

**POPULIST GOVERNANCE ON THE RISE: THE CASE OF
DUTERTISMO IN THE PHILIPPINES**

By

ESPIRITU Rovil Angustia

THESIS

Submitted to

KDI School of Public Policy and Management

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Committee in charge:

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Abstract

This study explores the central elements of *Dutertismo* – Rodrigo Duterte’s brand of populism in the Philippines in his first three years in office. Using Paul Taggart’s analytical theory on populism, this paper argues that upon Duterte’s assumption to office, he has used populism to maintain a steady grip on power, while concurrently portraying “Others”, particularly members of the once dominant Liberal Party, the media, Roman Catholic Church and most controversially, drug users as enemies of the State; and sheds light on how Duterte deals with reactions from external actors such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and international human rights groups who, according to him, have been ‘attacking our sovereignty’. It also looks into how he justifies and legitimizes his populist actions by framing and exaggerating the drug problem as a national crisis, exploiting national surveys and the social media, and offering vague policies and agenda. Lastly, this paper presents the chameleonic nature of Duterte’s politics by looking at his coalition with relatively liberal institutions such as the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines, and his relationships with the Communist Left. This analysis gives us an unprecedented opportunity to move from discussing the explanations on the rise of Duterte in 2016 into exploring the nuances of Rodrigo Duterte’s regime and major developments in the Philippines three years after his electoral victory.

Keywords: populism; *Dutertismo*; Rodrigo Duterte; Philippines

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*To Mom, Dad,
Kuya Rovidel, and Gift*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rodrigo Duterte's inauguration on June 30, 2016 as the Philippines' 16th president was a key turning point in the country's history. Almost as old as the post-Philippine independence, Duterte is the first Philippine president from Mindanao, the country's southernmost island also considered to be the most conflict-ridden and impoverished. He is also the first Filipino local politician, having been Mayor of Davao City for 20 years, to be catapulted to Malacañan Palace, the nation's highest seat of power in Manila.

Duterte's electoral success, however, is not an isolated case. It is part of a populist movement that has been sweeping many countries across the world. In recent years, much of liberal democracies have seen a trend of electoral setbacks to another. Strongman populists have started to depose the liberal establishment. This global populist wave has given rise to increased attention among scholars, reporters, and politicians alike, and prompted a seemingly intense and on-going debate centered on searching for a general explanation for its rise and success.

In the Philippines, significant political occurrences over the past 50 years have highlighted the transition from authoritarianism to a distinct phase of democratization. Between 1972 to 1986, the country was under Ferdinand Marcos' authoritarian rule. During this period, he put the country under martial law that gave him direct control over the state, and accumulated large amount of wealth for his family and his cronies. After the fall of Marcos in 1986 through the "People Power Revolution"¹ led by democracy icon Corazon Aquino, a new "EDSA² Republic" was put in place. This was underpinned by a new

¹ Also called the EDSA Revolution, was a nonviolent uprising in the Philippines in February 1986 that led to the collapse of Marcos' authoritarian government and the installation of Corazon Aquino as President of the Republic.

² EDSA is an acronym for Metro Manila's main highway, the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, where the series of rallies and protests occurred.

constitution anchored on the institutions, values, principles of liberal democracy. Ironically, it also led to the prevalence of ruling elites and developed an illusion of democracy through periodic elections, and reinforcement of system checks and balances among government institutions, among others. The liberal democratic establishment persisted to the succeeding administrations, although under different narratives: Fidel Ramos' "Philippines 2000", Joseph Estrada's "Erap para sa mahirap" (Erap for the poor), Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's "Strong Republic", and Benigno Aquino III's "Daang Matuwid" (Straight Path).

Arguably, the establishment has seen its highest and lowest points during the Aquino administration. In his six years in office, the country has experienced impressive economic and political improvements, as supported by reports such as the International Institute for Management Development's (IMD) World Competitiveness Yearbook and World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, among others. However, a series of events and crises, particularly the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) Scandal, Mamasapano Incident, and Typhoon Haiyan rehabilitation tested the legitimacy of this prevalent political order.

The electoral victory of Duterte in 2016 is a clear example of the rise of a populist in government since the country's experience of multi-dimensional crises under the Aquino administration. His first three years in office has seen the limited capacity of domestic actors to react against Duterte, in which neither the established political parties nor independent institutions have had enough legitimacy and influence to oppose his administration. Given this context, this thesis seeks to answer the core research puzzle:

What are the central elements in Rodrigo Duterte's populist politics dubbed as 'Dutertismo'³ as observed in his first three years in office?

In order to answer this question, the study adopts Paul Taggart's analytical theory on populism⁴ which suggests that populism is characterized by (a) a critique of the internal and external establishment; (b) a heartland for "the people" that the populist message refers to; (c) a lack of core values; (d) a sense of crisis and the need for more direct populist democracy; and (e) a charismatic leadership combined with chameleonic nature to adapt to changing circumstances.

Employing this theory in analyzing secondary resources such news reports, public speeches, survey results, and official policy documents, this study argues that upon his assumption to the country's highest seat of power, Duterte has used his style of populism dubbed as *Dutertismo* to:

- 1.) maintain a steady grip on power, while concurrently portraying "Others" particularly members of the once dominant Liberal Party, the media, Roman Catholic Church and most controversially, drug users as enemies of the State;
- 2.) deal with reactions from external actors such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and international human rights groups who, according to him, have been 'attacking our sovereignty';
- 3.) frame and exaggerate the drug problem as a national security crisis;
- 4.) sustain his popularity through his vague policies and agenda, and proactive mass mobilization projects in social media and national surveys; and

³ *Dutertismo* was first coined by Filipino sociologist Randy David to describe Rodrigo Duterte as the "Filipino incarnation of a style of governance that is enabled by public's faith in the capacity of a tough-talking, willful, and unorthodox leader to carry out drastic actions to solve the nation's persistent problems."

⁴ Paul Taggart, *Populism*, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia, 2000.

- 5.) build coalitions with relatively liberal institutions such as the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines, and the Communist Left.

This thesis takes the form of a case study, defined as something that requires various perspectives, and is rooted in a specific context viewed as critical to the understanding of the investigated phenomena. It examines what's in store for the populist phenomenon in the Philippines, as marked by the significant developments following Duterte's presidential victory.

This paper is structured as follows: the first chapter is the introduction that provides the background and research question. The second chapter contains the literature review that explores the challenges for liberal democratic regime and the rise of populism in liberal democracies, including the Philippines. The third chapter discusses the theoretical framework, research design and methodology of the study. The fourth chapter contextualizes the rise of Duterte by exploring the significant political developments in contemporary Philippines, while the fifth chapter aims to answer the main research question through a case study of the Philippine context exploring the central elements of *Dutertismo*. The final chapter contains the conclusion and discussion of implications.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The International Liberal Democratic Regime and the Global Populist Wave

Liberal democracy and its vulnerabilities

Francis Fukuyama, through his book "The End of History and the Last Man", argues that after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, liberal democracy has become the final ideological phase of human evolution.⁵ He sees no further direction for history after the conflict between the liberal West and the communist world has been settled. This argument is drawn from Kojeve's interpretation of Hegelian philosophy that "the final condition of humanity's socio-political order is a homogeneous state ruled by a single victorious ideology." A "post-political" society that is not bound by ideological differences will eventually result to the end of ideology (and thus of history).

Heydarian⁶ echoes the conventional democratization theory which emphasizes that post-autocratic societies, specifically third wave democracies, go through several phases. This include the "opening" or transition from autocratic rule after a period of political liberalization; "breakthrough," a minimalist-procedural democracy where at least a fair and competitive elections takes place; "consolidation", which ensures that political actors, including the military, acknowledge and accept the legitimacy of elections in the acquisition and transfer of state power; and maturity or "deepening" where both the state and civil society systemically internalizes individual and collective civil liberties and political rights.

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest* (1989), https://www.embl.de/aboutus/science_society/discussion/discussion_2006/ref1-22june06.pdf

⁶ Richard Javad Heydarian, *The Rise of Duterte: A Populist Revolt Against Elite Democracy*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

However, many third wave countries remain in the process of achieving well-functioning democracies.⁷ Carothers⁸ and Kurlantzick⁹ both observe that beyond the facade of lively democratic politics, many of these countries suffer deficits of democracy. Carothers adds that despite the conduct of elections, representation of citizen's interest remains lacking, political participation beyond voting and confidence in state institutions are at low levels, government officials frequently abuse the law, elections with uncertain legitimacy are conducted, and the state continues to perform poor.

Samuel Huntington¹⁰ also warns about "erosion of democracy" in third wave democracies attributed to the fragility of democratic institutions resulting from "decay of the administrative organization inherited from the colonial era and a weakening and disruption of the political organizations developed during the struggle for independence." This, for Foa and Mounk¹¹ has resulted to a troubling phenomenon called "democratic fatigue" as more citizens become more comfortable with the notion of autocratic rule and military takeover.

Contemporary Challenges in the Liberal Democratic West

Europe

Europe plays a key role in promoting democracy by supporting many democratic movements and serving as an example of its virtues. But current issues on large-scale immigration, increased economic inequality, reduced confidence in state institutions, and economic shocks all drive the fading popularity of liberal values and the return of nativist

⁷ Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-being in the World, 1950-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸ Thomas Carothers, "The End of Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13 no.1 (2002): 5-21. doi: <http://journalofdemocracy.org/article/end-transition-paradigm>.

⁹ Joshua Kurlantzick, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," *Foreign Policy* (2013).<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/04/one-step-forward-two-steps-back/>.

¹⁰ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in changing Societies*. (London: Yale University Press, 1968).

¹¹ Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Signs of Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 28 (2017): 5-16, doi: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2016-11-14/democracy-after-trump>.

sentiments.¹² These contemporary challenges gave rise to illiberal democracies and populist movements in many of the world's oldest democracies, such as Hungary and Poland. In the United Kingdom, this phenomenon is underscored by the controversial and historic "Brexit" vote led by Nigel Farage of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). In France, Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front (FN) Party acquired 40% of votes, enough to catapult her to the second round for the race to the Elysee Palace.

United States

With a presidential campaign tinged on anti-immigration and anti-globalization rhetoric, Donald Trump's victory against Hillary Clinton in 2016 perfectly reflects the crumbling foundations of oldest democracies. Trump's campaign is mainly due to the several decades of geographic and economic inequality in the US, and the failure of the government to address it.¹³ As Fukuyama observes, "there is indeed a problem of representation in American institutions: neither political party has served the declining group [blue collar white American workers] well."¹⁴

Democratic Backsliding beyond the West

Many non-Western democracies, many of which are emerging market economies, are also experiencing a comparable period of democratic disruption and upheaval.¹⁵ These include Turkey, Thailand, Kenya and Russia, whose economies have been performing

¹² Niall Ferguson, "Populism as a Backlash against Globalization," *Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development, Autumn* (2016), <http://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-autumn-2016--issue-no-8/populism-as-a-backlash-against-globalization>.

¹³ Thomas Piketty, "We must rethink globalization, or Trumpism will prevail," *The Guardian*. Last modified November 16, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/16/globalization-trump-inequality-thomas-piketty>.

¹⁴ Francis Fukuyama, "American Political Decay or Renewal? The Meaning of the 2016 Election," *Foreign Affairs* (2016). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/american-political-decay-or-renewal>.

