

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM): Realizing the Peace Process in the Philippines

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Abstract:

This study examines the implementation and early outcomes of the Bangsamoro peace process, focusing on the transition from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Using qualitative document analysis of primary legal instruments such as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, Republic Act No. 11054 or the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro, official government reports, civil-society assessments, and secondary literature. The study identifies principal achievements, persistent challenges, and critical factors that shape prospects for durable peace. Findings indicate important institutional and political gains, notably political recognition, an expanded autonomy framework, and formal mechanisms for normalization, while highlighting persistent obstacles including institutional capacity gaps, economic underdevelopment, the presence of violent spoilers, and unresolved issues of transitional justice and land disputes. The study concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen governance, accelerate socio-economic development, sustain disarmament and reintegration efforts, and deepen inclusive participation to consolidate peace.

Keywords: *Bangsamoro, BARMM, peace process, Philippines; autonomy, transitional justice, Mindanao; policy analysis.*

Introduction

For decades, the conflict in the southern Philippines has been driven by a combination of historical marginalization, competition over resources and territory, identity politics, and weak governance. Negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and Moro armed movements culminated in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in 2014 and the passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) or Republic Act No. 11054 in 2018. The law paved the way for replacing the ARMM with the BARMM, a political entity designed to deliver greater political autonomy, fiscal powers, and a framework for normalization and development.

This study aims to address the following questions:

1. To what extent has the creation of the BARMM realized the aims of the Bangsamoro peace process?
2. What are the factors that facilitate or hinder its consolidation?

The study assesses political-institutional changes, security and normalization progress, and socio-economic dimensions of peacebuilding, with an emphasis on early implementation (2018–2023). Understanding successes and constraints is essential for policymakers, practitioners, and civil society seeking to consolidate peace and promote inclusive development in Mindanao.

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative policy and document analysis synthesizing official documents, legislation, program reports, publicly available monitoring data, and academic and policy literature. The analysis focused on the negotiation outcomes as codified in the CAB and the BOL, the institutional arrangements and mandates of the BARMM and its transition mechanisms, and publicly reported implementation measures across governance, security, and development domains.

Data sources included primary legal and policy texts such as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2014), Bangsamoro Organic Law or Republic Act No. 11054 (2018), implementing guidelines and transition reports issued by the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) and relevant Philippine agencies. Included also as sources were the reports from international and non-governmental organizations, civil society monitoring groups, and media accounts covering implementation milestones. Peer-reviewed and scholarly literature on the history of the Moro conflict, autonomy arrangements, and peacebuilding in Mindanao were also included.

Content analysis was used to extract and code themes related to (a) institutional and political reforms; (b) security and normalization (disarmament, decommissioning, and security sector adjustments); (c) socio-economic development and service delivery; and (d) participation, justice, and reconciliation mechanisms. Findings were triangulated across sources to assess convergence and identify persistent gaps.

Results

Institutional and political outcomes

The BOL established the BARMM with wider devolved powers than ARMM, including taxation, natural resource management, and an expanded legislative framework. The BARMM includes a parliamentary-style Bangsamoro Government and institutions for local governance integration. The Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) was created to act as the interim government to draft the Bangsamoro Transition Plan and the

regional code framework. The plebiscite legitimized the BARMM in several provinces and cities formerly part of ARMM. The process opened formal political space for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to participate in governance through the BTA, and subsequent electoral pathways established in transition arrangements.

Security and normalization

The CAB's normalization track and mechanisms for decommissioning MILF combatants were implemented in phases, with some fighters formally decommissioned and enrolled in livelihood and skills programs. Violent extremist and criminal groups (e.g., Abu Sayyaf elements, breakaway factions such as parts of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters) continue to cause security incidents. Clan-based violence and localized insurgent activity remain security concerns. Coordination between national security forces and BARMM institutions improved in some areas, but integration of local security needs and trust-building remain works in progress.

Socio-economic and service-delivery outcomes

International donors and national agencies mobilized funds and programs targeting infrastructure, basic services, and livelihood in BARMM. Some quick-impact projects enhanced local-level service delivery. While the BOL provides revenue-sharing mechanisms, practical fiscal capacity of the BARMM remained constrained by limited local revenue generation, bureaucratic capacity gaps, and the need for predictable national transfers. Persistent poverty, low educational attainment, and infrastructure deficits remain major challenges affecting perceptions of peace dividends.

Participation, justice, and reconciliation

Women, indigenous peoples (IP), youth, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) faced barriers to full participation in planning and implementation. Mechanisms for transitional justice, reparations, and land restitution were underdeveloped or slow to operationalize. Local civil-society organizations play active monitoring and service roles, but capacity and resources vary across constituencies.

Discussion

Achievements and enabling factors

The Bangsamoro peace process achieved notable institutional breakthroughs. The CAB and BOL represent durable political recognition of Moro claims and a legal foundation for autonomy. The institutionalization of transition mechanisms (BTA) and the formal normalization track reflect commitments to shift from armed conflict to political processes.

International facilitation (notably by Malaysia), donor support, and adaptive negotiation strategies contributed to success.

Constraints and risks to consolidation

Despite progress, several systemic constraints threaten full realization of peace objectives. The BARMM's nascent institutions face administrative, technical, and financial capacity shortages. Effective public administration and transparent fiscal management are essential to deliver services and build legitimacy. Slow improvements in socio-economic conditions undermine the perception of a peace dividend and can fuel local grievances that spoilers exploit. Presence of non-signatory armed groups and criminal networks complicates normalization and compromises citizen security. Without robust, timely mechanisms for justice, reparations, and land dispute resolution, underlying grievances may persist. Marginalized groups require stronger institutionalized participation to ensure that governance reforms address diverse needs and reduce alienation.

Policy implications

Sustained national commitment and predictable financing are essential for the BARMM to institutionalize governance, stabilize security, and accelerate socio-economic recovery. Integrative approaches that combine top-down institutional reforms with bottom-up community engagement will be more effective than isolated interventions.

Conclusion

The transition from ARMM to BARMM represents a major advance in the Philippines' efforts to resolve the Moro conflict. The legal and institutional framework created by the CAB and BOL provides a strong foundation, but translating these gains into durable peace requires continued, coordinated action. It is along with the above conclusion that the following are recommended:

1. Strengthen institutional capacity through investing in public administration, budgeting, and human resources for BARMM ministries and local governments; prioritizing anti-corruption measures and transparent fiscal management.
2. Secure predictable financing through ensuring timely and predictable national transfers and donor coordination to support development and normalization programs.
3. Accelerate inclusive socio-economic programs through scaling up livelihood, education, health, and infrastructure projects targeted to marginalized communities and conflict-affected zones to deliver visible peace dividends.

4. Consolidate normalization through sustaining and adequately funding decommissioning, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs; expanding livelihood and skills training for former combatants with clear monitoring and evaluation systems.
5. Address justice and land disputes through operationalizing transitional justice mechanisms, strengthening land titling and dispute-resolution services, and providing reparations and rehabilitation for victims.
6. Enhance participation and representation through institutionalizing roles for women, IPs, youth, and civil society in planning and oversight; supporting capacity-building to ensure meaningful participation.
7. Counter spoilers through integrated strategies through combining law enforcement against violent extremist actors with development, community policing, and conflict-sensitive governance to reduce drivers of recruitment.
8. Establish independent, periodic monitoring mechanisms through involving local stakeholders to assess implementation progress and adjust policies.

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