

CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI "CESARE BONACOSSA" - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

ASIA MAIOR

THE JOURNAL OF THE ITALIAN THINK TANK ON ASIA
FOUNDED BY GIORGIO BORSA IN 1989

Vol. XXVII / 2016

The End of the Obama Era in Asia

Edited by
Michelguglielmo Torri
and Nicola Mocci

viella



Asia Maior. The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989.

Copyright © 2017 - Viella s.r.l. & Associazione Asia Maior

ISSN 2385-2526

ISBN 978-88-6728-885-4 (paper) ISBN 978-88-6728-886-1 (e-book pdf)

Annual journal - Vol. XXVII, 2016

This journal of the Associazione Asia Maior is published jointly by Associazione Asia Maior & CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli extra-europei "Cesare Bonacossa" - Università di Pavia

The publication of this issue of the journal Asia Maior has been co-funded by a grant from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE), whose help is here gratefully acknowledged. However, the opinions expressed in any given article in this issue are those of its author/s and do not in any way reflect the official position of the MAE

Editor (direttore responsabile): Michelguglielmo Torri, mg.torri@gmail.com

Junior editor: Nicola Mocci, nicolamocci@yahoo.it

Editorial Board: Axel Berkofsky, Simonetta Casci, Marzia Casolari, Nicola Mocci, Giulio Pugliese, Michelguglielmo Torri, Pierluigi Valsecchi

Book review editors: Oliviero Frattolillo, oliviero.frattolillo@uniroma3.it;

Francesca Congiu, francesca_congiu@hotmail.com

Segreteria di redazione: asiamaior@gmail.com

Progetto grafico di Nicola Mocci

Asia Maior. The Journal is an open-access journal, whose issues and single articles can be freely downloaded from the think tank webpage:

www.asiamaior.org

Paper version	Italy	€ 50.00	Abroad	€ 65.00
---------------	-------	---------	--------	---------

Subscription	abbonamenti@viella.it	www.viella.it
--------------	--	--



viella

libreria editrice

via delle Alpi, 32

I-00198 ROMA

tel. 06 84 17 758

fax 06 85 35 39 60

www.viella.it

CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

ASIA MAIOR

The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

Vol. XXVII / 2016

The End of the Obama Era in Asia

Edited by

Michelguglielmo Torri and Nicola Mocci

viella



ASSOCIAZIONE ASIA MAIOR

Steering Committee: Marzia Casolari (President), Francesca Congiu, Nicola Mocchi (Vice President), Riccardo Redaelli, Michelguglielmo Torri (Scientific Director)

Scientific Board: Guido Abbattista (Università di Trieste), Domenico Amirante (Università «Federico II», Napoli), Elisabetta Basile (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Luigi Bonanate (Università di Torino), Claudio Cecchi (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Alessandro Colombo (Università di Milano), Anton Giulio Maria de Robertis (Università di Bari), Thierry Di Costanzo (Université de Strasbourg), Max Guderzo (Università di Firenze), Franco Mazzei (Università «L'Orientale», Napoli), Giorgio Milanetti (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Paolo Puddinu (Università di Sassari), Adriano Rossi (Università «L'Orientale», Napoli), Giuseppe Sacco (Università «Roma Tre», Roma), Guido Samarani (Università «Ca' Foscari», Venezia), Filippo Sabetti (McGill University, Montréal), Gianni Vaggi (Università di Pavia), Alberto Ventura (Università della Calabria)



CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli extra-europei "Cesare Bonacossa" - Università di Pavia

Steering Committee: Axel Berkofsky, Arturo Colombo, Antonio Morone, Giulia Rossolillo, Gianni Vaggi, Pierluigi Valsecchi (President), Massimo Zaccaria

Authors publish in Asia Maior only on invitation. Invitations – which are made by the Director of the journal, after consulting the editorial board – are based on the invitee's curriculum vitae and his/her previous publications. Anybody willing to publish in Asia Maior is therefore invited to submit his/her curriculum vitae and list of previous publications, while indicating the Asian country which he/she would like to analyse, to the Director of the journal (writing to mg.torri@gmail.com).

Before being published in Asia Maior, any article is first evaluated by the Journal's editors, who have the power to decide either to refuse it or to further it to one or more referees. In the latter case, the editors decide the number of anonymous referees to which the submitted article must be sent for evaluation. This number varies between one and three.

Asia Maior is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal. Accordingly it is its policy not to make public the names of the reviewers. However, their names – and, if need be, the whole correspondence between the journal's editors and the reviewer/s– can be disclosed to interested institutions, upon a formal request made directly to the Director of the journal.

CONTENTS

- 7 MICHELGUGLIELMO TORRI & NICOLA MOCCI, *Foreword: Asia Maior in 2016*
- 17 FRANCESCA CONGIU & ALESSANDRO URAS, *China 2016: Defending the legitimacy of the party-state's authority*
- 53 AURELIO INSISA, *Taiwan 2012-2016: From consolidation to the collapse of cross-strait rapprochement*
- 89 MARCO MILANI, *Korean Peninsula 2016: The never-ending crisis*
- 121 GIULIO PUGLIESE, *Japan 2016: Political stability amidst maritime contestation and historical reconciliation*
- 143 CARMINA YU UNTALAN, *The Philippines 2016: Democracy in dispute?*
- 167 ELENA VALDAMERI, *Indonesia 2016: A difficult equilibrium amid global anxiety*
- 199 MICHELA CERIMELE, *Vietnam 2016: The aftermath of the 12th congress, between continuities and changes*
- 221 NICOLA MOCCI, *Laos 2016: The 10th congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (Lprp) and its domestic and international aftermath*
- 243 PIETRO MASINA, *Thailand 2016: The death of King Bhumibol and the deepening of the political crisis*
- 261 MATTEO FUMAGALLI, *Myanmar 2016: From enthusiasm to disillusionment*
- 277 MARZIA CASOLARI, *Bangladesh 2016: A laboratory for Islamic radicalism*
- 297 FABIO LEONE, *Sri Lanka 2016: Does the new era continue?*
- 315 MICHELGUGLIELMO TORRI & DIEGO MAIORANO, *India 2016: Reforming the economy and tightening the connection with the US (with an Appendix by MARCO VALERIO CORVINO, A brutal and violent year in the Kashmir Valley)*
- 385 MARCO CORSI, *Pakistan 2016: Economic features*
- 403 DIEGO ABENANTE, *Afghanistan 2016: Military crisis and contested reforms*
- 417 LUCIANO ZACCARA, *Iran 2016: From the Saudi embassy attack to the demise of Rafsanjani*
- 439 ADELE DEL SORDI, *Kazakhstan 2015-2016: Balancing regime stability amidst local and global challenges*
- 463 *Reviews*
- 483 *Appendix*

THE PHILIPPINES 2016: DEMOCRACY IN DISPUTE?

Carmina Yu Untalan

Osaka University
a-carmina@osipp.osaka-u.ac.jp

President Rodrigo Duterte's 2016 election was a divisive moment in Philippine politics. The promise to disrupt elite-centric politics and restore national peace and order won him strong popular support throughout the country. His satisfactory track record of turning Davao City from a haven of criminals to the «safest city» in the Philippines raised hopes that he would make every effort to replicate this model nationwide. His supporters celebrated his authoritarian, haphazard leadership style, which, however, also provoked severe criticism at home and abroad. Both local and international media have been keen on condemning his «War on Drugs», which sanctions extra-judicial killings, and his crude approach to foreign relations. The tension between those for and against Duterte's leadership has caused many to question how it was possible for a nation that successfully toppled a dictatorship through a non-violent revolution to elect someone with strong authoritarian leanings. This article argues that Duterte's election was an outcome of the diminishing credibility of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution and the system it created as a model for Philippine democracy. It suggests that the 2016 Philippine national elections provided an opportunity for people to express their dissatisfaction with the country's democracy, which had come to be seen as a fractured system. It adds to the usual, personality-focussed, commentaries on Philippine politics, by also discussing a range of domestic and international issues and the irony of electing a strongman to represent the people's discontent with Philippine politics.