¹⁵ Larry Diamond, "Democracy after Trump: Can a Populist Stop Democratic Decline?," *Foreign Affairs* (2016). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2016-11-14/democracy-after-trump>.

relatively well over the past two decades. As Sharma¹⁶ notes, the total amount of capital flow into these emerging markets reached a record of 478% in the period of 2005-2010, a big jump from 92% from 2000-2005. In a decade, the developing world also managed to double its share of world GDP, from 20% to 40%. From 2003 to 2007, the average GDP growth rates of these economies also doubled from 3.6 to 7.2%, as compared to the 1980s and 1990s. However, even in the most successful emerging market democracies outside the West, the re-emergence of the autocratic approach to governance seems to be more apparent.

Asia

In Japan, the status of civil rights and press freedom has significantly eroded upon the return to power of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2012. In fact, from 2010-2015, the country's ranking in the Press Freedom Index dropped to 61st from 11th, one of the worst cases of suppression of press freedom in the world. McCurry¹⁷ notes that this can be primarily attributed to Abe's repressive maneuvers to restrain criticisms toward the government's policies and increasing calls for changing the constitution. Due to political pressures from the government which limit freedom to express liberal standpoints, some well-known Japanese newscasters, including Shigetada Kishii, Hiroko Kuniya, and Ichiro Furutachi, were forced to resign from their jobs. The situation in Japan is unlikely to improve as Abe continues to have a steady grip on power with the resurgence of the one-party rule, combined with the strong support by the majority of the voting public, and no clear challenge from the opposition.

Meanwhile, in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also solidifying his grip in Indian politics. His prime ministership is best known for empowering Hindu-nationalist elements at the expense of the non-Hindu minorities and secular traditions. Though hailed by

¹⁶ Ruchir Sharma, *Breakout Nations: In Pursuit of the Next Economic Miracle*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).

¹⁷ Justin McCurry, "Abe defends Japan's secret s law that could jail whistleblowers for 10 years," *The Guardian*. Last date modified December 10, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/10/japan-state-secrets-law-security-dissent>.

his supporters as incorruptible and decisive, his critics argue that under his watch, the country has experienced an increasing number of harassment cases toward domestic and foreign civil society groups and scholars, and the gradual erosion of pluralistic, liberal values. He has also alienated many leading technocrats, including the central bank governor and former IMF chief economist, Raghuram Rajan.

In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan rapidly transformed the country hailed as the model for Islamic democracy to a pro-authoritarian state. Under Erdogan's rule, the system of checks and balances has been put aside. Political dissenters have also been silenced, with nationwide publications such as *Zaman* being closed down, and a number of journalists put in jail. Because of this, Turkey has now surpassed both China and Iran for having the most number of jailed journalists in the world. Akyol¹⁸ also notes that the 2016 failed coup against the ruling Justice and Development Party has only bolstered Erdogan's claim to authority and influence, and concentrated more authority in his office.

In Southeast Asia, the leading democracies are also undergoing the same democratic woes. In Indonesia, the incumbent president Joko Widodo was almost defeated by rival Prabowo Subianto in the 2014 presidential elections.¹⁹ Subianto's campaign was anchored on the promise to bring back the Suharto-style of autocratic leadership, reflecting the yearning of many Indonesian voters for a strongman who can combat the widespread corruption during the reformasi or Post-Suharto period. Jokowi, however, was able to secure the presidency with the help of the 11th hour mobilization of the millennial and middle class voters. Jokowi's dramatic presidential victory was largely driven by his style of populism that promised grassroot leadership, inclusive development, and disciplining of the oligarchy. But

¹⁸ Mustafa Akyol, "Coming Soon: Erdogan 'The Chief'," *Al-Monitor.com*. Last date modified February 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/02/turkey-erdogan-movie-boost-cult-personality.html>.

¹⁹ Marcus Mietzner, *Reinventing Asian Populism: Jokowi's Rise, Democracy, and Political Contestation in Indonesia*, (East West Center, 2015). <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/ps072.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35018>

in his first two years, many has observed Jokowi's strongman leanings as he attempted to surmount opposition and vested interests from various political parties. He has adopted a tough approach to maintain law and order, particularly drug trafficking, by bringing back execution of drug traffickers and dealers; and implemented more protectionist-nationalist economic policies.

Populist Ascendancy

Hannah Arendt²⁰ analyzes how a society's rapid modernization has brought to the population a sense of alienation and dislocation. Her focus is on the emergence of the “mass society,” a group of individuals unable to engage as active and empowered citizens in mainstream politics. With the deep desire to gain political voice against the powerful elites, the masses have become vulnerable to mobilization by populist leaders who offer simplistic and instant solutions in return for complete obedience to authority. As Arendt puts, “mass society is always prone to accept a person offhand for what he pretends to be, so that a crackpot posing as a genius always has a certain chance to be believed.”²¹

2.2. Populist Ascendancy in the Philippines

The 2016 Philippine presidential elections was a crucial turning point in Philippine history. Rodrigo Duterte, the mayor of Davao City in southern Philippines for more than 20 years, was catapulted to the nation’s highest seat of power, beating rival liberal and reformist candidates Manuel Roxas and Grace Poe. Arguably, his electoral success is hinged on his effective deployment of the populist style. This paper delves into the different perspectives on Duterte’s rise to power and attempts to understand his brand of populism - “Dutertismo.”

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973).

²¹ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Attempts to explain the electoral victory of Rodrigo Duterte and the rise of populism in the Philippines

Heydarian²² analyzes how Duterte's brand of populism gained ground in the Philippines whose economy has been booming over the past few years. His work places the electoral victory of Duterte on the wave of populism across Asia and beyond, emphasizing the failure of liberal democracy in coping up with the challenges of globalization.

His arguments are based on Samuel Huntington's Political Order in Changing Scenarios in 1968 and Francis Fukuyama's Political Order and Political Decay in 2014. Huntington discusses an important dynamic in post-colonial economies - the "aspiration institutionalization gap." What happens with economies that are growing fast and doing well, aspirations of people increases exponentially and so does social mobilization. But the ability of institutions to respond to new demands of having political voice and for better delivery of public services only increases arithmetically. That creates a gap which causes what is called grievance politics. Similar observations by Fukuyama on contemporary democracies reveal that the rigidity and/or capture by vested interests of state institutions has led in the failure to provide adequate public goods. These observations are in many ways experienced by the Philippines under the administration of Duterte's predecessor, Benigno Aquino III. At some point during his presidency, the Philippines became the fastest growing economy in Asia and the 4th fastest economy in the world. Paradoxically, as the Philippines grew faster, poverty became more evident. This was brought by the inability of the country's economic and political institutions to provide inclusive development and efficiently supply basic public goods. The broken promises, coupled with rising expectations among middle class, created a form of grievance politics that reflects the exasperation toward the post-dictatorship ruling

²² Heydarian, *The Rise of Duterte: A Populist Revolt Against Elite Democracy*

elite. This provided a “fertile ground for populists and demagogic figures to step into the picture and exploit the wellspring of discontent across all sections of the society.”

Heydarian²³ notes that Duterte was able to take advantage of this growing resentment over the establishment to contest the highest seat of power in the country. He skillfully marketed himself “as the underdog, a simple folk and provincial mayor [of the southern city of Davao] audaciously taking on the 'big machine' and 'Imperial Manila' elites.”

Meanwhile, the work of Thompson²⁴ explores the "systemic disjunction" within the liberal reformist political order adopted by the Aquino government. Duterte's campaign is considered as an effective protest vote against the narrative of good governance ("no corruption, no poverty"), key strategic groups (the Catholic Church, big businesses, social democratic activists, and the military) and relatively liberal institutions (traditional political parties and the judiciary). Duterte's presidential victory paved the way for a "new political order" that employs an illiberal populist law and order narrative. He has also formed a new ruling coalition with the Philippine National Police and the communist left that is very distinct from the previous liberal order.

Teehankee²⁵ explains the "inevitable rise" of Duterte by situating his presidency in the cycles of presidential regimes in the country. Following Stephen Skowronek's work, he examines how political leaders shape political regimes by transforming narratives into governance scripts. Teehankee locates Duterte's rise "in between structural regimes and agential choices." For Teehankee, Duterte's fierce rhetoric combined with the public's economic dissatisfaction created favorable conditions for Duterte's rise. He successfully tapped “into the 'politics of anger' fuelled by the general sense of frustration among the voters

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mark Thompson, “Bloodied Democracy: Duterte and the Death of Liberal Reformism in the Philippines.” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 35 (2016), (3), 39–68.

²⁵ Julio Teehankee, “Weak State, Strong Presidents: Situating the Duterte Presidency in Philippine Political Time.” *Journal of Developing Societies*, 32 (2017), (3), 293–321.

and the growing desire for a strong leader to restore law and order.”

Teehankee and Thompson²⁶ argue that while it is often claimed that Duterte's supporters are, for the most part, from the “the poor, uneducated constituency vulnerable to demagoguery” or the “masa” voters because of his seemingly simplistic solutions to the country's complex problems, his strongest support comes, in fact, from the upper and middle classes, the so-called “ABC” voters. As Teehankee puts it:

the Duterte phenomenon was not a revolt of the poor but was a protest of the new middle class who suffered from lack of public service, endured the horrendous land and air traffic, feared the breakdown of peace and order and silently witnessed their tax money siphoned by corruption despite promises of improved governance [from the Aquino regime].

Abinales²⁷ offers a different perspective on Duterte's rise to power. He underscores that “localist mentalite is what underpinned voters” confidence in Duterte; not disappointment over President Benigno Aquino III or because corruption has become worse.” His argument rests on the fact that Aquino consistently acquired at least 51% satisfaction rating until the end of his term in 2016, and that there is no sufficient evidence showing that Filipinos believe corruption has gotten worse. For Abinales, the enduring mistrust of the public on the legal system forced them to secure the help of “local Robin Hoods, trusted because they know how to dodge the system and act – often with impunity – outside the legal box.” Duterte perfectly fits the criteria - compared to his other political competitors seeking to follow the steps of Aquino, he offered vague, uncomprehensive programs for national development, did not act presidential, was politically inarticulate, and delivered invective-

²⁶ Julio Teehankee and Mark Thompson, “The Vote in the Philippines: Electing a Strongman.” *Journal of Democracy*, 27, 4, (2016), 124–134.

²⁷ Patricio Abinales, “The 2016 Philippine Elections: Local Power as National Authority.” *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, December 2016, 344, 31, www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb344.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35654.

filled campaign speeches - apparently making him the underdog. But the more he boasted his success in Davao City, the more Filipinos began to take a second look at this candidate from the South. As Abinales notes,

[Filipinos] started to admire what Davao had become – a city that has metamorphosed from the nation’s political assassination center in the 1970s and 1980s to the safest in the country. If Duterte can do this to Davao, what can he do about the criminals of our other cities and towns?

Indeed, Duterte’s presentation of himself as an effective and competent leader (through his “Davao model”), coupled by his portrayal of the Philippines as a country beset by the prevalence of crimes and drugs and in need of a decisive and strong leader, has catapulted him to the highest seat of power.

Curato²⁸ further explained that understanding Duterte and his approach to politics and governance also requires the understanding of his region. For more than 20 years, his strategy was to use brute force and astute political skills in order to transform Davao into what it is today. An important factor to this is the Davao Death Squad (DDS) - a vigilante group of "local thugs, rebels, ex-soldiers and policemen" who were commanded to kill suspected drug dealers, muggers, and rapists. However, up to this day, direct links between Duterte and the DDS has never been proven. The success story of Davao cannot also be boxed alone on the notorious death squad as Duterte also possesses astute political skills of arbitration and accommodation. He employed an innovative approach to governance by appointing "deputy mayors" from various ethnic groups who can represent the mayor in various kin-based conflicts. In other instances, he also used intimidation to drive unruly citizens out of the city or give them jobs in the government. All these strategies worked because he “understood the

²⁸ Nicole Curato, “We Need to Talk about Rody.” in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte’s Early Presidency*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017).

various sources of polarization in the city. He knew if it was an ethnic conflict, a political conflict, and he knew when these conflicts intersected with each other.”

