

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

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ISSN 2385-2526

ISBN 978-88-3313-044-6 (paper)

ISBN 978-88-3313-045-3 (e-book)

Annual journal - Vol. XXVIII, 2017

Published jointly by Associazione Asia Maior & CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli extra-europei "Cesare Bonacossa" - Università di Pavia

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Paper version Italy € 50.00 Abroad € 65.00

Subscription abbonamenti@viella.it www.viella.it



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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. XXVIII / 2017

Asia in the Waning Shadow of American Hegemony

Edited by

Michelguglielmo Torri, Elisabetta Basile, Nicola Mocci

viella



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THE PHILIPPINES 2017: DUTERTE-LED AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM AND ITS
LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC ROOTS*

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Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte led a phenomenal campaign to win the 2016 national election. During his first two years in power Duterte has become the protagonist and exemplar of a key new development – the social formation of a regime of authoritarian populism. Based on an analysis of news reports, public debates, survey results, and official policy documents from 2017, the article examines various features of this emergent regime and then illuminates the historical-institutional mechanisms that brought it about. The inquiry is predicated on an understanding that the old EDSA Republic’s liberal-democratic regime has been marked by intractable socio-economic crises since its installation in 1986. This triggered different political tendencies and trajectories that Duterte has been able to mould into a new mode of regulation and governance. The central discussion elucidates some of the significant features that constitute the process through which the new regime of authoritarian populism is taking shape. The conclusion highlights the mutually reinforcing features of the dying EDSA-type liberal democracy and the emerging Duterte-led authoritarian populism. This suggests that the former has been a spawning ground for the latter.

1. Introduction

Philippine politics and governance took an eventful turn in 2017. It was the moment when the character of the administration of the new president, Rodrigo Duterte, came more sharply into focus. He had already assumed global prominence and a certain notoriety since he led a successful campaign in the 2016 national election – seeming to break decisively with his predecessor in both domestic and foreign policy, and revelling in a brash, non-conformist public persona. Among other things, the year following his election exhibited momentous developments that provide impor-

* The different parts, ideas and arguments in this article have been presented and discussed in various forums and seminars since 2016 in the cities of Helsinki, Copenhagen, Tampere, Osaka, Stockholm, Vienna, and Oslo, as well as in a number of international media outlets. I thank the organizers and participants of these events, as well as my social media friends, for relevant discussions. I also thank the editors of *Asia Maior* and the two referees for their important suggestions and critical comments. I am grateful for the feedback and scholarly advice to Michelguglielmo Torri, Wolfgang Drechsler, Jacques Hersh, Ali Kadri, Johannes Dragsback Schmidt, Barry Gills, Jun Borrás, Wolfram Schaffar, and Gareth Richards.

tant insights into the current and future shape of the phenomenon of «populism» in the Philippines.

A brief history of major political turning points in the Philippines in the last 50 years highlights a transition from authoritarianism to an ostensible process of democratisation. Between 1972 and 1986, the country was under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. This period of authoritarianism was sustained by martial law, and brought about a concentration of state power within grasp of the strongman himself and the plunder of national wealth for the Marcos family and its business cronies. The «People Power Revolution» of 1986 put an end to this Marcos-led autocratic era, installing the so-called «EDSA Republic». The new republic was characterised by the dominance of a different set of governing élites, led by President Corazon «Cory» Aquino (who came from a prominent landowning family), and underpinned by a new constitution that enshrined the political principles and institutions of liberal democracy.¹ Put differently, the EDSA Republic resulted in the restoration of the power of a particular section of the political élites. It created an illusion of democracy through, *inter alia*, the conduct of regular elections and the alleged re-imposition of checks and balances between the different branches of government.

The starting point of the present article is that the liberal-democratic regime of the EDSA Republic has long been in crisis. As a result, various forces from across the political spectrum are challenging its hegemony. The crisis stems from the institutional failure of the EDSA system to deliver on the constitutionally-declared national aspirations for political democracy, economic development and social justice. Against this background, the article demonstrates that, at this historical juncture, an authoritarian populist form of regime is emerging from the prolonged and evolving crisis. The article addresses two interrelated objectives: first, to examine various significant features of the rising populist regime; and second, to illuminate the underlying causes that have triggered this process of regime formation.