1. Introduction

The Philippines has fought hard to keep its democratic institutions intact. Since becoming fully independent from United States (US) colonial rule in 1946, most of the Filipino electorate has opted for a candidate who supports freedom of the people. Although the Proclamation of Martial Law in 1972 challenged this ideal, it also showed that democracy was embedded in the Filipino spirit. Discontent over corruption and grave human rights abuse under the Marcos dictatorship urged the public to protest. Through the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, Filipinos appeared to have successfully resurrected democratic institutions in the country. This historical episode was a victory over authoritarianism and has been the emblem of Philippine democracy ever since.

Yet almost three decades later, the 2016 election of President Rodrigo «Digong» Duterte presented another turning point for Philippine democ-

racy. Duterte's campaign slogan, «Change is Coming», embodied both the change he wanted to make as a Philippine president and change desired by the Filipino majority. Duterte distanced himself from the usual campaign strategy of utilising tactfully constructed sound bites to entice voters. His campaign was candid, down-to-earth, and often undiplomatic. Duterte also shifted from the usual policy concerns of economic growth and anti-corruption strategies. Instead, he stressed fighting criminality as the major precursor to Philippine development. His promise to restore domestic peace and order through any means possible, including extra-judicial killings and reinstatement of the death penalty, was extraordinarily bold and straightforward. Despite criticism from rights groups who were against the pacification policies, Duterte continued as the mayor of Davao City prior to the elections,¹ with the prospect of a Davao-like Philippines prevailing among the voters.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the 2016 Philippine national elections set a historic record, with an 81% voter turnout.² Contrary to what one might expect from a democracy, the Filipino majority voted for a candidate with authoritarian features. Duterte won in a landslide victory with a 12.8% margin. The newly elected president maintained an approval rating of 72% six months after his inauguration on 30 June, amidst ceaseless domestic and international objections to his violent war against drugs and calls for his resignation from some quarters.³

Underneath Duterte's unbridled popularity is a nation torn between defending democracy and jeopardising its continuance; the potential for the country to be under the rule of authoritarian government appears to be a risk associated with improving the nation's political and socio-economic conditions. How did it become possible for a nation that successfully toppled a dictatorship to elect someone with strong authoritarian leanings? This article argues that Duterte's election is an outcome of the diminishing credibility of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution and the system it created as a model for Philippine democracy. It suggests that the 2016 Philippine national elections provided an opportunity for people to express their dissatisfaction with the country's oft-described fractured democracy. It adds to the usual commentaries on Philippine politics that emphasise personality politics by also discussing domestic and international issues and the irony of electing a strongman to represent the people's discontent with Philippine politics.

1. Davao is a city in the southern Philippines where he served as a mayor from 1988 to 1989 and from 2004 to 2007 (<http://ph.rappler.com/elections/2016/results/map>).

2. 'Comelec: Voter turnout at 81 percent', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 May 2016. Presidential elections take place every six years.

3. Social Weather Station's Fourth Quarter 2016 Social Weather Survey, 'Net trust in Rody Duterte stays Excellent at +72', *Social Weather Station Web Site*, 24 December 2016.

2. 2016 Philippine presidential elections: Overturning the post-EDSA order

2.1. Choosing the Philippine president: A brief history

To acquire a broad picture of the novelty of the 2016 Philippine national elections and the implications for Philippine politics, it is necessary to discuss the two foremost methods for replacing top public officials in the country: elections and public protests. Elections, based on the plurality voting system to determine winners, were integral to the development of representative democracy in the Philippines.⁴ The first Philippine national election in 1935 was part of the process of gaining independence from US colonial rule. Following the directives of the Tydings-McDuffie Act,⁵ the 1935 Constitution institutionalised the right of Filipinos to vote directly for their president and vice president. Since then, national elections have been held successfully at fixed terms.⁶ The Japanese Occupation briefly interrupted the process in 1943 when the Japanese established the single-party Kalibapi, or the Association for Service to the New Philippines, to dissolve political parties established under the US tutelary government. The Kalibapi appointed the president of the Second Philippine Republic instead of holding elections. The Filipinos' right to suffrage was re-institutionalised in 1946, following the end of the Second World War, almost three months before the US granted the Philippines full independence.

However, less than two decades after independence, the election of Ferdinand Marcos as the 10th Philippine president introduced another challenge to the country's representative democracy; further, it engendered popular protests as a means of ousting and installing a chief public official. When Marcos won his first presidential term in 1965, the Constitution granted elected presidents a four-year term with one chance for re-election. Having this option, the then popular Marcos ran again in 1969, winning 61.47% of the votes to become the first president to serve two consecutive terms.⁷ However, his popularity eroded following his Proclamation of Martial Law in 1972 and the promulgation of the 1973 Constitution.⁸ The pro-

4. Julio Teehankee, 'Electoral Politics in the Philippines', in Aurel Croissant & Marei John (eds.), *Electoral Politics in South and Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2002, pp. 149-202.

5. Also known as the Philippine Independence Act.

6. In the 1935 Constitution, the president has a fixed, six-year term with no provisions for re-election. An amendment in 1940 granted the president a four-year term, with a maximum of two consecutive terms in the office.

7. Office of the President Web Site, *Profile of Ferdinand Marcos* (<http://malacanang.gov.ph/presidents/fourth-republic/ferdinand-marcos/#efs-tabpane-1-5>).

8. Ferdinand Marcos justified the Proclamation of Martial Law as a response to the growing Communist insurgency during that period. The proclamation was issued less than a year before his term was to formally end.

posed objective of the 1973 Constitution was to change the form of government from a presidential to a parliamentary system.⁹ Nevertheless, Marcos used this opportunity to further tighten his grip on power. What could have been the Philippines' first experiment with parliamentarism turned into one of Asia's most ruthless dictatorships, under which the nation suffered military brutality, extra-judicial killings, *desaparecidos*, and rampant corruption. The perilous political situation coupled with severe economic conditions dramatically diminished the legitimacy of Marcos.¹⁰ Consequently, he lifted the martial law declaration in 1981, primarily because of pressure from the business class. This action, however, hardly made a dent in the scope of his executive and legislative powers.

Filipinos reached the tipping point when Marcos reinstated presidential elections in 1981. He ran for the presidency and won 88.02% of the votes.¹¹ Instead of legitimising his rule, his dubious victory exacerbated the public displeasure that had been growing over the years. The infamous 1983 assassination of the opposition leader, Benigno Simeon «Ninoy» Aquino Jr., further angered the public, giving opposing elites the impetus to reclaim their power. Marcos called a snap election in 1985 and won against the opposition candidate and widow of Ninoy, Corazon Aquino.¹² The people, outraged and desperate, acted to oust the dictator and installed Corazon Aquino as the president of the newly restored Philippine democracy in the historic 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution – what is now simply known as EDSA I.

Public protests that draw on the powerful legacy of EDSA I have come to play an important role in deciding the fate of Philippine presidents. So far in the post-Marcos era, there were two attempts to replicate EDSA I. Because of EDSA II, Joseph «Erap» Estrada was ousted through impeachment. He was succeeded by constitutional mandate by his vice president,

9. The proposal to have a parliamentary form of government was first raised during the Malolos Congress, or the First Philippine Republic (1898). For more information about the debate on shifting to a parliamentary form of government during the Marcos regime, see Albert F. Celozza, *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines: The Political Economy of Authoritarianism*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997.

10. For a comprehensive discussion of the political and economic conditions during the Marcos regime, see William H. Overholt, 'The Rise and Fall of Ferdinand Marcos', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 11, Nov. 1986, pp. 1137-1163.

11. According to Joel Steinberg, the major opposition parties decided to boycott the elections, which compelled Marcos to choose a fake opponent and stage the elections. For his discussion, see Joel Steinberg, *The Philippines: A Singular and a Plural Place*, New York: Westview Press, pp. 134-150. It is worth noting here that then US Vice President George H. W. Bush was present during the inauguration of Marcos, whose efforts towards upholding democratic values were praised by Bush. See Raul Manglapus, 'Buttery Toast in Manila', *The New York Times*, 10 July 1981.

12. The 1984 legislative elections gave opportunity to the opposition elites to gather support from the masses. For a more comprehensive discussion, see Julio Teehankee, 'Electoral Politics in the Philippines', pp. 160-61.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who faced two failed ousting attempts: EDSA III and several impeachment cases based on allegations of cheating during the 2004 elections, when she formally ran for the presidency.¹³ Unfortunately, Arroyo remained in power and is currently a congresswoman.