The works of Curato²⁹ and Arguelles³⁰ present a different and more inclusive way for understanding the emergence of populist phenomenon in the Philippines. Both argue that in the current literature, populist publics have traditionally been ignored, if not excluded, “even though the phenomenon is about populist voters as much as it is about populist leaders.”

In her two-year ethnographic study in Tacloban City, Philippines, Curato contends against the portrayal of Duterte supporters as ‘fanatical devotees’, and suggested instead that their support for Duterte is a result of opposing yet mutually reinforcing political logics - the politics of fear and the politics of hope. “Politics of fear gains currency from the immediate need for punitive measures to quell criminality, the politics of hope opens up spaces for citizens to visualise better conditions within their lifetime.” By highlighting these logics, populism is characterized then as a negotiated relationship between the populist leader and his publics – “a relationship that runs much deeper than one-way manipulation and demagoguery.”

Arguelles, on the other hand, conducted his study in Barangay Tatalon, one of the Philippines’ largest and most vote-rich slum communities. His study argued for populist public heterogeneity and surfaced grounded populism views. For Arguelles, populism is best understood as a political performance that demands from the populist a compelling rhetoric, style, and behavior. His research of the populist publics shows that this populist political performance has three vital aspects: “serving as a surrogate voice for the miserable, bringing authenticity as opposed to hypocrisy in politics, and showing persistent political will.”

²⁹ Nicole Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power.” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 35, 3, (2017), 91–109.

³⁰ Cleve Arguelles, “Grounding Populism: Perspectives from the Populist Publics”, 2017. www.etd.ceu.hu/2017/arguelles_cleve.pdf

2.3 Gap in Literature and Significance of the Study

While there is an extensive literature on the relationship between the liberal democratic establishment and populism, there remains a lack of in-depth studies that focus on the emerging democracies in Southeast Asia. In the case of the Philippines, much of the studies focus on the factors that gave rise to Rodrigo Duterte's phenomenal presidential victory, but there is a lack of literature that examines how he employs his populist politics known as *Dutertismo* in the first half (three years) of his six-year term. Moreover, how various actors, both domestic and international, are responding to Duterte's politics remains to be explored. Therefore, this work seeks to employ a holistic approach for studying populism in the Philippines, taking into account not just the inherent features of Duterte's politics, but also reflecting on the kind of society that has emerged from the era of *Dutertismo*.

III. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Paul Taggart's Analytical Theory on Populism

This study adopts the six elements of populism from the work of Paul Taggart.³¹ He demonstrated that populism is characterized by (a) a critique of the internal and external establishment; (b) a heartland for “the people” that the populist message refers to; (c) a lack of core values; (d) a sense of crisis and the need for more direct populist democracy; (e) a charismatic leadership combined with chameleonic nature to adapt to changing circumstances.

Critique of the internal and external establishment. Taggart contends that an important feature of populism is its antipathy towards both internal and external establishment. These can be the traditional political elites/parties, political structures, and practices. As will be discussed in more detail in the next section, Duterte has consistently discredited liberal institutions, particularly the legislative and judicial branches of the government, as they were seen as primarily responsible for many of the country's persistent problems. He has also openly denounced the Roman Catholic Church, the media, and human rights organizations that he believes are barriers to his populist movement.

“Heartland” for the people. Taggart highlights the importance of a connection between ‘the people’ and a heartland, an idealized place for the people. For Duterte, he sees that this will only be achieved if he gets rid of the main enemies of the State - the drug users. His aggressive crackdown on drugs did not sit well with many local and international human rights groups arguing that Duterte circumvents due process and human rights. Duterte, however, has every intention to defy interventions from the international community, and responded to criticisms as an attack to Philippine sovereignty.

³¹ P. Taggart, *Populism*, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia, 2000.

Vagueness and lack of core values. Taggart emphasizes the significance of vagueness of populism and the lack of core values. In the case of the Philippines, where political turncoatism or party-switching remains rampant, Duterte's PDP-Laban is among the political parties without sharp ideological profile. Rather, it resembles a clientelistic network with many interest groups represented within it. This is important because PDP-Laban itself is not a populist party per se, but uses populist methods to maintain a dominant political party in Philippine politics.

Performance of a national crisis. This sense of crisis results in people feeling lost and losing faith in the political establishment to deal with the crisis and quickly improve the situation. In the Philippines, Duterte effectively created a national crisis out of the drug problem, making it a core of his presidential rhetoric. He has continuously criticized the once-ruling Liberal Party for failing to address the country's worsening drug use and trade problem, and took this as an opportunity to maintain a stronghold in the presidential seat.

Political leadership. While a political leader does not create a populist movement per se but needs socio-economic conditions to boost public support for populist discourses, leadership is important in populist movements. As will be discussed further in the case study, Duterte is considered a charismatic leader who has exploited various platforms, including social media and national survey to sustain his popularity and to advance his populist law and order narrative.

Chameleonic nature. Taggart highlights that populism has a chameleonic nature; it can adapt to different and changing situations. This can also be observed in Duterte's Philippines wherein he was able to forge a coalition with liberal institutions such as the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police. He also deliberately

made friends with leaders of the Communist Left in order to get more support for his populist political agenda.

3.2 Research Design and Methodology

This study uses the case study approach as the main method for gathering and analyzing secondary resources such news reports, public speeches, survey results, and official policy documents. The strength of this approach is that it enables the researcher to focus on a group, community, event, individual, policy, or even nation-state, and to study them in great depth. Since this study analyzes a nation-wide phenomenon, a case study seems to be the ideal form of analysis. Furthermore, case studies are also most commonly associated with studies that are primarily qualitative, which this study is. Furthermore, this study is exploratory in nature it aims to explore a phenomenon, without explicitly focusing on causal effects and variables. The broad nature of an exploratory study fits the flexible nature of a case study design.

IV. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY PHILIPPINES INFLUENCING DUTERTE'S APPROACH TO POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

This chapter contextualizes *Dutertismo* by exploring the political developments in the Philippines prior to the election of Rodrigo Duterte, before returning to Taggart's analytical theory and applying them in more detail to the Philippine context.

4.1 The ambivalent character of elite democracy

The liberal democratic order in the Philippines takes its root from American colonization. It has, however, struggled to be firmly entrenched in the country. There are several reasons to explain this: cultural factors as evidenced by the power of clientelistic and familial ties; America's colonial legacies in empowering the land-owning elites; persistent socio-economic problems such as poverty and inequality; and institutional nuances, particularly in the presidential system that adopts the winner-takes-all election format. From 1946 until Martial Law declaration in 1972, Philippine democracy had been plagued by problems related to poor governance, flawed policymaking, armed insurgency, and elite competition. During Martial Law under President Marcos, dictatorship was favored over liberal democracy. But in this period, the country experienced heightened corruption and repression. Martial Law met its inevitable end through the 1986 People Power Revolution; at the same time, pre-martial law era political elites and institutional features were restored.

Scholars of Philippine politics acknowledge that the return to democracy following the People Power Revolution is a flawed work in progress, often citing elections as marred by vote buying and violence, rampant corruption and rent-seeking, policies that have benefitted the special interests of elites at the cost of the country's poor, and a weak and inefficient judicial system.

Liberal democracy has worked fairly well since its institutionalization in 1986. Liberalism's principles and values have influenced the People Power Revolution and the establishment of the Philippine Constitution of 1987, leading in constitutionally guaranteed human rights, periodic and competitive elections for local and national offices, checks and balances system, free press, and a strong civil society. Since 1986, there have been various efforts for privatization, deregulation, and economic integration which contributed for stronger GDP over the past 10 years. Even so, skepticisms remain on the breadth and depth of these reforms to significantly improve the country's economic and political landscapes.

The influence and resiliency of the Philippines' elite transcends beyond any presidential term limits and power. Although the presidency exercises power over political appointments and budgets, the president's power and influence is transitory as her/his term is limited to six years. On the other hand, political and business families - Cojuangcos, Aquinos, Marcoses, Ayalas and Lopezes, to name a few - have had remarkable adaptability and longevity. These families exercise influence over the elections, and lobby for legislation, policy-making, jurisprudence, regulation, and distribution of government resources.

The country's elite has long limited the growth and development potential of the country by restricting the fiscal base of the government, and corrupting, coopting, and intimidating the bureaucracy. Because of their practice of collusion and protectionism, they have significantly influenced the Philippine economy, putting aside financial competition. The elite also continue to dominate policymaking and legislative processes, making it hard for governments to adopt and enforce policies that meet the needs of both the middle and lower classes. The Philippines remains to be one of the countries in Asia with the highest inequality and poverty incidence. Even after a relatively strong macroeconomic growth, poverty incidence has only decreased to 21.6 percent in 2015.

4.2 The successes and shortcomings of the Benigno Aquino III administration (2010-2016)

If the 2010 presidential election is any indication, the victory of Benigno Simeon Aquino III (affectionately known as PNoy or NoyNoy) seemed to have kick-started a new dawn for the Philippines. Being the son of two democratic icons in the country, Benigno II and Corazon, he ran a presidential bid anchored on his political message of “Daang Matuwid” (Straight Path), promising good governance and anti-corruption. This campaign well resonated to the voting public, as the outgoing president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, was plagued with various accusations of corruption, abuse of power, and plunder. He succeeded in acquiring 42 percent of the total votes and a net trust rating of 74 percent for his pre-inauguration, almost three times greater than Duterte's in 2016.³²

Arguably, the nation once considered the "sick man of Asia" has grown by leaps and bounds under the Aquino administration. For the whole of his term, the Philippines experienced political stability and business optimism. In fact, in 2015, it was ranked 4th among the world's fastest growing economies with a GDP growth of 6.7%, only trailing behind India, Qatar and China³³. It was also the fastest growing economy in Asia in 2016, ahead of China and Vietnam. Aquino's leadership also led to the Philippines' improved performance in major economic indices such as the World Economic Forum's economic competitiveness and Heritage Foundation's economic openness, integrating it in the global economy and eventually making it an emerging market. The Aquino administration was also hailed for having achieved the country's highest average GDP growth rate of 6.26% in five

³² In 2016 elections, Duterte garnered 39% share of total votes, and 26% pre-inauguration net trust rating. Mahar Mangahas, “Baseline trust ratings of Duterte and Robredo.” *Inquirer.net*, Last modified June 11, 2016, <http://opinion.inquirer.net/95149/baseline-trust-ratings-of-duterte-and-robredo>; Kristine Sabillo, “Aquino admin's last net satisfaction rating ‘very good’ –SWS,” *Inquirer.net*, Last modified August 15, 2016. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/806229/Aquino-admin-last-net-satisfaction-rating-very-good>.

³³ Kathleen Martin, “In latest CNN Money data: Philippines 4th fastest-growing economy in 2015,” *Philstar Global*. August 3, 2015. <https://www.philstar.com/business/2015/08/03/1484131/latest-cnn-money-data-philippines-4th-fastest-growing-economy-2015>

decades - significantly higher than the Marcos years (3.43%) or even the Arroyo regime (4.46%). Annual growth rates from 2010-2015 were also higher than the average growth rates of post-Martial law administrations including Corazon Aquino (3.85%), Fidel Ramos (3.75%), and Joseph Estrada (2.3%). Because of this stellar economic performance, the Philippines has since been considered by Wall Street Journal as Asia's "rising star" and World Bank as a "new tiger economy."

