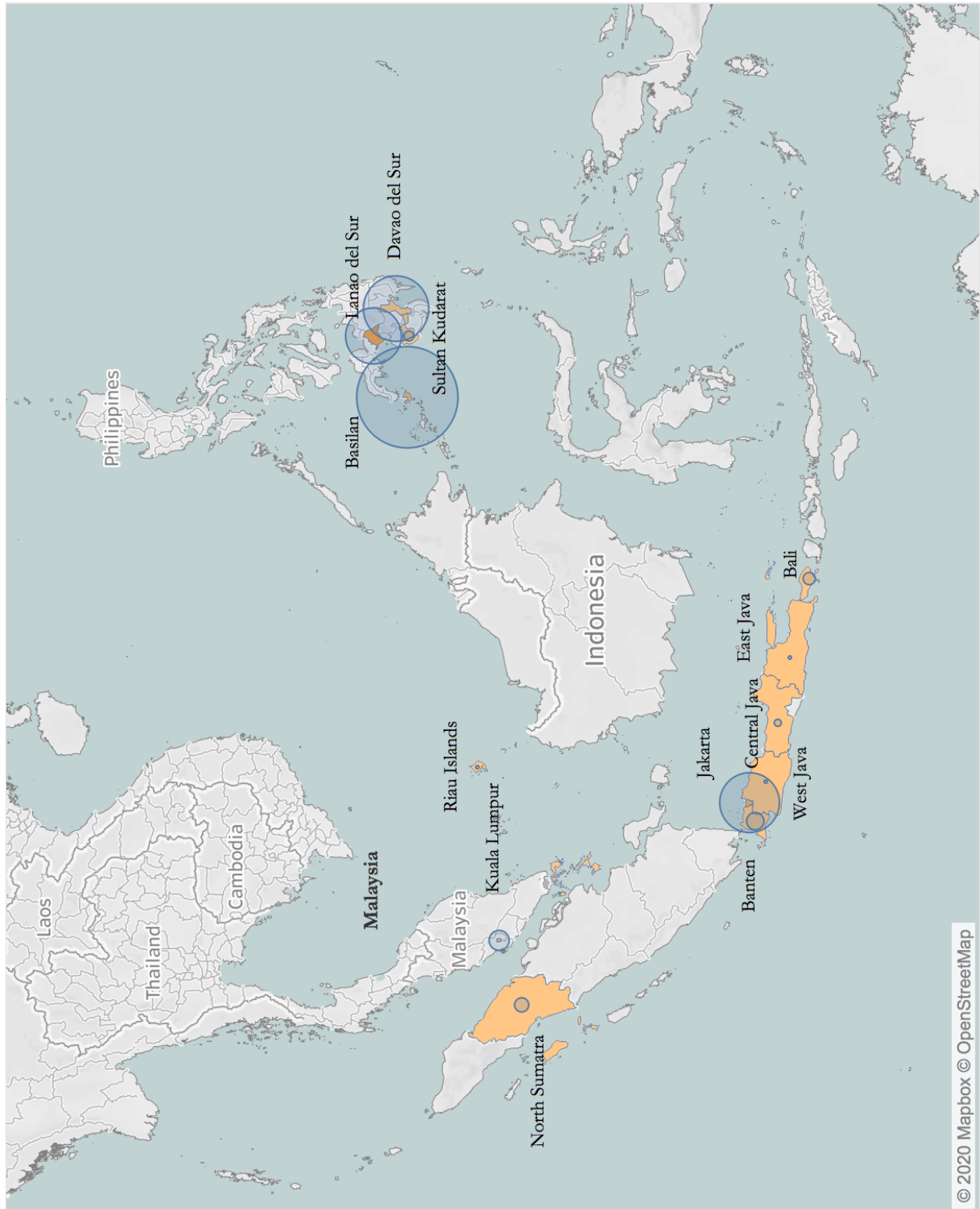
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254 Jadoon.