Through an analysis of media news, survey results, public speeches, government reports and official policies produced in 2017, the first part of the article examines the constitutive features of authoritarian populism as observed during the early period of Duterte's government in the areas of domestic politics, economic policy and political economy, and foreign policy and relations. The second part elaborates the argument that the phenomenal surge of Duterte's authoritarian populism is, to a large extent, a legacy of the crises in both the praxis and institutions of the EDSA version of liberal democracy.

The central discussion of the article underscores the distinguishing features of an incipient authoritarian populism of the Duterte regime. By

1. EDSA is an acronym for Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the main highway in Metro Manila where a series of major demonstrations and protests to oust the Marcos dictatorship occurred during the last weeks of February 1986.

analysing the current conjuncture, the discussion points to the multifaceted dimensions of populism, and of the political movement that embodies this phenomenon, in terms of:

- 1) the peculiarities of the movement's electoral victory and popularity;
- 2) the personality of the movement's leader and figurehead;
- 3) its position in the left/right political spectrum;
- 4) its language and discourse;
- 5) its rhetoric as a critique of an established ideology;
- 6) the impact of the use of social media on socio-political relations;
- 7) its class dynamics and support base;
- 8) the movement's strategies to secure social and political hegemony;
- 9) its governance approach to social problems and conflicts; and
- 10) its social, economic, and foreign policies.

These dimensions make up the building blocks of an analytical framework to understand the concepts, policies and phenomena associated with the present-day features of authoritarian populism. They evince the historical and empirical processes through which the emerging regime is taking shape.

It is proposed that, in the specific context of the Duterte phenomenon, the concept of authoritarian populism is more appropriately understood as an emergent socio-political *process*, rather than as a coherent ideology, state form or governance programme.² The focus of the analysis is on the *history* and *tendencies* of the current socio-political *conjuncture*. Duterte-led authoritarian populism is not only a reaction to the shortcomings and hypocrisies of the 30-year-old liberal-democratic EDSA Republic, but also as a direct legacy of it. As a self-contradictory phenomenon, the legitimacy of authoritarian populism's undemocratic practices and anti-democratic ideas derives from the popular support of an apparent majority of the population, articulated through either active or passive consent. Yet, thus far, the intrinsic contradictions of authoritarian populism are themselves the sources of the strength and weakness of the Duterte regime. With its own agential, institutional and historical-structural circumstances, this unfolding political phenomenon offers a distinctive case study of contemporary democratisation processes in developing Asia and of emerging varieties of populism across the world.

2. Cf. Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, January 1979, pp. 14-20; Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett, Simon Bromley & Tom Ling, 'Authoritarian Populism, Two Nations, and Thatcherism', *New Left Review*, Ser. I, No. 147, September-October 1984, pp. 32-60; Stuart Hall, 'Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop et al.', *New Left Review*, Ser. I, No. 151, May-June 1985, pp. 115-124.

2. Domestic political developments

2.1. Particularities of the popularity and electoral victory

A series of surveys conducted in 2017 indicated that Duterte has consistently remained trusted and popular among the population since he assumed office on 30 June 2016. In his first year in office, his approval ratings ranged from 86% to 80%, and performance rating from 80% to 76%. Interestingly, in Pulse Asia's study findings for May 1999 to September 2017, Duterte emerges as the most trusted president among his predecessors Joseph Estrada (1998–2001), Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001–2010) and Benigno S. Aquino III (2010–2016).³ By the end of 2017, the Social Weather Stations reported an «excellent» net satisfaction rating of +70% for the general performance of the Duterte administration, a «record high» rating, surpassing that of previous administrations.⁴ These surveys, showing Duterte's continued popularity, helped his supporters to argue that he is the representative, the embodiment and the voice of the majority. These same supporters have grounded their value judgments about what is democratic, moral, true, right and correct on the majoritarian principle. In other words, the claim is made that what is supported by the majority is *per se* democratic, moral, true, right and correct, quite independently from any ethical or normative evaluation.