Arguably, electing the Philippine president has been a celebration of freedom in a country formerly deprived of liberty under centuries of colonisation and decades of authoritarian rule. Apart from this, the Philippine experience since 1935 illustrates that popular protests have become crucial in the formal process of voting to legitimise a leader. Especially since EDSA I, the people have found a recourse through public protests as an effective means to protect their democracy from national leaders who appear to threaten it. At the outset, it seems that Filipinos firmly embraced the gift of democracy received after independence. However, as noted above, despite this relatively short but fiery history of protecting democracy from its enemies, most Filipino voters in the 2016 presidential elections chose a strongman to run their country for the next six years. Have the Filipinos lost their faith in democracy? Or was it a democratic expression of their frustration with the system?

2.2. *A protest vote?*

Despite being a latecomer in the presidential race hounded by allegations of hidden wealth and lewd remarks about a gang rape of an Australian missionary,¹⁴ Duterte gained strong grassroots support and maintained a secure lead during the latter half of the electoral campaign. Filipino political scientist Ramon Casiple observed, «the vote for Duterte is a protest vote, not really a Duterte vote».¹⁵ In theory, a voter casts a protest vote in a plurality system because of the absence of a genuinely preferable candidate or party. The vote is not intended to put somebody in a position of power, but to protest a previously favoured candidate or party which failed to deliver. Cumulatively, protest votes strengthen the clout of less dominant candidates or parties.¹⁶ Based on this definition, Duterte's massive popularity is at-

13. It is important to note that compared to EDSA II, which was led by the middle class, critics of EDSA III berated it as «mob rule» in which people were allegedly paid US\$ 20 to join the violent protests. For an alternative view of EDSA as a display of public outrage and withdrawal of allegiance from the incumbent president, see Dante B. Gatmaytan, 'It's all the rage: Popular uprisings and Philippine democracy', *Pacific Rim Law and Policy Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Feb. 2006.

14. Footage of Duterte responding to the queries about the rape case in 1989 went viral on social media. His comment, «She is so beautiful, the mayor should have been first», outraged the public but did not significantly affect his popularity among the general electorate. For details, see 'Duterte's rape comment sets off firestorm', *Philippine Star Web Site*, 18 April 2016.

15. 'Issues fail to dent Duterte's lead', *Business World Web Site*, 6 May 2016.

16. Won-Taek Kang, 'Protest Voting and Abstention Under Plurality Rule Elections', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol. 16, No.1, 2004, pp. 79-102.

tributable to the failure of the past administration and his rival presidential candidates, rather than to his credibility as a long-serving mayor of Davao City or his presidential campaign platform, «Change is Coming». People appeared to tolerate Duterte's inappropriate behaviour because the people saw him as the «face» of their protest.¹⁷

Indeed, given the weaknesses of the other presidential candidates, which will be discussed below, it is plausible that a substantial portion of Duterte votes constituted protest votes. However, if we consider his political career as the mayor of Davao City and the people's unmatched enthusiasm towards his campaign promises, Duterte's win could be considered *both* a protest vote and a Duterte vote.

Three factors influenced the outcome of the 2016 presidential election: 1) distance from the generation of leaders and elites who emerged triumphant after EDSA I yet who failed to sustain the EDSA spirit, which in turn diminished the appeal of notions such as freedom and a revolutionary movement; 2) public office track record; and 3) personality. These factors were interrelated in such a way that if a candidate was perceived to lack any of these, he or she would be at a disadvantage. A good example was Grace Poe, one of the leading candidates during the early pre-election phase. She had a relatively good track record as a legislator. She also played the card as the daughter of Fernando Poe Jr., the actor who lost to Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in the 2004 presidential election. Following the Hello Garci scandal that demonstrated the possibility of Arroyo manipulating election results, Grace Poe championed the cause for fair elections. A vote for Grace Poe in any other election would have symbolised a protest vote against a rigged electoral system, possibly sufficient to get her elected. Yet, her chances of winning as an independent candidate began to decline when she was engulfed with questions about her dual citizenship in the US and the Philippines. Moreover, despite expressing disagreement with the previous administration and distancing herself from traditional politics, the soft-spoken Poe appeared detached from the people and lacking the personality to garner mass appeal. This cost her the lead as a non-aligned, independent candidate.

Duterte was perceived as having all three factors associated with presidential preferences. First, it was not a coincidence that he emerged as the most favourable candidate to replace Benigno «PNoy» Aquino III in the Malacañang Palace. The former president's administration brought huge disappointments to the Filipinos, who had invested their hope on his 'straight path' campaign to rebuild the nation following the corruption-laden Arroyo regime. He ran in the year his mother died, which ignited the people's nostalgia for EDSA I. The people yearned for its revival through

17. '«Too late to change voters' minds amid Duterte lead», says analyst', *ABS-CBN News Website*, 6 May 2016.

PNoy. However, what seemed to be a sterling beginning ended with unsatisfactory legacies, most notably the Mamapasano incident and the Disbursement Allocation Program (DAP) scandal, in which Duterte was accused of fund malversation.¹⁸ The gap between the rich and poor widened sharply during his term, which reflects the ironic flipside of the GDP growth that the Philippines was beginning to experience even though corrupt officials were still in public office.¹⁹

Certainly, the performance of the Aquino administration only magnified the failure of the post-EDSA system to live up to its promises of eradicating corruption and challenging the overwhelming political and economic influence of the oligarchy. The only noticeable difference between the Marcos regime and the post-EDSA government seemed to be the form of government. Philippine politics – democratic or authoritarian – remained unscrupulous, violent, and exclusively managed by the rich and powerful.

As Aquino ran on the usual rhetoric of linking democracy with good governance and development, Duterte's campaign radicalised PNoy's reformist agenda through «jettisoning its liberal aspects» and «promising fast results through harsh punitive measures», with threats to dissolve Congress and abrogate human rights.²⁰ Duterte stated that EDSA I «restored democracy only for the elite» during an interview commemorating EDSA's 30th anniversary.²¹ In his last campaign speech, he told the cheering crowd something that previous candidates would not dare say: «I will be strict. I will be a dictator, no doubt [about] it. But only against the forces of evil –criminality, drugs and corruption in the government».²² Thereafter, the majority showed no hesitation in electing somebody who openly called himself a dictator, in a refreshing contrast to the corrupt elites who posed as liberal and democratic.

The vice-presidential campaign is also telling of this choice. The strongest competitors were Ferdinand «Bongbong» Marcos Jr., the son of Ferdinand Marcos, and Leni Robredo, the widow of Jesse Robredo, an acclaimed mayor of Naga City and former Department of Interior and Lo-

18. The Mamapasano incident occurred on 25 January 2015 during a clash between the Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police and Muslim rebels in Maguindanao. The resulting deaths of 44 policemen were attributed to an alleged lack of coordination by the government. The DAP scandal involved the Aquino administration's unconstitutional budgeting mechanism to pump-prime the economy and allot funds to the president's pet projects.

19. For a more detailed discussion of Mamapasano and DAP cases, see Salvador Santino Regilme Jr. & Carmina Yu Untalan, 'The Philippines 2014–2015: Domestic Politics and Foreign Relations, A Critical Review', *Asia Maior* 205, pp. 133-157.

20. Julio C. Teehankee & Mark R. Thompson, 'Electing A Strongman', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 27, No. 4, October 2016, pp. 125-134.

21. 'Candidates on EDSA 30 years ago: Duterte', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 25 February 2016.