Apart from carrying out a robust macroeconomic policy, the Aquino government also initiated anti-corruption drives which aimed to end the seemingly perennial problems of red tape and bureaucratic graft, and restore public trust in government agencies. In Aquino's first few years in office, he led the successful impeachment of some high-ranking officials appointed by Arroyo in both the Office of the Ombudsman and the Supreme Court.³⁴ These anti-corruption drives were so arduous that it also led to the widely-covered investigation and eventual conviction of Arroyo herself and several senators. Because of this, Aquino formidably instigated a stronger campaign to combat corruption by making it a centerpiece of national political discourse. This has rekindled an old flame in the consciousness of the Filipino – to fight and finally put an end on what seems to be an omnipresent feature of Philippine politics.

While this liberal democratic political regime adopted by the Aquino administration may have had notable accomplishments, it also had its fair share of shortcomings. In his six years in office, Benigno Aquino failed to institutionalize his Daang Matuwid (Straight Path) mantra. In his term, important legislations which could have dramatically changed the political structure in the country such as the Freedom of Information Bill, Anti-Political Dynasty Act, and Political Party Development Act, were introduced in both the upper and

³⁴ These officials include the late Chief Justice Renato Corona who was removed from office for failing to release to the public his statement of assets, liabilities and net worth (SALN), as required by the Philippine Constitution.

lower houses of Congress, but were not passed into laws. The period of economic boom was largely seen as unequal as it failed to trickle down to the ordinary populace. These events further exposed the vulnerability of Aquino's reformism to a "breakdown."

Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) Scandal

One of the most detrimental issues against Aquino's good governance narrative was the controversial Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) - a discretionary fund taken from multiple public institutions' unspent assets and allotted to the government's priority projects.³⁵ It was initially intended to address the consequences of spending cutbacks and economic slowdown in the first few years of the Aquino government. However, the judgment of the Supreme Court on its unconstitutionality resulted in numerous allegations that it was being used to win Senators' favor in the form of extra pork barrel funds to remove corrupt officials from government, particularly those who are Arroyo allies and/or appointees. In addition, it was revealed that the funds would often go to the pockets of legislators rather than the priority projects. There were also claims of corruption and leadership misconduct in the Department of Budget and Management, the very institution that administers the DAP. Aquino, however, refused to conduct investigations on these allegations as it involved his appointee and longtime ally, Florencio Abad. He also managed to block any other corruption investigations that would involve his key allies in the executive and legislative branches. This was felt by the public to be an apparent display of hypocrisy by an administration that promises greater transparency and accountability.³⁶

³⁵ Some of the priority projects of the government include the upgrading of the mass rail transit (MRT) system and disaster mitigation and prevention.

³⁶ Richard Heydarian, "Philippines' Competition Conundrum: A Nation of Oligopolies, Dynasties and Autocratic Nostalgia," August 19, 2016. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-javad-heydarian/philippines-competition-c_b_8012788.html

Mamasapano Incident

The conflict in Mamasapano, Maguindanao between the Philippine National Police (PNP) and rebel organizations Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is regarded one of the worst defeats against terrorism in Philippine history. The operation, called Oplan Exodus, was conducted on 25 January 2015 to serve arrest warrants to Malaysian terrorists Zulkifli Addhir (aka Marwan) and Basit Usman. But it unfortunately resulted in the death of the PNP's 44 Special Action Force (SAF44) members. This mission captured the attention of the public as Aquino was nowhere near public's view after the clash. Instead, he appeared three days after to lead the opening of a car manufacturing plant than attend to the grieving families of the killed policemen. It revealed Aquino's lack of sensitivity and remorse as he looked unapologetic for the failed mission. Being the commander-in-chief, Aquino, together with other high-ranking PNP officials, was heavily criticized for violating the chain of command. Aquino was primarily blamed for letting his close friend, resigned police chief Alan Purisima, play an active role in the mission despite his suspension over graft charges. Critics also claim that the debacle could have been prevented if there was proper coordination and intelligence plan with the Philippine Army.

Typhoon Haiyan

Typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda) struck the area of Eastern Visayas on November 8, 2013, displacing approximately 4 million individuals or 900,000 families in 44 provinces. Death toll reached 6,000, making it one of the greatest typhoons to ever hit the country. Criticisms on Aquino was on the way he handled the disaster since he attempted to downplay the seriousness of the devastation few days after its landfall, saying that death toll

was overestimated and putting much of the blame on local officials³⁷. The slow emergency response and post-disaster rehabilitation by the national government also triggered much disappointment from both the locals and the media. What's worse, there were allegations on the misuse of public funds intended for the faster recovery and rehabilitation of the disaster-stricken areas. In particular, roughly P20 billion for housing assistance to 200,000 families was never released by the government before the president stepped down from office, adding to billions of unutilized local and foreign donations. There were also allegations of improper disbursements, irregularities on procurement, undocumented project expenses, and questionable contracts.

Unequal economic growth

The macroeconomic growth under Aquino was mainly due to the remittances sent by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), and the fast-growing business process outsourcing (BPO) industry commonly owned by foreign investors. A more profound problem, however, is that the amount of wealth generated from these sources hardly reach the majority of the population. In fact, in 2011, the country's 40 richest families' cumulative wealth was equivalent to 75% of the country's GDP that year. This is reflected by a \$13 billion or 37.95 increase in their capital stocks in the year 2010-2011. It is hardly surprising that poverty and unemployment rates, among other basic development indicators remained high. Added to this burden to the ordinary Filipino working class is the continuous problem on infrastructure. The improving economic performance of the country also meant a greater need for more reliable and improved system of public transport. Despite the promise of the government to expand the basic infrastructure by increasing GDP share of spending to 5%, Manila remained

³⁷ Aquino pointed his finger on the mayor of Tacloban, Leyte where most of deaths occurred, Alfred Romualdez, nephew of Imelda Marcos. It sparked speculations that Romualdez was singled out as he belongs to the Romualdez-Marcos clan, a political rival of the Aquinos. In his defense, Romualdez said that his preparations for the typhoon were approved by the national government 24 hours before its landfall.

to have one of the world's worst traffic congestions. Its Metro Rail Transit (MRT) system also has numerous defects and undergoes repeated incidents of breakdown. The Ninoy Aquino International Airport (ironically named the late father of the incumbent) also frequently experienced embarrassing blackouts, besides its overcrowding and inefficiency woes. These setbacks on public transportation and traffic in the national capital were indeed detrimental to Aquino's popularity and approval ratings. By the end of his term, he acquired a net zero approval rating in Metro Manila.

The unmet promises and escalating expectations, particularly from the middle classes, have resulted to what Heydarian³⁸ calls "grievance politics." This discontent with the prevailing liberal democratic order, dominated by the elite, was used by populist Duterte to penetrate the national political arena and instigate a new leadership at the helm of Malacañan Palace to fix the mistakes of the past administrations. The rise of Duterte is regarded part of a worldwide populist phenomenon that has challenged the establishment in both advanced and developing democracies.

³⁸ Heydarian, *The Rise of Duterte: A Populist Revolt Against Elite Democracy*

V. CASE STUDY: THE PHILIPPINES UNDER POPULIST DUTERTE

This chapter considers the five key features of populism adapted from Paul Taggart's analytical theory. He demonstrated that populism is characterized by (a) a critique of the internal and external establishment; (b) a heartland for "the people" that the populist message refers to; (c) a lack of core values; (d) a performance of a crisis and the need for more direct populist democracy; (e) a charismatic leadership combined with chameleonic nature to adapt to changing circumstances.

Adopting this theory in the context of the Philippines, this chapter argues that upon his assumption to office, Duterte has used populism to maintain a steady grip on power, while concurrently portraying "Others", particularly members of the once dominant Liberal Party, the media, Roman Catholic Church and most controversially, drug users as enemies of the State. It also sheds light on how Duterte has been responding to various criticisms from external actors such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and international human rights groups who, according to him, have been 'attacking our sovereignty'; and looks into how he sustains his high popularity and trust ratings by framing the drug problem as a national crisis. Lastly, this paper presents the chameleonic nature of Duterte's politics by looking at his coalition with relatively liberal institutions such as the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines, and his relationships with the Communist Left.

Elements of populism in Rodrigo Duterte's politics as observed in his first three years in office

5.1 'Othering': The dangerous "others" and the enemies of the State

Liberal institutions and political opponents

Relatively liberal institutions, particularly the judicial and legislative branches, were quickly discredited upon Duterte's election. The Aquino administration was often criticized for its weakness in enforcing the law and curbing criminality in the country. The "justice delayed" phenomenon in the country persisted as there were few major institutional reforms introduced. Example of which is the case of Maguindanao massacre in 2009 that resulted to deaths of 32 journalists which Aquino vowed to help resolve before he steps down from office. The trial has been affected by delays and to the disappointment of many, not a single suspect has been convicted until now. Secondly, the raid in the biggest and most crowded jail in the Philippines, the National Bilibid Prison, exposed the situations of drug lords, gang leaders and other powerful inmates who were secretly put in luxurious prison cells, and allowed to bring in illegal drugs. This controversy was particularly embarrassing to Aquino as criticisms arose to why this problem was never found out and investigated early in his term. In addition, the case on the pork barrel scandal was widely perceived to be selective. Cases were only filed against opposition legislators, which raised concerns about Aquino's adherence to the rule of law.

Perceptions on Aquino being particularly incompetent and soft on matters related to the justice system, and fight against criminality and drug abuse was taken advantage by Duterte. His disparagement of liberal democracy, particularly the ineffectiveness and corruption of the liberal elites, has acquired considerable public traction. He introduced his

“alternative” illiberal populist political order – anchored on a law and order campaign, and a new coalition group to counter the dominant liberal institutions.

At the very onset, the Duterte administration has put to test the established democratic institutions. Legislators and critics, specifically those who are members of the Liberal Party, were also not spared by Duterte’s lashes and vulgarities. He exploited the legal system as a tool to obstruct any form of opposition. When Leila De Lima, former Justice Secretary under the Aquino government and a neophyte senator, initiated a senate inquiry on the war on drugs in her capacity as head of the Justice Committee of the Senate and advised him on the possible consequences in the International Criminal Court, Duterte was quick to accuse her of coddling druglords during her stint as Justice Secretary, and having an affair with her driver who also had roles associated to illegal drugs. These accusations led Duterte’s allies in the Senate to remove De Lima as head of the Committee on Justice and launch investigations on her possible involvement in drugs and extra-marital affair. This proved her vulnerability in the context of a misogynist political culture perpetrated and tolerated by the president himself. In February 2017, she was arrested and convicted for drug-related cases.

One of Duterte’s staunchest critics, Senator Antonio Trillanes, was the second legislator to be arrested in just two years. Trillanes has also criticized the drug war, accused the president's son and his cabinet members of being involved in corruption, and supported the ICC’s preliminary investigation into the alleged extrajudicial killings.