There have been several mutually reinforcing factors that explain the electoral victory and popularity of Duterte, of which three stand out.⁵ The first is the *agential* factor in which Duterte's campaign team executed an efficient strategy that connected well with the resentment, fears and hopes of the electorate. Their campaign message highlighted both the most fundamental problems in the society and the most basic day-to-day concerns of ordinary people.

The second is about the *institutional* aspect, namely the presidential set-up and an electoral system based on the first-past-the-post rule, which allowed Duterte to win. Had there been a run-off or a parliamentary set-up, the political fate of Duterte would have been different. The presidential system is also proving to be conducive to the unconstrained propagation of populist discourses, as evidenced in the cases of Duterte and US President Donald Trump. In both cases, their politically charged statements are conveniently spread through the media, without being subjected to rigorous debates and scrutiny in a parliamentary setting, as in many parts of Europe.

3. 'Comparative Performance and Trust Ratings of Presidents (May 1999 to September 2017)', *Pulse Asia*, 9 November 2017.

4. 'Fourth Quarter 2017 Social Weather Survey: Net satisfaction rating of the Duterte National Administration rises to record-high «Excellent» +70', *Social Weather Stations*, 17 January 2018.

5. Bonn Juego, 'Demystifying Duterte's Populism in the Philippines', *LAPS Dialogue: The Online Magazine of the Institute of Asia & Pacific Studies*, University of Nottingham, UK, 22 February 2017.

The third and most important is the *structural* reason, whereby Duterte's landslide election and continued popularity are a loud articulation of a «protest vote» and legitimate anger against what the EDSA system has come to represent.⁶

2.2. *A cult of personality organized around a charismatic and heterodox politician*

The ideology and phenomenon of populism can be represented either by a political party or by a political personality. In some mature democracies in contemporary Western and Nordic Europe, such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, populism is promoted by right-wing or nationalist parties. But in other countries, populism has a face: Donald Trump in the US, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Narendra Modi in India, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. The rise of populist movements in these cases suggests that popular mass mobilisation is organised around a «cult of personality». It is thus important to take into consideration the personality of the movement's leader.

Thanks to Max Weber, the theory of charisma, or charismatic leadership, is well recognised in sociology. While charisma is a relative and fragile phenomenon, and often a unique gift to a special person, it is a source of power and authority that commands a faithful following. Despite negative publicity about Duterte by both the conservative and liberal media, locally and internationally, during the past two years, survey results throughout 2017 show that his trust and satisfaction ratings have remained mostly «excellent». One has to accept the fact that Duterte possesses charisma, which, historically, is a key mobilising characteristic of a national political leader in Philippine culture and society.

Duterte may be regarded as a «heterodox» politician with a partly traditional political background and a partly unorthodox political style. He is undoubtedly a «traditional politician», as he is a veteran local political boss who has mastered the language and skills of effective power politics at the local level. Hailing from an influential political family in Davao City and the regions of Mindanao and the Visayas, he has been exposed to national-level political wheeler-dealing that has long characterised political relations, and which is based on patronage and clientelism, the use of coercion and violence, and the realities of money politics.⁷ At the same time, Duterte is

6. See Carmina Yu Untalan, «The Philippines 2016: Democracy in dispute?», *Asia Maior 2016*, pp. 143-166. For relevant background on the competing narratives about the EDSA revolutions and their dwindling appeal among the population through the years, see also Lisandro E. Claudio, *Taming People's Power: The EDSA Revolutions and their Contradictions*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013.

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

«unorthodox» as his political style is characterised by his public display of uncouth behaviour, vulgar speeches and politically incorrect statements. Yet the most unorthodox aspect of his political style is his bold criticism of the so-called «establishments» in Philippine politics, society and culture – the United States, the oligarchies and the Catholic Church.⁸

2.3. *A mix of Left and Right-wing populism*

During the election period and the first few months in office, Duterte projected a mix of both left- and right-wing types of populism. But after a year as president, it became palpable that Duterte was swinging to right-wing populism, in terms of discourse, governance style and his political support base. On top of this, he started exhibiting more openly his predisposition to authoritarianism.