22. 'As Philippines' likely president, Duterte vows to be a «dictator» against evil', *CNN Philippines Web Site*, 10 May 2016.

cal Government Secretary.²³ Robredo won the race only by 263,473 votes. Duterte's victory and the surprising number of votes for Bongbong Marcos despite the legacy he carried, further demonstrated how the 2016 national elections gave the disenfranchised the opportunity to cast protest votes against the post-EDSA system in their desire to preserve the oligarchy. It delivered a harsh judgment to those who steered the Philippines for almost 30 years after EDSA I. As if to add insult to injury, the people were close to putting Bongbong Marcos, a son of a former dictator, in office with a self-proclaimed «qualified» dictator. Beyond the previous administration's performance, Duterte also had a track record that appealed to the anti-EDSA protest votes. During his campaign, he vowed to roll out Davao City's law and order measures across the nation. Filipinos were aware of what he meant. Davao City is a very urbanised area in Mindanao, where Duterte was the mayor for more than 22 years.²⁴ *Davaoeños'* unwavering support for Duterte is largely the result of his success in transforming the 'murder capital of the Philippines' to one of the safest and richest cities in the Philippines. During his term, the national government frequently rewarded Davao City for its good local governance practises. It was acclaimed as one of the safest cities on earth.²⁵ Duterte earned public admiration when he declined the nomination for the «World Mayor Award», saying that he was «only doing his job».²⁶ Upon his election as the mayor, Duterte's formula dictated that peace and order precede economic and political progress.

Such was his premise when he said, «If I make it to the presidential palace, I will do just what I did as mayor. You drug pushers, hold-up men and do-nothings, you better go out. Because as the mayor, I'd kill you».²⁷ In the minds of many Filipinos, the image of the Philippines becoming like Davao City resonated strongly, overriding concerns that Duterte's measures to enforce peace and order could threaten human rights and ignore legal measures. Duterte's authoritarian appeal was not based on imagined fear. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, incidences of crime and delinquency

23. Jesse Robredo died in a plane crash in 2012. He is credited for his good governance model in Naga City, which stressed people's participation. The public saw Leni Robredo as capable of continuing the legacy of her husband.

24. He held the position intermittently for the periods 1988–1998, 2001–2010, and 2013–2016. He was also the vice mayor under his daughter, Sara Duterte, from 2010 to 2013.

25. During Duterte's government, some of the national awards Davao City received were, 'Best Performing City Police in the Country', 'Seal of Good Governance', and 'Top Government Withholding Agent'. The city was also recognised abroad as 'The Most Liveable City in the Country' and '9th Safest City in the World'.

26. 'Duterte Declines «World Mayor» Award nod, says he's just doing his job', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 16 April 2014.

27. 'Presidential favorite Duterte to «butcher» criminals', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 May 2016.

skyrocketed from 212,812 cases in 2012 to 1,161,188 in 2015.²⁸ Regarding drugs, the Philippines has the highest rate of methamphetamine use in East Asia.²⁹ In fact, 26.93% of the 42,063 *barangays* (the smallest administrative division) have drug-related problems, with Metro Manila the most affected at 92.26%.³⁰ Therefore, his emphasis on criminality as one of the major causes of stagnation in the Philippines resonated across all socio-economic classes, especially in crime and terror-laden areas of Metro Manila and Mindanao.

The last point in question is Duterte's personality. In the Philippines, at least on the cursory level, personality politics speak louder than political parties, ideologies, or policy coherence. Aside from land ownership and patronage, «celebrification» has been a potent tool for electioneering.³¹ Celebrification refers to the introduction of celebrities to public office, the most notable example of which was the impeached Erap Estrada. Although Duterte was not a celebrity, he was packaged in Hollywood-style garb. His famed nicknames include «Du-dirty Harry» – a spin-off of Clint Eastwood's iconic fictional police character, Dirty Harry, known to take justice in his own hands – and «The Punisher», based on the vigilante character in Marvel comics.³² Duterte also created his own celebrity status with his unreserved communication style. He would drop lines ranging from humorous ones such as «Even God will weep if I become the president»³³ and «I'll dump all of you (criminals) into Manila Bay and fatten all the fish there», to outright irreverent statements addressed to the Pope: «I want to call him 'Pope (son of a whore)', go home. Do not visit us again».³⁴ Adding to his international stardom was the constant comparison to Donald Trump, who was simultaneously running for the US presidency. To this, Duterte responded, «He is a bigot, I am not».³⁵

Yet, much like Donald Trump's presidential campaign, a substantive policy discourse was absent. Filipino sociologist Randy David coined the term 'Dutertismo' to characterise Duterte's campaign style, which capital-

28. 'Philippines in Figures: 2015', *Philippine Statistics Authority Report*, 2015, p. 24.

29. Statistics from UN World Drug Report can be accessed at: <https://www.unodc.org/wdr2016>.

30. Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, *2015 Annual Report* (<http://pdea.gov.ph/images/AnnualReport/2015AR/AR2015page1to37.pdf>).

31. Raul Pertierra, 'The New Media, Society and Politics in the Philippines', *fesmedia Asia, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, 2012.

32. On 18 June 2002, *Time Magazine* published an article, 'The Punisher' to describe Duterte's ironclad leadership style in Davao City. This nickname was resurrected during the 2016 elections.

33. 'Duterte: «God will weep if I become president»', *Philippine Star Web Site*, 4 June 2015.

34. Duterte uttered these words because of the traffic congestion caused by the Pope's visit.

35. 'Duterte: «Trump is a bigot, I am not»', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 27 March 2016.

ised on theatrics and promises without a concrete underlying rationale.³⁶ Accordingly, Duterte's «dark» charisma comes from his fearless and intrepid personality. Though clear about his aim to eradicate criminality in his first year as the nation's president, he did not present a defined agenda on how he planned to do it. Regardless, his rhetoric against crime fuelled resentment and fanned aggression among ordinary people towards criminals as public enemies.

Perhaps what contributed most to Duterte's allure was that he offered something that his rivals could not: an alternative to elite-dominated politics. He is the antithesis of a typical Filipino president known until now. Appearing folksy, tactless, frank, and oftentimes vulgar, Duterte posed as an ordinary man who had no care for the luxurious lifestyles of politicians. He wore ordinary clothes, lived in an ordinary house, and spoke the ordinary Filipino's language. He also came from the southern part of the Philippines, where people often feel neglected because of the concentration of wealth and power in «imperial Manila».³⁷ He stood out in the roster of candidates who – including Grace Poe – were seen to be representatives of *trapo*, the Filipino word for 'rag' but also a derogatory term for traditional politicians, denoting «scum».³⁸

It would be a facile generalisation to interpret Duterte's election simply as a product of protest votes. His promise of ushering in 'real change' was no different from that of previous and rival candidates. There were similarities among them, perhaps enough to cancel Duterte's image as one-of-a-kind. He was like Jejomar Binay, who pledged to transform the Philippines into Makati City.³⁹ He was also like Roxas, who represented another political dynasty. He was like Poe, who wanted to challenge the status quo. Like the rest of the presidential roster, he faced allegations of corruption; worse, he was said to have been involved with the notorious Davao Death Squad, a purported vigilante group in Davao City responsible for the deaths of thousands of crime suspects. Yet, Duterte was chosen, conceivably less because the electorate did not have a choice, but rather because Duterte embodied what the majority wanted – a strongman. Thus, the tragic irony of the 2016 presi-

36. Randy David, 'Dutertismo', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 1 May 2016.

37. For a brief discussion of the political economic manifestations of this concept, see economist Cielito F. Habito's opinion piece, 'The Edge of «Imperial Manila»', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 August 2016.

38. *Trapos* are politicians aiming to maintain the existing order of society, including its hierarchies and patronage politics. See Randy David, 'The Dilemmas and Tasks of New Politics', *Speech*, AKBAYAN 10th Anniversary Forum, *Bukluran sa Ikaunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa (BISIG)*, 25 January 2008. Aside from Grace Poe, the other candidates were Mar Roxas, the vice-presidential running mate of former President Benigno 'PNoy' Aquino and a member of the old ruling elite in Bacolod City, and Jejomar Binay, the former vice president whose family has been mired with corruption scandals in Makati City.

39. Jejomar Binay was the mayor of the financial centre of the Philippines, Makati City, from 2001 to 2010.

dential election for democracy in the Philippines was the public choice of an authoritarian figure to rectify the mistakes of past «democratic» leaders.

It is too early to judge the effectiveness of Duterte's leadership or to make sense of his unabated popularity among the public despite actions and policies that have been contentious and controversial. Nonetheless, Duterte's few months in office have already drawn a wedge between people who are separated only by their beliefs regarding how to improve the country's condition. The next two sections cover the controversial issues surrounding the Duterte administration in relation to domestic and international politics that raise questions about the durability of democracy in the Philippines.