Appendix

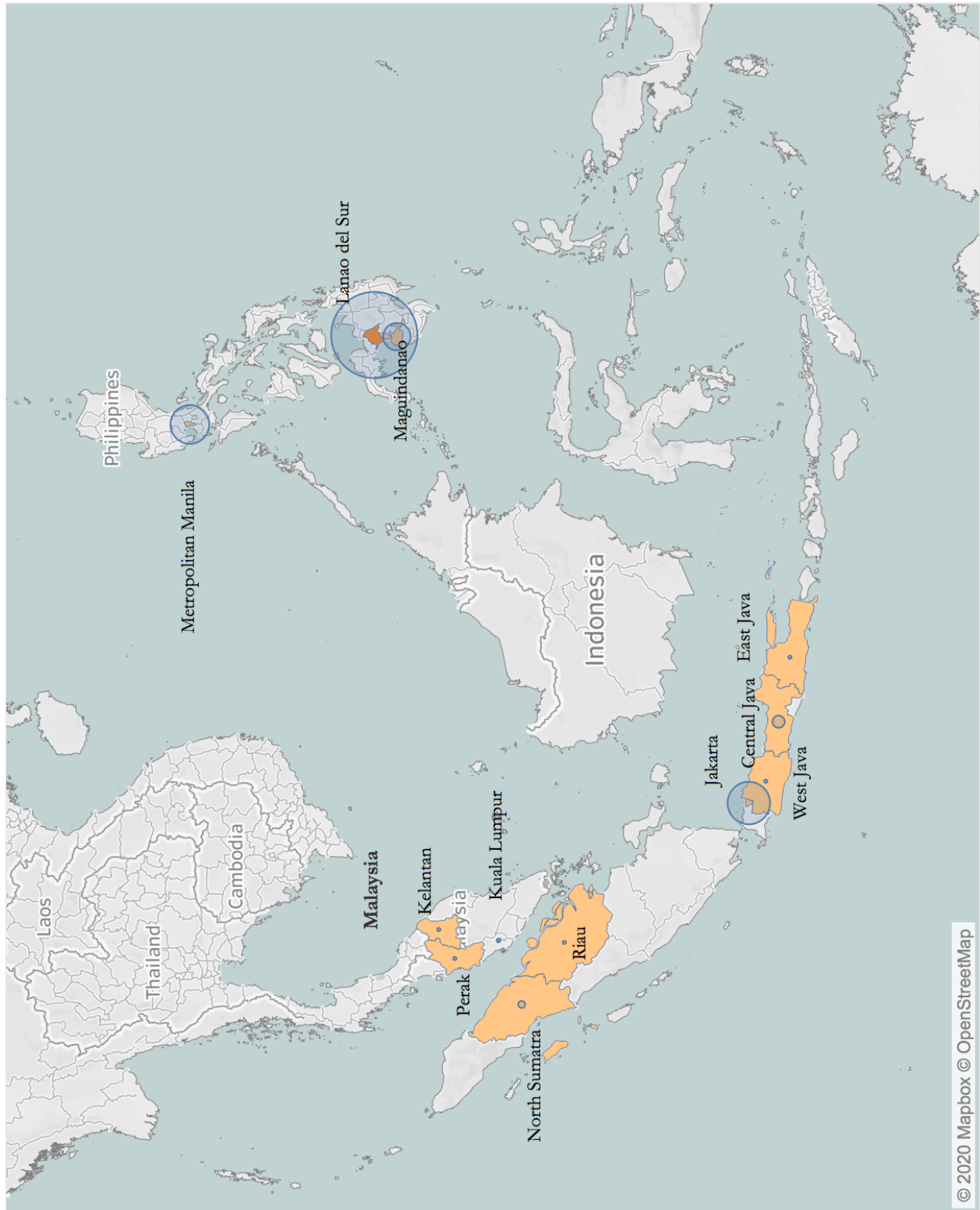*Figure 2.1 (a): Regional Trends in Islamic