Various rights groups have also alleged that Duterte is murdering many of his political opponents under the mask of his bloody drug war. Since Duterte took office in June 2016, a total of 11 mayors and 6 vice mayors have been killed. This rise in the number of murdered local officials follows months after Duterte read out of a list of 158 officials

suspected of drug trade.³⁹ Notable of these was the assassination of two provincial mayors in a span of two days. Tanauan City Mayor Antonio Halili's assassination by a sniper during a flag ceremony in July 2018 was caught on video, causing mass panic. Halili was commonly renowned for "parading drug suspects in a walk of shame", but was subsequently accused by Duterte for being connected to drug trade himself. A day after Halili's killing, Mayor Ferdinand Bote of General Tinio, Nueva Ecija was ambushed in his car by unidentified gunmen after leaving a meeting in Cabanatuan City, north of Manila.

Duterte also publicly denounced human rights organizations, particularly the Commission on Human Rights, for their stance against Duterte's drug war-related killings. He has repeatedly threatened to abolish or at least provide zero budget for the institution and block any investigations of CHR on possible abuses by the PNP.

The Supreme Court, meanwhile, has been cautious to face a sitting president, particularly after the former Chief Justice Renato Corona's impeachment trial during the Aquino presidency. Adding to this are various allegations of political influence and plagiarism of some judges and justices that might be used by Duterte to further demoralize the institution.

The Media

In its 2018 World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders has cut the ranking of the Philippines from 127 a year ago to 133, out of 180 nations. This followed government threats, press restrictions, and last year's killings of four journalist, making the Philippines Asia's deadliest nation for reporters.

³⁹ Joseph Hincks, "Duterte is assassinating opponents under the cover of the drug war, Philippine Rights Groups say". *Time*, July 5, 2018. <https://time.com/5330071/philippines-mayors-political-assassination-duterte/>

Examples of violations include the blacklisting of journalists from the news site Rappler from covering Malacañan Palace, tax evasion and libel lawsuits against its owners, and investigation of its ownership structure that could lead to the closure of the network. Before Rappler, Duterte also personally threatened a tax case against the Philippine Daily Inquirer, the country's most prestigious newspaper, and flirted with the idea of denying ABS-CBN, the country's largest media network, its congressional franchise for critically reporting on the "drug war."⁴⁰

The Roman Catholic Church

Being predominantly Catholic⁴¹, much of Philippine history has been influenced by the Church. It became a more significant force in the country after it helped topple down the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. Church leaders completely embraced their position as protectors of democracy, thus securing a vital position in Philippine politics. After the Marcos presidency, they supported the reformist government established by the newly-elected president, Corazon Aquino. The Church, through the leadership of then Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, also played an important part in the impeachment hearing of former President Joseph Estrada, who was ultimately indicted for plunder and perjury charges. But the death of Cardinal Sin began a rather fragmented leadership in the Church, marked by a reorganization of the Archdiocese of Manila into dioceses with different bishops. The Church was also plagued by allegations of sexual abuses and internal conflicts, making it difficult for the clergy to take unified stance against then President Arroyo after she committed election fraud during the 2004 presidential elections and on the wiretapping scandal in 2005 (dubbed as "Hello Garci"). In the Aquino presidency, the Catholic Church took a strong stance against

⁴⁰ Carlos H. Conde, "A New Weapon Against Press Freedom in the Philippines". *The Globe and Mail*, December 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-a-new-weapon-against-press-freedom-in-the-philippines/>

⁴¹ More than 80% of Philippine population is Roman Catholic. (Jack Miller, "Religion in the Philippines," <https://asiasociety.org/education/religion-philippines>)

the passage of the Reproductive Health Bill⁴² in the Philippine Congress, which would give greater access to contraception, maternal care, and sex education. While the bill was signed into law in 2013, the Church made huge efforts by using homilies as platforms for dissent, and having the Supreme Court and allies in Congress partially block or defund it.

Things went on a big turnabout when Duterte took office. Although a significant voice in the human rights discussion in the country, the Catholic Church was challenged by Duterte who repeatedly threatened to reveal their sexual abuses, corruption involvement, and pointing at their strong position against greater access to reproductive health. These instances of intimidation put the Church's power and influence in question. It struggled to even issue its first statement against Duterte's crackdown of illegal drugs which killed 3,000 people in his first three months in office.

Drug Users

With an unapologetic and foul-mouthed rhetoric, Duterte's presidential campaign was anchored on a promise to a total crackdown of illegal drugs within three to six months and "fatten the fish of Manila Bay with the corpses of criminals."⁴³ In justifying this bloody war on drugs, he was able to depict the drug trade in the country as a serious threat to the country's national security, claiming that because of the growing drug menace, the Philippines is on the verge of turning into a "narco-state."⁴⁴ This pledge was well-received by voters who had become increasingly fearful of the seemingly ever-growing social problems in the country, yet had shaken many observers in the international community, his political opponents, and international and local human rights organizations.

⁴² Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. An Act Providing for a National Policy on Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health. <http://www.gov.ph/2012/12/21/republic-act-no-10354/>.

⁴³ 'Duterte's Talk of Killing Criminals Raises Fear in the Philippines' *The New York Times*, 17 May 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/world/asia/rodrigo-duterte-philippines.html> [Accessed 22/06/17]

⁴⁴ Nathaniel Gilbert Quimpo, "Duterte's 'War on Drugs' The Securitization of Illegal Drugs and the Return of National Boss Rule" in *A Duterte Reader*. Cornell University Press, 145.

The message of Duterte in his drug war was clear: it is justifiable to humiliate and kill criminals for the sake of those who fear god and abide by the law. After he was sworn in as president on June 30, 2016, the number of killings related to his war on drugs has skyrocketed. In his first seven weeks alone, almost 1,800 people died as a result of the anti-drug war, either through police operations or extrajudicial killings.⁴⁵ A study by the Philippine-based ABS-CBN Investigative and Research Group reveals that a total of 5,317 suspected drug users have been murdered from the period of July 2016 to December 2018. (Table 4.1). It is interesting to note that the number of drug-related fatalities came not only from legitimate operations by law enforcement agencies, but also by unknown gunmen either witnessed by other people or caught on CCTV.

Table 4.1 Drug-related deaths, by type of incident, July 1, 2016 to December 18, 2018

Type of incident	No. of fatalities	Percentage
Killed during operations conducted by law-enforcement agencies	3,391	63.8%
Killed by unidentified assailants	1,682	31.6%
Bodies that were dumped in public places	244	4.6%
Total	5,317	100%

Source: ABS-CBN Investigative and Research Group culled from ABS-CBN reports and other news sites and press releases from PDEA and PNP

Also, the number of fatalities recorded as a consequence of police activities in 2018 was greater than in 2017, as shown in Figure 4.1. Between January 1 and December 18, 2018, there were 1,021 drug-related fatalities, 11% higher than the 916 people killed in 2017.

⁴⁵ Julio C. Teehankee and Mark R. Thompson, 'The Vote in the Philippines: Electing a Strongman' *Journal of Democracy* 27,4 (2016) 125-134 : 126.

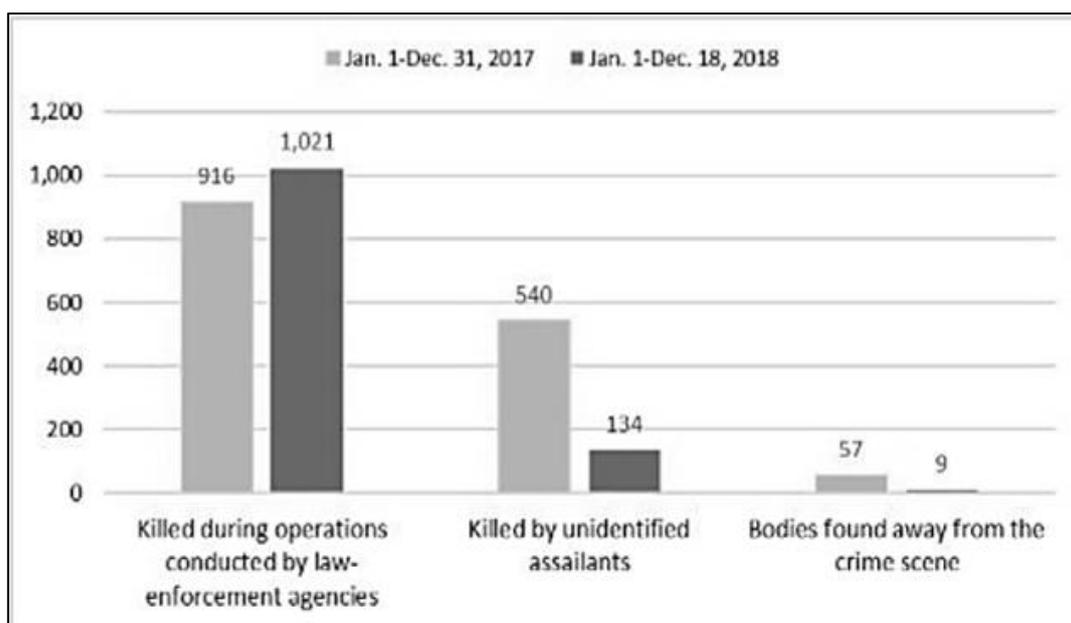


Figure 4.1 Anti-drug operation-related deaths, 2017 vs 2018

Source: ABS-CBN Investigative and Research Group culled from ABS-CBN reports and other news sites and press releases from PDEA and PNP

5.2 Performance of a national crisis: Framing and exaggerating the drug problem as a threat to national security

Drug menace as Duterte's signature issue

Duterte's capturing of an ever-grimmer picture of the drug issue in the country continues to be an essential component of his overall political strategy. By continually framing the drug problem as a national security issue and exaggerating its extent, accompanied by his use of gutter language, he is able to justify his crackdown on drugs which cause public panic and "urgency for saving the republic."⁴⁶

Though it cannot be denied that the Philippines has a long-standing problem on drugs, Duterte, for the past three years, has overstated its scope and scale. When his term started in 2016, he claimed that there are about 4 million drug users in the country. Many are

⁴⁶ JC Punongbayan, "How Duterte's exaggerations worsened the Philippines' drug problem," *Rappler*, <https://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/224583-analysis-how-duterte-exaggerations-worsened-drug-problem-philippines>

questioning the legitimacy of Duterte's statement on the sheer scale of the drug problem. Until now, the government has not verified which intel agencies have assisted the president in his estimations. Whether these are based on collecting and triangulating individual reports from different state authorities and overseas partners remains unclear. But one is for sure, his figures contrasted sharply with the official statistics released in 2015 by the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB), which estimated the number of drug users nationwide at just about 1.8 million. Despite the comparison in the numbers of the president and the DDB, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reports that the drug incidence rate of 2.3 percent in the country is still below the worldwide average of 5.2 percent.⁴⁷

Duterte's overblown figures have profound implications in that the government determines how many people must be targeted to eradicate the drug demand in the country. This has led to the drawing up of notorious "drug list" with names of drug suspects, hundreds if not thousands, of whom have been killed either through legitimate police operations or by unknown gunmen. He stated by the end of his first year in office that over the next four to six years, the number of drug addicts would increase to over 10 million. Following this projection, by 2020, 14 million Filipinos will be drug addicted.

Although not the first presidential candidate to make crime and drug his signature issue, Duterte was the first to portray it as an existential threat and have been consistently vocal about the violent approach he would adopt to suppress it. This appears to have a political logic. For one, the reputation of Duterte as an efficient Davao City Mayor was mainly due to his city-wide fighting of drug and crime. The Davao Death Squad, a group supposedly connected to Duterte that targets suspected criminals and drug dealers, is also publicly tolerated due to its low cost but high returns. As president, his nationwide

⁴⁷ 'Are there 4 million drug addicts in the Philippines?' *The Philippine Star*, December 16, 2016. <https://www.philstar.com/other-sections/news-feature/2016/12/16/1654043/are-there-4-million-drug-addicts-philippines>

crackdown also provides a political narrative which makes Duterte the only one with moral compass and political will to save the country from the dangers brought by drugs and crime.