Duterte is a self-proclaimed «socialist» and «leftist» even though he does not have a coherent socialist programme, nor does he belong to any socialist party or left-leaning social movement.⁹ He is vocal in his criticism against the established institutions in the country – particularly, as noted above, US imperialism, the landed oligarchy and the Catholic Church. Earlier, he sounded keen on pursuing peace negotiations to resolve long-standing conflicts with armed communist rebels and Islamist separatist groups – both of which he categorised as «ideological» organisations, with legitimate causes, rather than plain «criminal» organisations. At the same time, however, what has become prominent in his speeches and governance style are the authoritarian themes, the military approach to political problems and the emphasis on active police action. Duterte has repeatedly expressed fascination with Marcos-era martial law, and has resorted to state violence as the solution to the problems of criminality and illegal drugs, leaving aside any thoroughgoing socio-economic reforms.

2.4. *Duterte-speak and dominant discourse*

Two years after he captured the attention of the nationwide mainstream media, Duterte has constructed a political language that remains popular and is becoming normalised in public discourse. This Duterte-speak is unconstrained by political norms and is characterised by messianic and domineering discourses. His messages, though replete with «motherhood statements» offering simple solutions to complicated social problems, appear to be the product of a messiah complex. He also conjures up an image as the father of the nation (*Tatay Digong*), and discursively creates binaries between good citizens and bad criminals, as well as between the élites and ordinary people.

8. Bonn Juego, 'Demystifying Duterte's Populism'.

9. Cf. Herbert Docena & Gabriel Hetland, 'Why Duterte is not – and is unlikely to be – a socialist', *Rappler*, 29 June 2016.

The election of Duterte and his continuing popularity signify that his «vulgar» speech is a non-issue for his supporters, if not for most citizens. Arguably, Duterte's language is popular because he speaks publicly the socially and culturally dominant features that characterise the collective mind and that are deeply ingrained in the psyche of most Filipinos. These features include machismo, sexism, violence, the desire for social order and the need to discipline the citizenry.¹⁰ Moreover, Duterte's campaign and governance platforms for «law and order» and «anti-corruption» are catch-all objectives that can easily be supported and accommodated by all socio-economic classes and political factions.

2.5. Critique of the theory and practice of liberal democracy

Duterte's authoritarian populism is not labelled by him as such. It is not a coherent political ideology or programme. But a consistent theme in his speeches is his discursive critique of both the theory and practice of liberal democracy. His critique, particularly of the ideals of human rights, emphasises the Filipino, Asian and developing country contexts. What has gained significant traction among the public is his disparagement of the practice of liberal democracy, specifically the corruption and ineffectiveness of hypocritical liberal élites who governed the country before his rise to power.

The approval of Duterte's populist discourse has tremendous implications for the current and future standing of liberal democracy in the Philippines. The embedding of authoritarian populism is best understood not simply as political rhetoric or propaganda to deceive the population, but as a response to real problems, affecting people's lives. It is a populist message that resonates well with people's lived experiences, touching on the legitimate fears, insecurities, angers, resentments, anxieties and hopes of the majority.¹¹

Take, for example, the «war on drugs» which is globally controversial among the world's liberal media, but remains nationally popular despite the campaign's bloody record. The survey fieldwork of Pulse Asia in September 2017 reveals that 88% of Filipinos support the administration's campaign against illegal drugs, even though 73% believe that extrajudicial

10. For a sociological and historical analysis of the correlation between the culture of violence and the phenomenon of populism in the Philippine context, see Alfred W. McCoy, 'Philippine Populism: Local Violence and Global Context in the Rise of a Filipino Strongman', *Surveillance & Society*, Vol. 15, Nos. 3/4, 2017, pp. 514-522; Patricio N. Abinales, 'Why acceptance of killings is at all-time high', *Rappler*, 28 July 2016. See also, Randy David, 'Where is «Dutertismo» headed?', *Inquirer.net*, 17 December 2017.