State-linked Attacks and Total Killed and Wounded, 2014-2019*
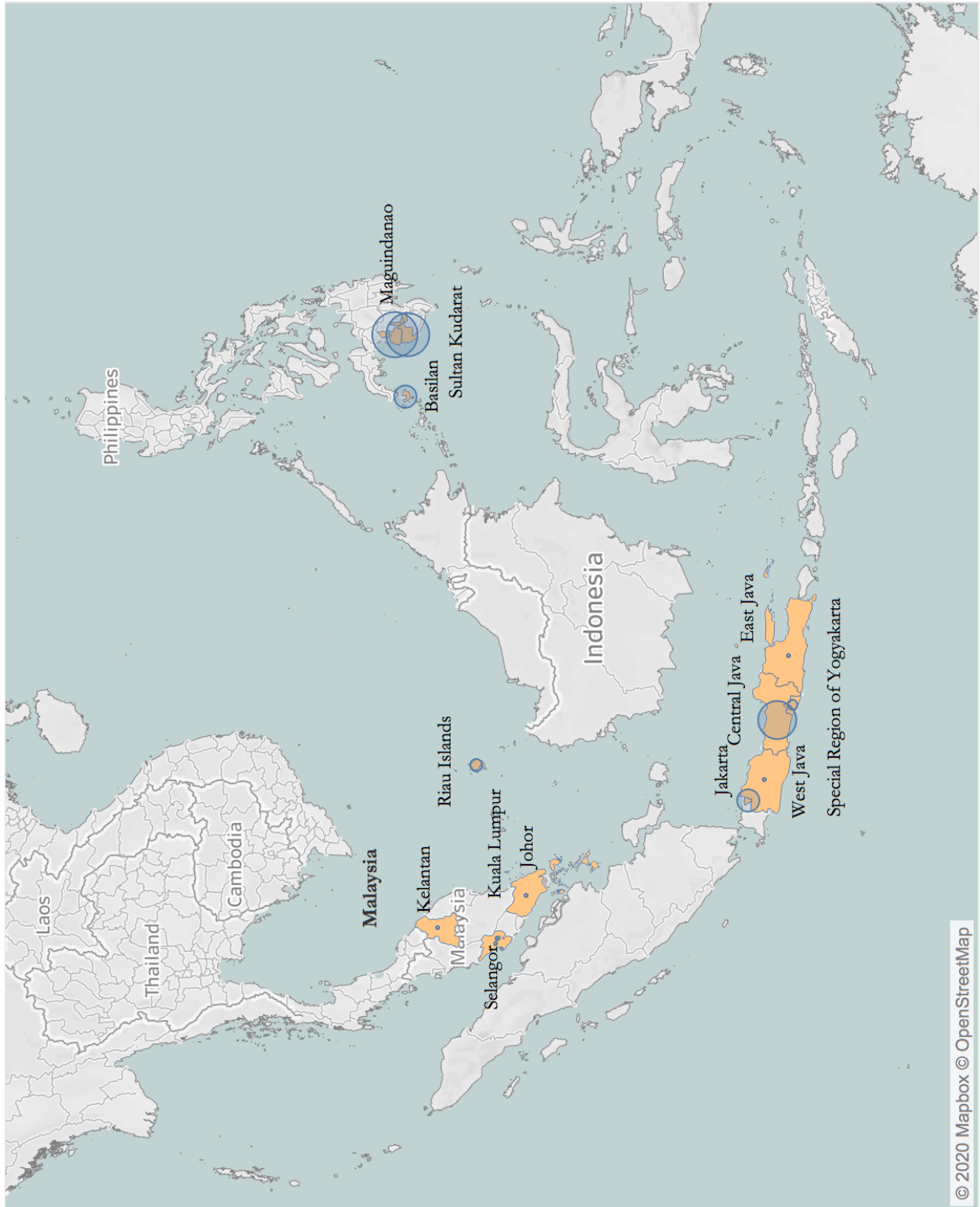