Public attitude towards Duterte's war on drugs

The president's exaggeration of the drug problem seems to sit well with the public. It tracks closely with their demand for a more comprehensive and reliable action against lawlessness in the country. In fact, based on surveys, fighting crime, including drug-related offenses, is one of the top five priorities of most Filipino voters. A survey by Pulse Asia on March 23-28, 2018 reveals that 27% of participants recognized the fight against crime as their fifth most pressing concern, with as many as 81% of participants praising the achievement of the Duterte government in this matter, as shown in Table 4.2. In terms of demographics, those belonging to Class ABC put the biggest significance on fighting crime (45%), as compared to Class D (25%) and Class E (25%), which are more worried with other domestic problems.

Table 4.2 Perceived urgency of selected national issues and the national administration's performance ratings (March 23-28, 2018)

Selected National issues	% citing as One of Three Most Urgent Issues	Approve	Undecided	Disapprove	NAR*
Responding to the needs of areas affected by calamities	--	86	12	2	+84
Protecting the welfare of OFWs	13	84	12	4	+80
Fighting criminality	27	81	12	7	+74
Increasing peace in the country	22	71	23	6	+65
Enforcing the law on all, whether influential or ordinary people	10	71	21	7	+64
Stopping the destruction and abuse of our environment	10	71	20	9	+62
Improving/Increasing the pay of workers	50	68	24	8	+60
Fighting graft and corruption in government	22	70	18	12	+58
Creating more jobs	32	67	23	9	+58
Defending the integrity of Philippine territory against foreigners	6	67	23	10	+57
Reducing the poverty of many Filipinos	35	53	29	18	+35
Controlling inflation	45	39	28	33	+ 6

Source: Pulse Asia, 2018

In another survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) in September 2016, more than 80% of the respondents were satisfied with Duterte’s war on drugs (Fig 4.2). It is interesting to note, however, that despite the high approval for the administration's anti-illegal drugs campaign, 71%, or a majority of respondents, said they find it "very important" for police to keep drug suspects alive (Fig. 4.3). This paradoxical information might imply that while most Filipinos are in principle in agreement with the president's anti-drug campaign, they have reservations about the approach and process.

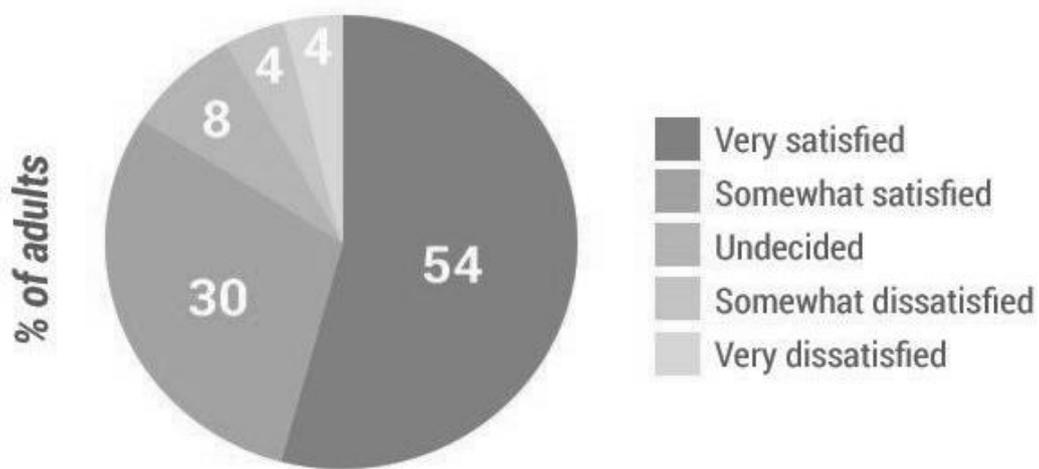


Fig. 4.2 Satisfaction with government’s campaign against illegal drugs (September 2016)
 Source: SWS Third Quarter Social Weather Report, September 2016 National Survey

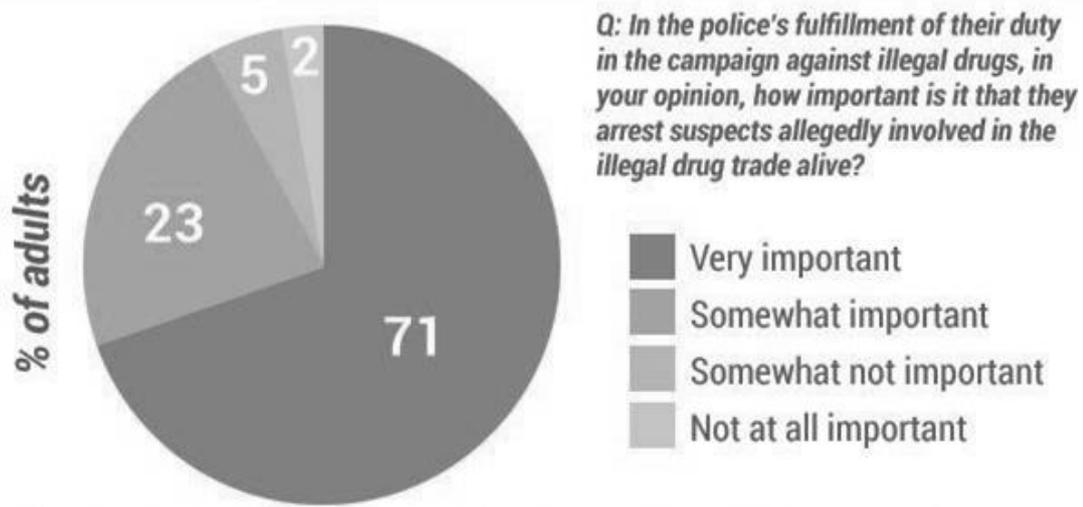


Fig. 4.3 Importance of keeping illegal drug trade suspects alive (September 2016)
 Source: SWS Third Quarter Social Weather Report, September 2016 National Survey

5.3 'Heartland': Defiance of international backlash

For Duterte, the total crackdown on drugs is the realization of his campaign promise and the nationalization of the law enforcement approach he utilized in Davao City. What's more, he is under high levels of public expectation and pressure as he promised to fully wipe out the proliferation of crime and drugs in the country in the first 3-6 months of his term. Despite this, he decided to up the ante and declared that he "will not stop until the last drug lord, financier, pusher is put behind bars...or below the ground if they so wish" during his first State of the Nation Address (SONA).⁴⁸

The president's fight against drugs, however, has raised extensive global concern about the country's human rights and rule of law. In the 2018 Global Peace Index, the Philippines was only next to North Korea as the least peaceful country in Asia. The report states that the poor standing of the country was partly because of "a bloody war against drugs and crime (that) has been extended nationwide" under Duterte.⁴⁹

The Duterte administration has been accused by several members of the international human rights organizations of promoting vigilante murders. Amnesty International blamed Duterte and other populist leaders Trump, Orban, and Erdogan for pursuing a "divisive fear mongering" and "wielding a toxic agenda that hounds, scapegoats and dehumanizes entire groups of people." In the Philippines, the 'other' are the alleged drug pushers/users and criminals.⁵⁰ This makes Duterte the first Filipino president likely to be prosecuted by

⁴⁸ 'Duterte: 'We will not stop until last drug lord has surrendered' *SunStar Philippines*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/87972>

⁴⁹ Frances Mangosing, 'PH is 2nd 'least peaceful' country in Asia Pacific' *Inquirer.net*, June 6, 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/998244/ph-is-2nd-least-peaceful-country-in-asia-pacific>

⁵⁰ 'Politics of demonization' breeding division and fear', *Amnesty International*, February 22, 2017 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/02/amnesty-international-annual-report-201617/>

international courts, particularly those under the auspices of the ICC.⁵¹ In a statement, ICC's chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda voiced out her deep concern with the current situation in the country, and warned that "any person in the Philippines who incites or engages in acts of mass violence including by ordering, requesting, encouraging, or contributing, in any other manner, to the commission of crimes within the jurisdiction of the ICC is potentially liable to prosecution before the Court." She further emphasized that her office "will be closely following the developments in the Philippines in the weeks to come and record any instance of incitement or resort to violence with a view to assessing whether a preliminary examination into the situation of the Philippines needs to be opened."⁵²

However, Duterte, who has already developed a strong grip on political institutions, does not appear to be concerned about the ICC's imminent filing of charges and prosecution. He and his officials categorically and consistently rejected any wrongdoing, declaring allegations of extensive breach of human rights as biased, based on questionable and misleading proofs, and/or politically driven. In response to the ICC's launch of a preliminary investigation over the possibility of crimes against humanity in the ongoing crackdown on drugs, Duterte withdrew the Philippines' membership in the ICC, arguing that the court "can never acquire jurisdiction over my person, not in a million years."

The US government, under then President Barack Obama, also conveyed its reservations about the clear disregard for the legal processes and the unlawful killings.⁵³ In fact, during the 2016 ASEAN Summit in Laos, the two presidents' encounter did not reflect

⁵¹ Perfecto Caparas. "Explainer: Yes, International Criminal Court can prosecute Duterte for killing spree", Rappler. March 6, 2017. <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/150285-international-criminal-court-trial-duterte-killings>

⁵² "Statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, concerning the situation in the Republic of the Philippines." *ICC-CPI.int*. October 13, 2016. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/pages/item.aspx?name=161013-otp-stat-php>

⁵³ Eric Vincent Batalla, "Divided Politics and Economic Growth in the Philippines", *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 35, 3 (2016), 161–186.

the long-standing warm friendship between the two countries, especially during the term of Aquino. Before their planned one-on-one talk, Duterte was fast to remind Obama to respect the anti-drug war or else he “would curse him in the forum.” In response, the US president dismissed his meeting with Duterte. Meanwhile, Duterte retaliated by not attending Obama's meeting with Southeast Asian leaders.

In one of his invective-filled public statements, President Duterte also reacted to threats of aid withdrawal by the US government and other international groups, saying, “We have a problem here trying to preserve our society and you mess up by [raising] human rights [issues]. You threaten us using your assistance. How do you look at us? Mendicants?.”⁵⁴ He also reminded public officials to not beg for “crumbs of foreign aid” at the expense of the country’s dignity. Thus, wanting the US to treat the Philippines more fairly, Duterte at one point proposed the idea of mandating US citizens to obtain a visa to the Philippines, as Filipinos are required to do the same, usually at a high cost, when they visit the US.

The president has declared his intention to defy any intervention by any external actors, who, according to him, are “attacking our sovereignty.” His defiance is anchored on his argument that the criminal justice system in the country is too slow and ineffective to be relied on and respected. He presents himself as the lone protector of the republic that is on the verge of a breakdown; the only person whom the people can rely in getting the bad guys, at any cost, including sidestepping standard operating procedures of law and extinguishing checks and balances in the country.

⁵⁴ “Duterte dares US, EU: Pull out aid to Philippines”, *Philippine Star*, October 6, 2016
<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/10/06/1630967/duterte-dares-us-eu-pull-out-aid-philippines>

5.4 Vagueness or lack of core values

Party ideologies in the Philippines are weak, as evidenced by widespread political turncoatism and party-switching which has become part and parcel of Philippine politics. In particular, the legislature, composed of the House of Representatives and the Senate, has the reputation of defections in favor of the winning presidential candidate's party. In fact, between 1987 and 2016, an average of 33% of members of the House of Representatives switched parties; of this number, 32% usually transfers to the political party of the president.