3. *Domestic politics*

3.1. *The «war on drugs»*

Perhaps the deepest dent to the EDSA-ushered democracy following Duterte's election was the Filipino majority's surprising acquiescence to violence to restore order in society. In theory, one of the most important tenets of democracy is resolving conflict and restoring order through peaceful and diplomatic means. Under the rule of law, all citizens, including criminals, are protected against the possible abuse of power from the state. When a citizen errs, a mature democratic society alludes to thoughtfully designed procedures to ensure that he or she gets a just and fair trial. If this is not a viable option, the people may devise non-violent extra-constitutional means. In practice, this was the core principle behind the success of EDSA I and II, with Erap Estrada's impeachment: a peaceful means to reclaim the power of the people from the hands of criminal leaders.

Whereas these successes created a mythical belief in the non-violent nature of Filipinos,⁴⁰ Duterte's election opened a space for the majority to express their unwillingness to stand firmly for non-violent means. Duterte initiated the national War on Drugs, known colloquially as «Oplan Tokhang», immediately after his inauguration.⁴¹ He urged the public to «do it [killing] yourself if you have the gun» and offered financial rewards to those who could capture or kill a drug lord.⁴² Duterte worked in tandem with his close friend, Ronald «Bato» dela Rosa, chief of the Philippine National Police

40. For a discussion of the mythical constructions following the 1986 EDSA Revolution, see David Timberman, *A Changeless Land: Continuity and Change in Philippine Politics*, London, UK: Routledge, 2016.

41. *Tokhang* was derived from the Cebuano (Cebu City's dialect) term *toktokhangyo*, which means to 'knock and warn'. Ideally in Oplan Tokhang, police officers would knock on a suspected drug pusher's door and warn him/her about the situation. However, there were reported incidences in which law enforcement representatives would knock and just shoot a suspect.

42. 'Duterte urges public to kill criminals', *GMA News Web Site*, 5 June 2016.

(PNP), who previously served in Davao and transferred to PNP Headquarters in Manila, to deliver swift ‘justice’ to victims of drug-related crimes. In roughly a month, a total of 103 suspects were reportedly killed, and 60,000 drug pushers and users surrendered, proving that Duterte’s promise of a bloody war against drug users and pushers could be fulfilled.⁴³

The War on Drugs immediately attracted domestic and international attention. Aside from dominating domestic media, it glossed the covers of Time Magazine and made it to the headlines of top newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Guardian. Internationally, there is a perceptible sensationalism in the depiction of the Philippine situation, especially compared to how other countries where political conditions are arguably much worse – such as in Venezuela or South Sudan – are covered. Exacerbating this poor imagery is Duterte’s response to foreign criticism. Whenever international institutions and Western leaders attack Duterte’s administration for supposedly condoning the killings that have occurred, Duterte typically retaliates, citing their hypocrisy and double standards. For instance, Duterte chided the United Nations (UN) for its shortcomings in dealing with the Middle East crisis and Africa.⁴⁴ After the European Union (EU) released a statement against his War on Drugs, Duterte raised his middle finger and reminded everyone of Europe’s brutal colonial history.⁴⁵

Although there are some truths in Duterte’s angry retorts that strike an anti-Western chord, the ruthlessness of his crime deterrence is also real. The War on Drugs operated on a lethal combination of fear and secrecy. The whole modus is – to use Charles Tilly’s characterisation of state and war-making – similar to that of organised crime.⁴⁶ States operating in this regard act like «self-seeking entrepreneurs» who create threats and sell protection in exchange for legitimising the state’s monopoly on force. The state consequently acquires legitimacy from other consenting authorities and citizens.

In the case of the Philippines, magnifying the drug problem and inciting fear and paranoia among citizens create the threat. Duterte’s constantly updated «Narco» list contains the names of more than 1,000 suspected drug criminals, including high-ranking officials. The case filed against former Commissioner on Human Rights and Secretary of Department of Justice Leila de Lima roused domestic and international attention. It involved allegations of De Lima having an affair with her driver, who also served as her

43. ‘60,000 drug users, pushers have surrendered: Palace’, *ABS-CBN News Web Site*, 14 July 2016.

44. ‘In the know: Duterte’s remarks vs the United Nations’, *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 15 September 2016.

45. ‘Philippines’ Duterte fierce attack on «hypocritical» EU’, *BBC Web Site*, 21 September 2016. Despite the attacks, the EU kept the agreement on funding the rehabilitation of Filipinos with illegal drug-related problems.

46. Charles Tilly, ‘State-making and War-making as Organised Crime’, in Peter Evans et al. (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 169-186.

drug money collector and who was a known drug user. De Lima was also accused of using illegal drug-related funds for campaigning during the 2016 national elections.⁴⁷ Another high-profile case is the death of Leyte Mayor Rolando Espinosa Sr., who was shot in prison while resisting arrest for suspected illegal drug possession.⁴⁸

Among ordinary citizens, 6,236 people were killed in five months, with 2,187 of those deaths conducted during police operations and 4,049 in vigilante killings.⁴⁹ It is surprising that the number of vigilante killings is almost twice more than those performed through formal means. What perhaps fuelled the killing epidemic is the nature of the war itself. According to Hardt and Negri, the limits of war in the 21st century have been extended, and states and institutions can wage an abstract war against an indefinite enemy.⁵⁰ The main targets in this war are the poor, whom the authorities and their supporters consider as 1) morally dangerous because they are ‘social parasites’ who make their living by stealing, engaging in prostitution, and pushing drugs; and 2) politically dangerous because they are disorganised and capricious.⁵¹ In aspiring for so-called «cardboard justice», anybody can act like police officers and kill anyone whom they suspect is a criminal.⁵² Like Hardt and Negri’s social parasites, drug pushers and dealers are perceived as threats to societal morale and order. As such, they can be easily gunned down instead of being brought to the justice system.⁵³

The rising number of casualties prompted the formation of a congressional committee tasked to investigate the alleged state-sponsored extrajudicial killings. Duterte was also probed for charges of murder, torture, and

47. ‘Drug money made Leila win’, *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 7 October 2016.

48. According to the findings of an investigation by Senator Panfilo Lacson, the killing was intentional. It was as a part of a ‘systematic cleanup’ in which other officials suffered the same fate as Espinosa’s. For details of the report, see *Lacson: Sponsorship Speech for the Committee Report on the Inquiry on the Killing of Albuera Mayor Rolando Espinosa, Sr. Speech of Panfilo Lacson, Senator, Republic of the Philippines, 13 March 2017*. (http://www.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2017/0313_lacson).

49. Data from a Philippine National Police report, as published in ‘IN NUMBERS: The Philippine «War on Drugs»’, *Rappler*, 6 January 2017.

50. Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, London: Penguin Books, 2005.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

52. *Cardboard justice* is a term coined by the De La Salle University teacher, Hope Swann, to characterise how people are convicted as drug criminals on the streets. People who are killed through vigilante justice are usually seen wrapped in packaging tape with a sign attached saying, «I am a drug pusher».

53. The targeted suspects in the Philippines are users of cheap and accessible crystal methamphetamine or *shabu*. The rich can afford cocaine and ecstasy and are usually spared in the operations. For a detailed discussion, see Joseph Franco, ‘The Philippines War on Drugs Is Really a War on the Poor’, *The Global Observatory Web Site*, 10 August 2016.

kidnappings during his tenure as the mayor of Davao City.⁵⁴ However, the chair of the Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights terminated the hearings, stating that there was insufficient proof linking the deaths to state policies.⁵⁵ The International Criminal Court in The Hague spelled out that it had no plans to investigate Duterte after the Senate ruling. Still, there are pending motions for investigations from the UN and local activist groups hoping to convince the so-called ‘silent majority’ to withdraw their support for Duterte.

Despite the criticisms, Duterte remains invincible. In the latest survey conducted by the Social Weather Station, respondents gave the government an ‘excellent’ rating for its campaign against drugs, with 74% saying they are satisfied with its effort to uphold human rights.⁵⁶ Though it is debatable whether or not Duterte’s War on Drugs condones state-sponsored killing, the ongoing investigations and public exchange it has sparked has led citizens to scrutinise the extra-judicial killing records of past presidencies.⁵⁷ The extent to which these discussions can boost or deter the killing spree is still in question, but they certainly have made the world feel the once overlooked presence of those who back violence as a means of restoring order in a democracy.