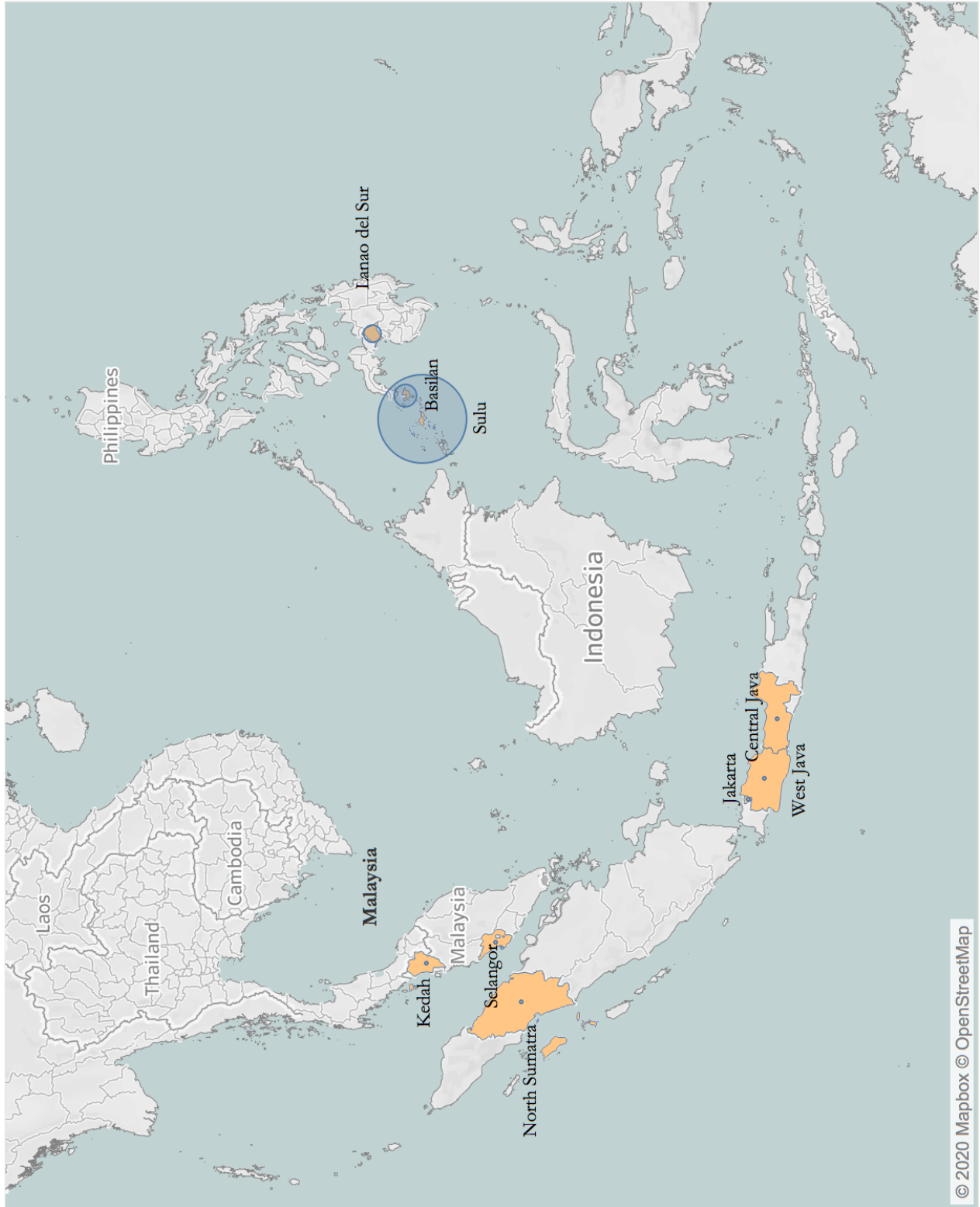
(b) 2014/2015

(c) 2016

(d) 2017

(e) 2018

(f) 2019