Duterte's *Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan* (PDP-Laban) or Philippine Democratic Party - Power of the People is among those parties without sharp ideological profile. It used to be a minor party that only had three seats in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate prior to the 2016 general elections. However, it soon became the ruling party in both houses because of "political butterflies" who were under the predominant Liberal Party. As soon as Duterte's presidential victory, more than 300 legislators switched party affiliations. Many of these defections occurred despite the warning of Liberal Party's leadership that the Philippines will sooner or later be under an authoritarian rule, and the failure of the Party to reverse its growing image as a Party of traditional politicians (aka "trapos"). It can be speculated that the immediate transfer of these Liberals to Duterte's party is to protect themselves from prosecution, following the controversies under the Aquino administration. A more obvious motive behind this party switching is the promise of access to patronage.

PDP-Laban is no populist party per se, but Duterte has been able to stage a populist mobilization strategy to build a mass of supporters and retain power. In the 2019 midterm elections, for example, the popular Duterte helped consolidate block votes accumulated through traditional bailiwicks and political machineries. This was particularly true for three

of Duterte's most favored senatorial candidates – Special Assistant to the President Christopher “Bong” Go, former police chief Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa, and Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs Francis Tolentino. Struggling for name recognition in the senatorial race crowded by familiar and established names in Philippine politics, these three candidates all managed to win a senate seat. Being close to the president, they were able to gain more public awareness and converted this awareness into actual votes.

5.5 Charismatic leadership through mass mobilization projects and vague policies and agenda

Exploitation of national surveys to strengthen populist hegemony

Various surveys conducted from the start of Duterte's administration in June 2016 show that Duterte continues to enjoy high levels of approval and performance ratings, ranging from 86% to 80% and 80% to 76%, respectively. A Pulse Asia study in 2017 finds that Duterte remains the most trusted among Philippine presidents from 1999 to 2017.⁵⁵ Compared to former presidents Benigno S. Aquino III (2010–2016) Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001–2010) and Joseph Estrada (1998–2001), only Duterte was able to attain the 90% mark, reaching 91% in July 2016 right after he took office. He is followed by Aquino, whose highest rating of 80% in October 2010 is 11 points lower than Duterte's. Meanwhile, Arroyo and Estrada's highest trust ratings were 55% (October 2001) and 44% (October 2000), respectively. The same holds true for performance rating in which Duterte's highest rating peaked at 86% in September 2016, compared to Aquino's 79% in October 2010. Estrada achieved 74% in May 1999, and 63% for Arroyo in March 2001. Similarly, SWS reported

⁵⁵ “Comparative Performance and Trust Ratings of Presidents (May 1999 to September 2017),” *Pulse Asia*, 9 November 2017; “Duterte more trusted than his 3 predecessors – survey,” *Rappler*. 10 November 2017.

that by the first quarter of 2019, the Duterte Administration achieved a record high net satisfaction rating of +72% for general performance, classified by SWS as “excellent.”⁵⁶

Negative portrayals by local and international media have so far not affected Duterte’s popularity among the ordinary Filipino. The “excellent” ratings he gained from various surveys conducted in his first three years in office manifest an important characteristic for national leaders in Philippine society – charismatic leadership. He has effectively exploited these surveys to place himself as a “president for all” - given that his support base transcends gender, sector, generations, social class. He also continues to have the broad support of different political factions. Duterte sure knows how to use this to strengthen his populist movement. Coming from a political family in the city of Davao and having served in local politics for more than 20 years, Duterte is considered a veteran political boss or a traditional politician. For much of his years in power as the local chief executive of Davao, he has witnessed national-level political arrangements and relations that are characterized by clientelism and patronage, money politics, and coercive violence.⁵⁷ Even so, Duterte’s governance style can also be viewed as unorthodox because of his harsh criticisms and often politically incorrect statements about the institutions that have paved the way for these irregularities – the liberal oligarchy, the Catholic Church, and the US – which have been the staple during his public engagements.

The sustained popularity of Rodrigo Duterte, as shown by both Pulse Asia and SWS surveys, make it possible for his supporters to claim that he indeed represents and embodies the majority’s voice. These same followers have anchored their value judgments on what is moral, true, right and democratic on the principle of majoritarianism. In short, the choice of

⁵⁶ Duterte admin satisfaction rating rises to 'excellent' in Q1 2019: SWS. *ABS-CBN News*, 03 May 2019.

⁵⁷ Alfred W. McCoy (ed.), *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philip-pines*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009; John Sidel, *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

the majority becomes absolutely and automatically moral, true, right, and democratic. Explaining this outpour of support for Duterte can be summed up into three: employment of an efficient and effective campaign strategy, particularly in the cyberspace, that well-resonated to the hopes, fears, and resentment of the voting population; the Philippine presidential and electoral system that relies on the plurality method or the election of the highest polling candidate and in which politically charged statements are not sufficiently scrutinized such as in a parliamentary set-up; and the embodiment of people's anger against the predominant liberal establishment paving for a "protest" vote in favor of Duterte.

Duterte's populist rhetoric at the helm of public discourse

The political language that Duterte helped popularize and normalize in his presidential campaign has continued to dominate public discourse. Characterized by loud, and domineering speech that is often filled with vague and sweeping statements, he is able to provide simplistic solutions to complex social problems, and perfectly creates for himself an image of a father of the nation that stands between the voiceless people and the corrupt elites. For his supporters, if not for most citizens, this, of course, is no issue. For them, Duterte effectively speaks the collective mind of the majority – the ardent desire for law and order, a more disciplined populace, and long-term development that reaches poorest and the farthest.

The cyberspace, a crucial virtual arena that helps shape public opinion during the election season, was effectively used by Duterte's campaign team to boost his presidential run. In fact, the Oxford University's Computational Propaganda Research Project⁵⁸ found out that with a USD 200,000 budget, a group of social media campaigners, known as keyboard armies or trolls, have been recruited to boost Duterte's internet presence. After the elections,

⁵⁸ Samantha Bradshaw & Philip N. Howard, 'Troops, Trolls and Troublemakers: A Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation', in Samuel Woolley & Philip N. Howard (eds.), Working Paper 2017.12, Oxford: Project on Computational Propaganda.

it is alleged that this group has continued supporting Duterte through propaganda work; Duterte himself appointed his famous performer-turned-blogger supporter as Assistant Secretary for Social Media at the official communications office of the palace. Many fake social media accounts/profiles are being used to provoke public outrage and spread disinformation towards political rivals of the Duterte government; however, the bigger, most profound problems is that real people with legitimate social media accounts have been heavily influenced and have started behaving badly and expressing messages of divisiveness and hate. This indicates that social media can be used not just as a tool for promoting anti-democratic ideas, while facilitating a populist politician's legitimacy, but also help in forming populist sentiments and behaviors through online memes, one-liners, and insults. This dominance of Duterte's populist rhetoric on public discourse significantly influences the state of the country's liberal democracy. It is not a political propaganda that deceives or misleads the public, but one that echoes the current realities and resentments of the people, their lived experiences, hopes, insecurities, and fears. Although social media increase the political awareness and participation of the public, it can also lead to behaviors, often not through constructive dialogues and interactions, which do not contribute to or even hamper the process of nation-building.

Duterte's public mobilization projects has made it easier to him to forward and justify his ideas of a Revolutionary Government which he floated as early as 2017, and the revision of the 1987 Philippine Constitution to transition the country from a unitary to a federal form of government. While Duterte won the presidency through a democratically led general election, most of the supporters of the revolutionary government act as if they have initiated and established a political revolution. Duterte justifies the idea of a revolutionary government to repair the government, curb corruption and crime, and block efforts to destabilize the government. Also, he has long advocated for a federalist form of government which he

claims would lead to better delivery of services to the people, and equally distribute public funds to all regions which has traditionally been concentrated in the “Imperial Manila.” These agenda are now subject to major contestations and debates in both the lower and upper houses of Congress, and are expected to make drastic changes to the country’s political landscape in the coming years.

Vague policies and agenda: TRAIN and the ‘Build, Build, Build’

During his campaign for the top post of the land, Duterte did not show much interest on issues in economic policy. In fact, his ten-point economic agenda, developed to appease worried domestic and foreign businesses, was largely based on the economic policies of his predecessor Aquino. However, in order to further justify and legitimize his populist actions and create an image that would make himself closer to “the people”, Duterte has introduced policies such as the Tax Reforms for Acceleration and Inclusion Act or TRAIN and the Build, Build, Build program.

During his first SONA, Duterte conveyed his desire to enhance the tax system of the country. The tax reform will be used to finance public projects that are meant to raise people from poverty, create the country’s Golden Age of Infrastructure, and maintain strong macroeconomic fundamentals.⁵⁹ Making it clear that the poorest and most disadvantaged are at the core of his tax reform, Duterte signed the TRAIN law in December 2017. He proudly announced that it is a “fulfillment of a campaign promise,” describing it further as “the administration’s biggest Christmas gift to the Filipino people as 99 percent of the taxpayers will benefit from the simpler, fairer and more efficient tax system.”⁶⁰ Through the law, salaried workers’ income tax rates were cut down in order to increase their disposable income

⁵⁹ Department of Finance. “PRRD certifies tax reform bill as urgent” May 29, 2017, <http://www.dof.gov.ph/taxreform/index.php/2017/05/24/netizens-back-tax-reform>

⁶⁰“Duterte signs tax reform, 2018 budget into law,” *ABS-CBN News*, December 19, 2017, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/business/12/19/17/duterte-signs-tax-reform-2018-budget-into-law>

and purchasing power. To compensate for this, higher taxes were imposed on goods and services that directly affect Filipino consumers, such as basic commodities, electricity, and public transportation. This has resulted in a rapid rise in inflation, averaging 4.8 percent on the first half of 2017 and extending to a nine-year record high of 6.7 percent on the second half of the same year.⁶¹ Higher prices of food and oil, excise taxes, and weak peso have intensified the inflation level. Because of this, several individuals and groups criticized the law as it would only be beneficial to the rich and middle classes, and detrimental to the poor. This could not only worsen the country's problems on inequality, inflation and poverty that have long been persistent in the country, but may also lead to the dwindling of President Duterte's popularity and support in the long run.

At the start of his term, Duterte also launched the "Build, Build, Build" program, an ambitious PHP 8 trillion infrastructure development program aimed at ushering the golden age of infrastructure in the country. This program will be funded through the revenues raised from the TRAIN law, and also from Official Development Assistance (ODAs). Duterte's promise was simple: by increasing spending on infrastructure, the country will see a general improvement in facilities that will attract foreign investments into the country, which in turn, would bring employment and business opportunities to Filipinos, emancipating them from poverty. However, while the program is off to a promising start, many of the infrastructure projects are moving ahead slowly because of difficulties in securing loans, and bureaucratic hurdles. Worse, three years in Duterte's presidency, but the country still continues to lag behind its peers in terms of perceived quality in infrastructure, as shown in Figure 4.4.