3.2. *Burial of Ferdinand Marcos*

Another historic event that unveiled a crack in post-EDSA Philippine democracy was the burial of Ferdinand Marcos in the national Heroes’ Cemetery. The atrocities the nation experienced during Martial Law made the idea of giving Marcos a hero’s burial almost taboo.⁵⁸ Any form of festivity was restricted during the process of transferring his body from Hawaii to his home province, Ilocos Norte, in 1993. His remains were subsequently preserved in an airtight glass case in his family mausoleum, where they were made available for public viewing.

54. On 9 December 2016, Edgar Matobato, a self-confessed hitman, filed cases against Duterte, his son, and PNP Chief Ronald dela Rosa for alleged murder, torture, and kidnapping in Davao City.

55. ‘Senate report on extrajudicial killings out this week’, *Philippine Star Web Site*, 17 October 2016.

56. ‘Gov’t bags «very good» SWS satisfaction rating: Drug war «excellent», «very good» in human rights’, *CNN Philippines Web Site*, 17 November 2016.

57. See for example, Rigoberto Tiglao, ‘Human rights abuses under Cory as bad as dictator’s record – Marcos critics own data’, *Manila Times*, 17 April 2016; ‘A History of Extra-judicial Killings in the Philippines’, *Extra Judicial Killing in the Philippines Blog*, 3 October 2016 (<http://ricalynntaporco.blogspot.jp/2016/10/a-history-of-extrajudicial-killings-in.html>). Reports about extra-judicial killings and forced disappearances during the post-Marcos regime are available online.

58. Ferdinand Marcos died of lung and heart complications. As early as 1983, he was diagnosed with a chronic autoimmune disease. Despite the illness, he presented himself as a healthy leader, completely capable of governing. By the time he was ousted as the president of the Philippines, his health was deteriorating quickly.

In 2016, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Duterte administration's request to bury Marcos in the Heroes' Cemetery on 18 November.⁵⁹ Duterte argued that this action would initiate national healing, wherein Marcos would not necessarily be considered a hero but would receive the ceremony dead soldiers and presidents had in the past.⁶⁰ Duterte was an admirer of Marcos and considered him the 'brightest' among the past Philippine presidents, citing his wish to revive programmes Marcos initiated during his presidency.⁶¹ He also took on the failure of past administrations to deal with the lingering burial issue and their unwillingness to gamble on possible dissent from the people.⁶²

The proposal also seemed to echo the majority's opinion. The narrow margins in surveys show a fundamental divide among Filipinos regarding the treatment of Marcos's remains. Social Weather Station surveys conducted in July 1998, March 2011, June 2011, and February 2016 revealed that 54%, 60%, 50%, and 59% of Filipinos agreed that Marcos should be buried with official honours.⁶³ Such support was also reflected in the fact that Marcos family members continue to hold elected public positions despite persisting allegations of corruption. Ferdinand Marcos's wife, Imelda Marcos, is currently a member of the House of Representatives. Their daughter, Imee Marcos, is the incumbent governor of Ilocos Norte, and their son – Bongbong Marcos – is a senator. As mentioned earlier, Bongbong lost the 2016 vice-presidential race by only a narrow margin.

This underestimated support for the Marcos family was tested when Duterte decided to bury the late dictator in fulfilment of one of his campaign promises. As expected, human rights groups and activists protested. The bone of contention, fought on the bases of history and legality, was whether Marcos was a hero. As the anti-burial protesters shouted «Marcos, not a hero!» **Marcos loyalists pleaded for forgiveness for the dictator's atrocious deeds for the sake of «national healing».**⁶⁴ A petition was filed with the

59. Duterte was the second Philippine president to express his desire to bury Marcos at the national Heroes' Cemetery. In 1998, Joseph «Erap» Estrada planned a burial for Marcos. The plan did not go through because of strong opposition, including that from Corazon «Cory» Aquino.

60. 'Duterte in Ilocos Norte: «I will allow Marcos' burial in Heroes' Cemetery», *Rappler*, 19 February 2016. Duterte also cited the huge following of Marcos in the Ilocos Region, a region in the northern part of the Philippines; 'SC votes, 9–5, for burial of Marcos at Libingan', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 9 November 2016.

61. 'Duterte says Marcos was the brightest of them all', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 February 2016.

62. 'Duterte says predecessors' inaction on Marcos burial left him with a burden to resolve it', *Interaksyon Web Site*, 25 November 2016.

63. 'Is Philippines ready for a state burial for Marcos?', *ABS-CBN New Web Site*, 14 March 2016.

64. 'Marcos loyalists, critics engage in shouting match outside SC', *ABS-CBN News Web Site*, 31 August 2016. A signature campaign lobbying for a Marcos burial gathered more than one million signatures, including those from Filipinos living

Supreme Court to stop the burial. However, it ruled for the burial in a 9–5 vote, with one abstaining. According to the Supreme Court, Duterte’s decision was not considered a grave abuse of discretionary power, and as chief executive, he had the right to reserve a cemetery plot for Marcos.

Protests and appeals to revoke the Supreme Court ruling erupted across the country as the Marcos family and their loyalists rejoiced. High-profile public officials, such as Senator Francis Pangilinan, Vice President Leni Robredo, and Socrates Villegas, the president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, voiced their objection to the decision. Martial law victims filed a temporary injunction to suspend the burial of Marcos with the argument that it would defile the people’s «historic struggle against the tyranny of martial law». ⁶⁵ The sentiments of anti-burial citizens could be summarised in former National Historical Commission of the Philippines Chair Maria Sereno Diokno’s statement in her letter to Duterte, «Our appeal is based not on a narrow and short-sighted reading of law but on historical grounds». ⁶⁶

Despite these petitions, the Duterte administration performed the burial. According to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Department of Defence instructed them to keep the preparations private, at the request of the family. As a response to this act compared to a «thief in the night», thousands of Filipinos – including the young who had not experienced the Marcos regime – joined the «Black Friday» protests. Duterte’s reassurance that the protests would not be suppressed came as a consolation prize, for the protesters’ demands were unheeded as the burial pushed through.

On a positive note, the protests reminded many of EDSA I, when people of different socio-economic backgrounds and generations joined to fight an oppressive regime. Nevertheless, the Marcos burial seemingly reversed the achievements of EDSA I. The protests continued briefly. Several petitions to exhume the remains of Marcos and appeals questioning the legitimacy of the Supreme Court’s decision are still on the table. ⁶⁷ Therefore, it is difficult to deny that the burial was a watershed moment implicating future discussions about lessons learned by the Filipinos from overthrowing a dictator and electing a president who authorised his burial in Heroes’ Cemetery.

abroad. «National healing» was also the Office of the Solicitor General’s main justification to junk anti-burial petitions.

65. ‘Martial law victims to file TRO petition vs Marcos hero burial’, *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 13 August 2016.

66. ‘NHCP to Duterte: Lead the way to true healing, reconsider Marcos burial’, *Rappler Web Site*, 11 November 2016. It should be noted here that Diokno resigned on 29 November 2016, after the Marcos burial.

67. Although Duterte’s permissive attitude towards the protests may be construed as contradictory to his perceived authoritarian figure, it must be noted that his uncompromising stance on burying Marcos in the Heroes’ Cemetery has effectively marginalised dissenting opinion.

3.2. *Economic policies*

Despite considering Philippine oligarchy as the foremost enemy of Philippine democracy,⁶⁸ the Filipinos have elected oligarchs to the presidency since 1935. Whether the election outcomes reflect their choices or the absence thereof, Duterte's election might have changed the pattern. Like any other newly elected president, Duterte faced the challenge of addressing the Filipinos' economic plight. Poverty in the Philippines has long been linked to land-owning oligarchies, which own and control most of the country's resources. Whereas poverty alleviation has been a permanent campaign vow of presidential candidates, it was Duterte's pro-poor image that revitalised the hope of overturning the system.

The current administration's 10-point socio-economic agenda offered a promising start. It combines existing economic policies and a renewed focus on infrastructure development, agrarian reform, and improvement of social welfare protection programmes. Duterte's economic team, composed of highly qualified individuals, acknowledged PNoy's efforts to improve the economic condition of the country.⁶⁹ Such open-mindedness towards incorporating and reviewing the previous economic policies was fundamental to keep the inherited economic growth from digressing.