11. Nicole Curato, 'Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte's Rise to Power', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2016, pp. 91-109.

killings occur in its conduct.¹² There are multiple psychological factors why there is popular support for the anti-drug offensive. People at large *fear* for their individual selves and for their families being victimised by illegal drug abuse and drug-related crimes. Some support the campaign strongly as an expression of their own *hatred*, having been themselves, or their family members, victimised by illegal drug traffickers and users. Other supporters are *in denial* of their own past illegal drug use. *Frustration* and *anger* abound with regard to the failure of previous administrations to seriously address the problems of illegal drugs and criminality. The survey suggests how much more Filipinos care about prioritising a *sense of public security and personal safety* vis-à-vis drug-related crimes. High *trust* is given to the perception of Duterte's political will and the necessity for a strongman to deal with the complex apparatus of the illegal drug industry.

2.6. Social media and the populist moment

During the presidential elections, the Duterte camp won over rival candidates in the online war. Cyberspace is a crucial battleground in electoral contests and the shaping of public opinion. This is especially critical for the Philippines, which is recognised as the most active country in terms of time spent on social media and where social media penetration is 56% (i.e., 59 million people).¹³ Findings of the Computational Propaganda Research Project at Oxford University show that cybertroopers – so-called keyboard trolls – with a budget of some US\$ 200,000 were hired to intensify online support for Duterte.¹⁴ The manager of his social media campaign team had acknowledged this fact right after winning the election.¹⁵ There have been claims that this group of online campaigners has continued their propaganda work for Duterte's government.¹⁶ But the more obvious fact is that many people have been effectively stimulated by these social media campaigns. As a consequence, they have become passionate supporters of Duterte in both the online and offline spheres. There are trolls with fictitious social media profiles acting as internet provocateurs and spreading

12. 'September 2017 Nationwide Survey on the Campaign Against Illegal Drugs', *Pulse Asia*. National Survey conducted by Ulat ng Bayan on 24 - 30 September 2017.

13. 'Digital in 2017 Global Overview', *We Are Social and Hootsuite*, 24 January 2017.

14. 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.

15. 'Duterte's P10M social media campaign: Organic, volunteer driven', *Rappler*, 1 June 2016.

16. Sean Williams, 'Rodrigo Duterte's Army of Online Trolls', *New Republic*, 4 January 2017.

fake news. Nevertheless, the more serious societal problem at present (and for the future) is not these automated trolls, but actual people with real social media profiles – loose cannons behaving badly and boldly expressing messages of hate and divisiveness.

Social media can be a vehicle for democratising social relations. But it can also be utilised for a variety of political projects including the promotion of anti-democratic ideas. The Duterte phenomenon shows how social media facilitates the appeal and legitimacy of a populist politician with authoritarian tendencies. It serves as a convenient tool to form popular beliefs, sentiments and opinions. It can easily convey short messages through memes, soundbites, one-liners, expletives, insults and swear words that clearly have an impact. Bad language and images have the greatest and most far-reaching impact on minds and emotions.

The most intense rivalry in political cyberspace has remained the same since the 2016 campaigns: the so-called «Dutertards versus Yellowtards» confrontation. The pro-Duterte camp calls their rivals «Yellowtards», with reference to the symbolic colour of the Liberal Party's presidential candidate Manuel «Mar» Araneta Roxas II and former President Benigno S. Aquino III; meanwhile, opposition groups call the diehard Duterte supporters «Dutertards». It must be noted, however, that the aggression of the pro-Duterte camp is not only self-generated, but was largely triggered by the black propaganda and often condescending tone of the rival Roxas camp during the election. This fierce online rivalry betrays what social and political psychologists call «groupthink» behaviour – that is, a tribalistic division between *us* (the good allies) and *them* (our evil enemies). Online exchanges have merely become a discursive battle of «confirmation bias», where each camp selects information based on preconceived beliefs and loyalties. Political argumentation becomes personalised, emotional rather than rational, and replete with logical fallacies, especially straw man and *ad hominem* arguments.