⁶¹ "Philippines Inflation Rate," *Trading Economics*, December 5, 2018, <https://tradingeconomics.com/Philippines/inflation-cpi>

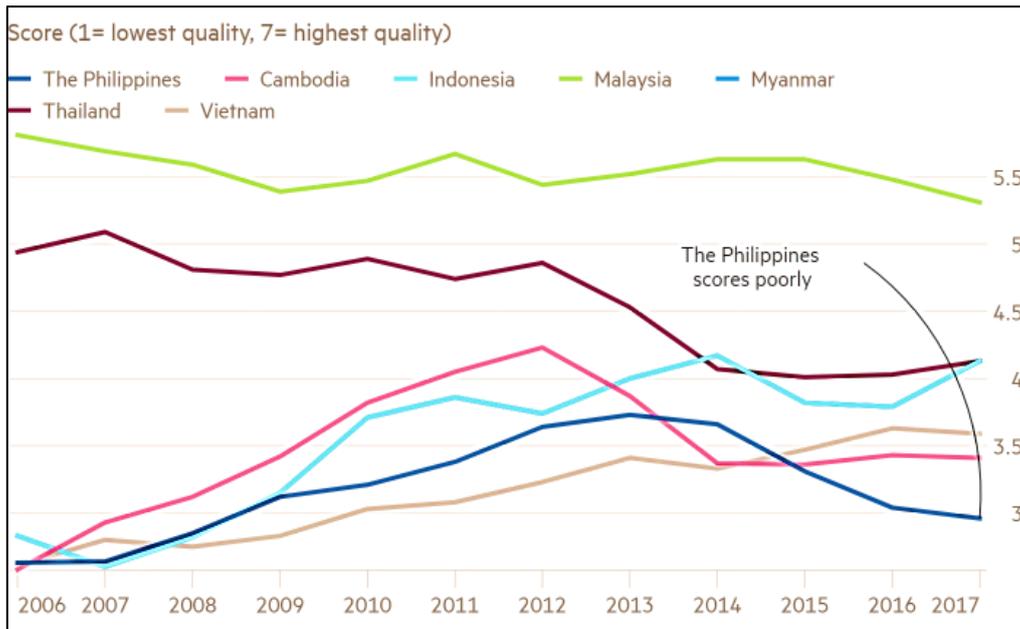


Fig. 4.4 Perceived quality of infrastructure

Source: Global Competitiveness Report, *World Economic Forum*

5.6 Chameleonic Nature: Coalitions with the PNP, AFP and the Communist Left

In his first months as president, Duterte was able to create a new national coalition with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), and the communist left. As Davao City’s mayor for 20 years before being catapulted to the nation’s highest office, this is no longer new to him. After the fall of Marcos regime in 1986, Duterte became Davao City’s mayor. Dealing with problems of civil war in the city, “he was instrumental for peace talks with the para-military groups on both ends of the ideological spectrum and managed to reach a de facto ceasefire.”⁶² Because of his profound understanding of Marxism and the influence of his former professor of university and communist thinker, Jose Maria Sison, he earned the confidence of far-left organizations. He also befriended former members of communist rebel groups such as Leoncio Evasco who served as the Secretary of the Cabinet until late 2018. On the part of the police, he made huge

⁶² Heydarian, *The Rise of Duterte*

investments in improving their capabilities by providing more incentives and upgrading their equipment. He also focused on ending the problem of illegal drugs and crime, running after corrupt officials, and overseeing the inflow of investments in the city. It is no wonder that Duterte is endeared by residents of Davao City, as evidenced by his almost 99% performance satisfaction rating as mayor in mid-2016.⁶³

The Philippine National Police (PNP), in particular, has long been known to have ties with local politicians. Duterte's rule in Davao was no different. He had good relationships with the local PNP that when he won the presidency, appointed his local police chief Ronald "Bato (The Rock)" Dela Rosa as chief of the national PNP. In his first few months as president, Duterte has promised greater support for the PNP - allocating bigger budget and incentives, and expanding their national significance and status. This is in line with their significant role in Duterte's crackdown on illegal drugs. Duterte also announced his plans of reviving the Philippine constabulary, a civilian police force under the AFP once designated by Ferdinand Marcos to implement peace and order during Martial Law.

Duterte also managed to gain the support of communist left during his mayorship in Davao. In fact, his Secretary to the Cabinet, Leoncio Evasco, was once a communist whom Duterte sent to jail but later befriended. He also appointed several communist leaders to key cabinet positions, including Judy Taguiwalo (Secretary for Social Welfare and Development), Rafael Mariano (Secretary for Agrarian Reform), and Liza Maza (Secretary for the National Anti-Poverty Commission). These communist leaders have also pushed for government

⁶³ Pia Ranada, "Rody Duterte: The man, the mayor the president," *Rappler.com*. <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/137583-rodrigo-duterte-philippine-president-profile>.; Sheila Coronel, "I Will Kill All the Drug Lords: The Making of Rodrigo Duterte," *The Atlantic.com*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/09/rodrigo-duterte-philippines-manila-drugs-davao/500756/>.

actions on issues in short-term contractualization, higher minimum wage, and increased benefits for workers which many business leaders have vehemently opposed.⁶⁴

The coalition with the PNP, AFP, and communist groups was particularly helpful for Duterte. His critical remarks against the US and EU, and his provocation of anti-colonial nationalism gained praises from the communist groups which, for the longest time, have been in adversarial relations with the West. Added to this was his ardent support for working out a concrete and clear peace agreement between these groups and the government. He has also gained the support of the rank-and-file police and military officers which helped prevent further hostilities between military and the communist groups, and creating a unified stance away from the US. Not surprising, because of these cordial relations with the president, the communist groups, often at the forefront of opposing violations of human rights, are often silent or even tolerant of Duterte's clear human rights violations through his drug war.

⁶⁴ John McBeth, "Duterte Always Loved Communists – Except When He Was Killing Them," *South China Morning Post* (2016). www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2038320/duterte-always-loved-communists-except-when-he-was-killing>

VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION OF IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Summary

This case study was anchored on a desire to empirically examine the nuances of Rodrigo Duterte's regime and major developments in the Philippines in his first three years of presidency. With the research question: '*What are the central elements in Rodrigo Duterte's populist politics dubbed as 'Dutertismo'⁶⁵ as observed in his first three years in office?*', it adopted the analytical theory on populism put forward by Paul Taggart which suggests that populism is characterized by (a) a critique of the internal and external establishment; (b) a heartland for "the people" that the populist message refers to; (c) a lack of core values; (d) a sense of crisis and the need for more direct populist democracy; and (e) a charismatic leadership combined with chameleonic nature to adapt to changing circumstances.

Employing Taggart's theory in analyzing secondary resources such news reports, public speeches, survey results, and official policy documents, this study suggests that in the first half of President Duterte's term, he has employed his own brand of populism known as *Dutertismo* to:

- 1.) maintain a steady grip on power, while concurrently portraying "Others" particularly members of the once dominant Liberal Party, the media, Roman Catholic Church and most controversially, drug users as enemies of the State;
- 2.) deal with reactions from external actors such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and international human rights groups who, according to him, have been 'attacking our sovereignty';
- 3.) frame and exaggerate the drug problem as a national security crisis;

⁶⁵ *Dutertismo* was first coined by Filipino sociologist Randy David to describe Rodrigo Duterte as the "Filipino incarnation of a style of governance that is enabled by public's faith in the capacity of a tough-talking, willful, and unorthodox leader to carry out drastic actions to solve the nation's persistent problems."

- 4.) sustain his popularity through his vague policies and agenda, and proactive mass mobilization projects in social media and national surveys; and
- 5.) build coalitions with relatively liberal institutions such as the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines, and the Communist Left.

6.2 Conclusion: Philippine society in the era of *Dutertismo*

When the Marcos dictatorship ended in 1986 through the People Power Revolution, people became hopeful for a new kind of politics and government, the EDSA Republic, anchored on the liberal democratic values, principles, and institutions. But while liberal democracy continued to dominate in the succeeding administrations, it has also perpetuated many of the country's enduring problems and tragedies. It has failed to deliver on its promises and meet escalating expectations, particularly from the middle classes. This failure of the EDSA system paved the way for Duterte's success.

Despite his predecessor's personal popularity, president Duterte was able to exploit the vulnerability of the ruling liberal democratic establishment, and introduced a new era of illiberal populist *Dutertismo*. It is not surprising then that with his strongman image, he successfully and effectively tapped to the general sense of frustration and resentment of the voting public by providing seemingly simplistic solutions to many of the country's complex problems, coupled by a fierce rhetoric aimed at alienating the Catholic Church, media, and drug users. Ironically, this interruption of the politics-as-usual is also hinged on the perpetuation and exploitation of the very same social structures that led to the failures of the thirty years of democratization following the end of Martial Law. While he spoke against the oligarchs, on the front lines of his bloody anti-drug war is police force with a deeply flawed institutional culture, and on the sidelines is a seemingly complicit and cruel public who turn a blind eye to the growing number of fatalities in the name of Duterte's drug war.

As clearly observed in the first three years of the Duterte government, there is an apparent disregard for the protection for the “right of life” as entrenched in the Philippine Constitution. By undermining the rights of alleged drug criminals, political opponents and the media, and feistily responding to international backlash, Duterte’s politics deviates from the tenets of democracy – accountability to the law, upholding of human rights and notions of equality, and employment of equal protection. This is particularly dangerous for a democratic country that defeated authoritarian rule 30 years ago. The violent approach to combat the spread of illegal drugs that he implemented as mayor of Davao City has been scaled-up nationwide, prompting a new “normal” in the country’s political landscape. For Duterte, human rights only apply to those who are “god-fearing” and law-abiding citizens, not to the alleged drug criminals; guaranteeing protection to the former, and absolute elimination to the latter. But despite the rampant violation of human rights under his watch, the Duterte government continues to enjoy high ratings in national opinion surveys, suggesting widespread popular support from those who have been manipulated into thinking that the country is on the brink of a breakdown.

This heightened level of violence in the country is truly peculiar as it was not observed in succeeding governments following the collapse of Marcos dictatorship in the 1980s. Scholars of Philippine politics, journalists, and the like all agree that no other Philippine president has ever secured the presidency anchored on the promise to execute criminals, carried out this promise, and still received such strong public support.

5.3 Discussion of Implications

For policymaking

This thesis provides a different perspective on the discussions of Rodrigo Duterte's populist politics as it explored significant developments in the country in his first three years in power. The findings suggest some reforms that the government may consider implementing towards the second half of his term. The government's crackdown on drugs, for one, has been mainly fixated on the poor drug users, while failing to address the main sources of the country's drug problem. Looking at international best practices and reviewing empirical evidences, the Duterte administration could instead adopt a more health-based approach in dealing with the drug problem. Thus, instead of alienating important institutions such as the Catholic Church, the media, and civil society, the government could forge a partnership with them, together with the AFP and PNP, to help rebuild trust and curb the drug challenges, particularly among the youth. It is also essential trace and suppress the sources of drugs to help address the root cause of this problem.

In terms of policies in the tax reform and infrastructure, it would impact more Filipinos if the reforms and investments go beyond the "Imperial Manila" and other metropolitan areas. They should be strategically developed in order to reach more populations and regions that are yet to benefit from the country's economic boom.

The Duterte government can use the remaining three years in creating real positive changes in the lives of the vast majority of Filipinos. Beyond mere populist-sounding promises, deep structural reforms are imperative to help ensure more inclusive development and less socio-economic and political division in the Philippines.

For future researches

The scope of this case study is on the first three years of the Duterte government. Future researches on the populist government of Duterte may employ quantitative or qualitative approaches to analyze and examine the second half of his term. This would bring a better and more holistic understanding of how the populist leader employs his brand of populism known as *Dutertismo*, and how it affects the Philippines' political and social realities.

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