Duterte's economic platform seems to be on the right track. Notable Filipino economist Gerardo Sicat stated that Duterte acquired good macro-economic fundamentals from the Aquino administration, including a good 'investment grade' credit rating and decrease in total debt-to-GDP ratio. However, he also inherited his predecessor's «poor performance in public infrastructure investment», particularly its position against easing the constitutional restrictions to foreign direct investments.⁷⁰ Knowing this, the Duterte administration allotted 900 billion pesos to strengthen infra-

68. Benedict Anderson, 'Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams', *New Left Review*, Vol. 1, No. 169, May-June 1988; Paul Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism: The Politics of Banking in the Philippines*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998; Eva-Lotta E. Heman and John T. Sidel, *Philippine Politics and Societies in the Twentieth Century: Colonial Legacies, Post-Colonial Trajectories*, London, U.K.: Routledge, 2005.

69. 'Economy grows 6.3% in 4th quarter, 5.8% in 2015', *Philippine Star Web Site*, 29 January 2016; 'Duterte's economic team reveals 10-point socio-economic agenda', *GMA News Online*, 20 June 2016. Some of the notable members of Duterte's economic team include the following: Secretary of Finance Carlos Dominguez III, a businessman who has also served as Corazon Aquino's Secretary of Agriculture; Secretary of Budget and Management Benjamin Diokno, an economics professor from the University of the Philippines Diliman, who held the same position under Joseph Estrada; and Secretary of Socio-economic Planning Ernesto Pernia, also Economics Professor Emeritus from the University of the Philippines Diliman and economist at the Asian Development Bank.

70. 'Macroeconomic directions: Duterte vs Aquino', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 13 July 2016.

structure development.⁷¹ It also plans to loosen constitutional restrictions regarding land ownership to attract foreign investors. In addition, the current administration's goal is to reduce poverty from 21% to 13% by 2020, with a focus on addressing issues in rural areas and among the poorest of the poor families.⁷² Existing poverty alleviation programmes such as Conditional Cash Transfer, by which families are given money in exchange for fulfilling certain requirements, were retained, and the results of the latest Family Income and Expenditure Survey by the Philippine Statistics Authority were reviewed to determine which policies needed improvement. The government also sought to enhance the implementation of the Reproductive Health Law, despite causing a skirmish between its supporters and opponents, especially the Philippine Catholic Church.

The reception towards Duterte administration's socio-economic agenda implementation was mixed, particularly when seen against the backdrop of the country's political climate. The perception of the business community was generally positive, expressing approval for Duterte's choice of people to oversee economic matters.⁷³ Likewise, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce President George Barcelon saw economic improvements in the first three months of Duterte's presidency. For some experts, the adherence to sound economic fundamentals was a good sign. Gilberto Llanto, the president of the Philippine think tank, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, had an optimistic outlook about the sustained implementation of tax reforms.⁷⁴ According to a Social Weather Station survey, the percentage of families who considered themselves in poverty reached a historic all-time low of 42% compared to the 50% average of previous years.⁷⁵

However, such a positive economic outlook may be more an effect of Duterte's popular 'outsider image', rather than a reflection of his leadership's likely economic consequences. Even though his approval ratings remain high, alleged human rights abuse, questionable anti-drug policies, and inflammatory rhetoric against his critics has turned off foreign investors.⁷⁶ The Philippine peso fell to its lowest value in seven years owing to the perceived political instability of the Duterte administration. Despite perceptions of the government's volatility, Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez reas-

71. 'Government to spend P900B on infra projects', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 21 July 2016.

72. 'Duterte administration must «work doubly hard» on accelerated poverty reduction, says Dominguez', *Philippine Department of Finance Web Site*, 11 March 2016.

73. 'Businessmen laud Duterte's economic team', *CNN Philippine Web Site*, 22 June 2016.

74. 'Economists give mixed reviews on Duterte's first 100 days', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 10 October 2016.

75. '2016 self-rated poverty is lowest in 29 years: SWS', *ABS-CBN News Web Site*, 16 January 2017.

76. '100 days in: Duterte wins local support at the risk of losing foreign investors', *Nikkei Asian Review Web Site*, 8 October 2016.

sured the public that despite Duterte's undiplomatic manner, he remains loyal to economic agreements within and outside the country.⁷⁷

In an ironic twist, critics cannot help but see the anti-poor angle of the current administration's economic policies. Non-governmental organisations, activists, and government opponents consider Duterte's anti-drug campaign as a war on the poor, contradicting his claim that eradicating drug problems in the country would help alleviate poverty.⁷⁸ In addition, a left-leaning think tank, IBON Foundation, argues that Duterte's economic policies still adhere to the neoliberal agenda that neglects pro-Filipino industrialisation through boosting local industry's competitiveness in favour of foreign investors. This bias towards big business and private interests could undermine land reform and other policy initiatives supportive of farmers and low-income workers.⁷⁹ Filipino leftists, likewise, described Duterte's top economic advisers as the «neoliberal triumvirate» who could undermine his 'pro-poor' economic policies by sustaining the Aquino administration's neoliberal policies.⁸⁰ Duterte, in their view, should be wary of fostering exclusive economic growth that would fail to trickle down to ordinary Filipinos who voted for him.

Weighing these perceptions, it is difficult to ascertain whether poverty and the overall economic performance of the Philippines will improve or deteriorate during Duterte's term. His supporters continue to show a willingness to lean on his strongman leadership style for the sake of what they perceive as a key to changing the impoverished state of the country. Nevertheless, the economic discussions transpose the developmental state debate that asks whether an authoritarian leadership could improve the country's socio-economic condition. Are the Filipinos ready for this? Can Duterte boost the economy without a stronghold among the oligarchs? These are altogether separate questions that need more time to answer.

77. 'Duterte gov't assures PH economic policies «predictable»', *Rappler Web Site*, 27 September 2016.

78. 'Philippines: The police's murderous war on the poor', *Amnesty International Web Site*, 31 January 2017; 'Gov't war on drugs targets the poor – CHR', *GMA News Online*, 25 September 2016; 'Minority solons criticize Duterte in first 100 days', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 7 October 2016; Joseph Franco, 'The Philippines War on Drugs Is Really a War on the Poor', *IPI Global Observatory Web Site*, 19 August 2016.

79. 'On the Duterte administration's economic direction in its first 100 days: Neoliberal economics continues, but nationalist change still possible', *Ibon Foundation Web Site*, 5 October 2016.

80. 'Left blasts Duterte admin's «neoliberal triumvirate» dare them to survive on P40/day', *Interaksyon Web Site*, 4 January 2017.

4. *The return of the Philippines in geopolitics?*

As in domestic politics, Duterte's personality featured prominently in foreign relations. For the past several years, the perceived decline of US influence in many Asian countries coinciding with a China that wants a significant regional and global presence has affected East Asian regional politics.⁸¹ Duterte was able to capitalise on this fluid power landscape to make his mark as an iconoclast leader in Southeast Asian international affairs. Rallying for an «independent foreign policy», Duterte showed signals that he was not beholden to any conventional wisdom or custom regarding how to deal with China and the US or how to position the Philippines in the international community.⁸²

Duterte's election occurred simultaneously with the emergence of the Philippines as a key country for balancing Chinese and American influence in the region. The case against China's maritime territorial claim in the South China Sea at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague was filed during the previous Aquino administration, and it reflects the position of the Philippines and, to some degree, that of ASEAN. There is a growing unease with China's bold moves to disturb the status quo.⁸³ Aquino also brought back US forces to Filipino soil for the first time in over 20 years since their departure in 1992, sending a clear message to the US that the Philippines needed its support and would host American troops despite domestic backlash. Joining the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations was equally crucial to counterbalance the growing influence of Chinese money in the Philippine economy.⁸⁴

However, Duterte upset those enamoured with the Aquino legacy once he assumed the presidency. He appeared to play the powers against each other instead of committing to one side. Less guided by strategic calculations, Duterte operated on a reactionary, gut-instinct move to throw his foreign counterparts off balance. He managed, within months of his taking office, to offend the US and befriend China, Russia, and Japan, which ironi-

81. See for example, John G. John Ikenberry, 'The Rise of China and Future of the West', *Foreign Affairs Web Site*, January/February 2008, and Robert G. Sutter, 'China's Rise: Implications for US Leadership in Asia', *East West Center Policy Studies*, 1, 2006.

82. 'Duterte: Gov't to pursue «independent foreign» policy', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 10 September 2016. See also Renato de Castro, 'The Duterte Administration's Foreign Policy: Unraveling the Aquino Administration's Balancing Agenda on an Emergent China', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2016.

83. 'Aquino: The President who brought China to court', *Rappler Web Site*, 29 June 2016; 'Philippine Court Upholds New US Defense Pact', *The Diplomat*, 12 January 2016.

84. 'Aquino, Obama eye PH inclusion in TPP', *Philippine Star*, 18 November 2016.

cally is a key ally of the US in the region.⁸⁵ What resulted from his approach was a new matrix of regional relations in which traditional allies, friends, and foes seemed to be unchained from the post-Cold War order. Duterte's approach also allowed the Philippines to carve out some room for diplomatic maneuvering. During his Southeast Asia tour, Duterte expressed his intention to have a stronger Sino-ASEAN security partnership. In effect, he overrode the balancing strategy of the Aquino administration and opted instead for equi-balancing, which prefers engagement with multinational institutions instead of balancing or bandwagoning with great powers.⁸⁶

To an extent, it appears that Duterte is independently creating his country's pivot to Asia. He visited both Beijing and Tokyo to strike aid and economic deals. Unlike his predecessors, he showed little interest in prioritising ties with Washington.⁸⁷ Aside from the rude remarks addressed to US President Barack Obama during the ASEAN Summit in September 2016,⁸⁸ Duterte also called off future joint military exercises with the US. He had never professed any liking for the Americans ever since he was the mayor in Davao City, where he derided the country for its colonial legacy in the Philippines.⁸⁹ The US, taking the moral high ground and criticising his war on drugs on grounds of human rights abuse, appeared hypocritical based on the brutal killings of thousands of Filipinos during its colonial rule. In addition, Duterte sees the shadow of the US in the elites of his country's domestic political establishment. The US as a representative of the imperial world, which marginalised formerly colonised and developing countries, seems an anathema to the pursuit of Duterte's anti-establishment agenda.

Worth noting is that although leadership of the Philippines in East Asian foreign affairs may be illusory, Duterte's «anti-Americanism» kicked off a broader enquiry on the history of American colonialism in the Philippines. In history textbooks, American colonialism is usually narrated in positive terms, postulating that the Americans came to save the Filipinos from the brutal rule of the Spanish and defended them from Imperial Ja-

85. As a concession or weakening of the Filipino control of the South China Sea or upholding The Hague's ruling, including the idea to ban fishing in the Scarborough Shoal

86. Renato De Castro, 'The Duterte Administration's Foreign Policy: Unraveling the Aquino Administration's Balancing Agenda on an Emergent China', *Journal of Current Southeast Asia Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 139-159.

87. 'Duterte: Visit in Japan Fruitful', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 29 October 2016; 'Duterte meets China's President in charm offensive', *Philippine Star Web Site*, 20 October 2016; 'Duterte slams US, praises China', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 21 November 2016.

88. 'Duterte Tells Obama «Son of a Whore» Remark Wasn't Personal', *The Guardian*, 6 September 2016.

89. For a concise discussion of the relationship between Duterte's background as the mayor of Davao and his dislike for the US, see Prashanth Parameswaran, 'Why the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte hates America', *The Diplomat*, 1 November 2016.

pan. In other words, the benevolent assimilation narrative runs deep in the veins of ordinary Filipinos, who have long seen US as a model. If there is a positive externality to Duterte's quips critical of the West, it is putting the spotlight on the negative American colonial legacies that had since been eclipsed by US foreign and military aid to the Philippines. With Duterte, the Filipinos might have found a leader that refuses to kowtow to the demands of big powers, especially the US.

Nevertheless, there are a few loopholes in his rhetoric. Duterte was less dismissive than China was of The Hague ruling favouring the position of the Philippines. Nevertheless, he chose to downplay the victorious card against China. Opting instead to effectively shelve the issue, Duterte let realpolitik dictate his course of action. Neither China's claim nor the upholding of international law seemed worth considering unless it served the national interests of the Philippines. As he would demonstrate later in his scathing remarks about US interference in Philippine domestic politics or the hypocrisy of international organisations, protecting Philippine sovereignty was of utmost concern. For Foreign Affairs Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr., this would effectively address both internal and external security threats.⁹⁰ Duterte was careful to clarify that he does not intend to completely cut ties with the US. Under his leadership, Duterte only aspires for a Philippines that pursues an «independent foreign policy».⁹¹

What he meant by «independent foreign policy» is still unclear. The irony is that as Duterte's administration pulls the Philippines away from the American grasp for the sake of sovereignty, it does so at the expense of backing China's and Russia's territorial and military ambitions.⁹² Hence, it appears that the Philippines is sandwiched between three giants and has not revamped its role in world politics. Duterte's presidency presents a real test to how Philippine domestic politics could implicate its geopolitical relations. For the Filipinos, the historical enquiry Duterte inspired may at best show how a US-bestowed democracy could backfire against the former coloniser by electing Duterte. At worst, it could urge the former coloniser to make a comeback in another form.

90. 'Duterte wants to liberate the Philippines from foreign shackles: foreign minister', *Reuters*, 6 October 2016.

91. 'Philippine not cutting ties with the US – Duterte', *Philippine Star*, 23 September 2016.

92. 'In China, Duterte announces separation with the US: «America has lost»', *CNN Web Site*, 20 October 2016. See Stephen J. Blank, 'Imperial Ambitions: Russia's Military Buildup', *World Affairs Journal*, May/June 2015; Feng Zang, 'Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream: An «Imperial» China?', *The National Interest*, 18 September 2016.

5. Concluding remarks

In this essay, some of the most salient issues of Philippine domestic and international relations in 2016 have been examined analytically. Duterte's emergence to power is linked to the brief but substantive history of choosing a leader in the Philippines following the right to suffrage granted to the Filipinos by the US. This essay also illustrates the consequences of the EDSA system applicable to democratic politics, particularly the irony of electing an authoritarian leader to rectify an ailing democracy.

Arguably, Duterte introduced unconventional measures in Philippine domestic and international politics in 2016. His landslide victory over the usual power players demonstrated a democracy wanting change, dissatisfied with the initial unfulfilled promise of the post-EDSA system to dispense with oligarchic politics. More importantly, he created a space big and controversial enough to reveal a majority willing to experiment with an authoritarian leader who promised to improve the country's abysmal situation. Despite receiving domestic and international criticism and derision for his tough and impulsive manner, Duterte has gained enough supporters to condone even brutal forms of discipline in the country. If democracy is the reflection of the will of the people, then Duterte is a product of democracy.

The Duterte administration entered 2017 with an 83% approval rating, but it is difficult to ascertain whether he will maintain his popularity amidst the tirade from his supporters and critics.⁹³ It is also too early to tell whether real change is coming or whether the Filipino majority will continue to give Duterte the support that gave him the presidency in the first place. The War on Drugs remains at the core of Duterte's domestic policy. Development programmes involving the social security system, building infrastructure, labour, and agrarian reform are still pending. In international relations, the pay-offs of Duterte's attitude towards global politics have yet to unfold. It is difficult to overturn both the positive and negative momentum he created with the US, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Whether the Philippines – a country known to be among the strongest partners of the US in Asia – can afford to rid itself of its colonial dependence is another big question mark.

In the early 1990s, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew told then President Fidel Ramos that disorder and underdevelopment in the Philippines could be attributed to its lively democracy. To this, the former

93. 'Duterte approval rating at 83% – Pulse Asia', *Philippine Daily Inquirer Web Site*, 6 January 2017. At the time of writing this article, the latest Pulse Asia survey conducted in March 2017 showed a decline in approval ratings from 83% to 78%. There was a significant increase in support from the upper and middle class, from 69% to 84%, and a decrease in Class E, from 85% to 74%. For details, see Pulse Asia, 'March 2017 Nationwide Survey on the Performance and Trust Ratings of Top Five Philippine Government Officials', *Pulse Asia Web Site*, 18 April 2017.