In this populist moment in the Philippines, the political discourses communicated through social media are articulations of current realities. They are, among other things, a reflection of the state of many Filipinos' socio-political consciousness, ideological leanings, cultural beliefs and, perhaps, quality of formal education. As such, the increase in political awareness and participation of citizens in public debates, through different social media channels, can be considered a positive effect of the Duterte phenomenon. Netizens have also been actively informing themselves about governmental issues, foreign affairs, as well as political and economic concepts. The negative effects, however, include the prevalence of groupthink and confirmation bias behaviours, which precludes citizens from engaging in the constructive dialogue needed in the process of nation-building. In addition to this, harm is done to social relations by gutter talk, fake news, trolling, bullying and character assassination that are endemic in the social media.

Borrowing Albert Hirschman's well-known conceptual framework on *exit*, *voice*, and *loyalty* to understand the different ways in which citizens participate in political affairs especially through social media, there appear to be contradictions in the attitude of «liberals» towards the Duterte-led populist movement.¹⁷ Previously, liberals complained about the apathy of citizens, who had been choosing to «exit» from political participation. The liberal response to exit ranged from dialogue, to rational debate, to popular education, and to the strategy to arouse-mobilise-organise for active citizenship. Now, the populist movement has chosen to «voice» their political opinions and assert their «loyalty» to the state leader. But the liberal response to citizens who have found their voice in the social media to critique the EDSA Republic's legacy and who have expressed loyalty to Duterte ranges from fighting fire with fire to condescension and censorship.

2.7. *From cross-class alliance to centre-right politics*

One of the distinctive characteristics of Duterte-style populism is that its support base cuts across classes, gender, generations and the political spectrum. This catch-all politics, and the big tent coalition it forges, has a divide-and-rule effect on different sectors of the population. For example, while there is strong opposition from his critics against what can be construed as «misogynistic» and «homophobic» remarks that he makes in public, Duterte continues to have the political support of sections of women and the LGBTQ community. Unlike the earlier populist President Joseph Estrada, who presented himself as «for the poor», Duterte does not promote himself as such, but as the president of all classes. He does so despite his «anti-élite» rhetoric, on the one hand, and his administration's economic policies, perceived to be «anti-poor», on the other. So far such contradictions, rather than weakening the president's political standing, have served as a source of strength for Duterte's populist movement.

Since the campaign and during his first year in office, Duterte has enjoyed broad support from different political factions. In the Philippines, the electorate votes separately for the positions of president and vice-president. This electoral system – which is less party-based than personality-oriented – made it possible for Duterte to acquire support even from citizens who preferred a vice-presidential candidate who did not hail from his party. These supporters can be broadly categorised as belonging to four groups. The first group are the Duterte–Marcos supporters, who campaigned for the losing vice-presidential candidate Ferdinand Marcos Jr. They are the most aggressive (online) supporters of Duterte, and include Marcos loyalists, who are anti-Yellow and who have right-wing authoritarian and dictatorial proclivities. The second group is made up by Duterte–Cayetano

17. Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. London: Harvard University Press, 1970.

supporters, who voted for Duterte's running-mate Alan Peter Cayetano. Although aggressive supporters of Duterte, the Duterte–Cayetano followers are mostly critical of both the Marcoses and the Yellows. The third group is made up by the Duterte–Robredo group, who are moderate supporters of Duterte, sympathisers of the Yellow and anti-Marcos. The fourth group is the Duterte–Far Left group, including left-leaning individuals, who are both anti-Marcos and anti-Yellow but have tried to form some sort of tactical alliance with Duterte.

Early in his presidency, the Duterte administration was embroiled in two major controversies. The first was related to the issue of extra-judicial killings, linked to the government's anti-drug war, which had caused the loss of between 3,000 and 12,000 lives (with different estimates from different sources) from July 2016 to December 2017. The second major controversy was to do with the burial of Marcos at the heroes' cemetery on 18 November 2016. Both controversies reactivated the opposition and caused divisions among Duterte's supporters since not all of them condone extrajudicial killings or regard Marcos as a hero.

After his election, Duterte appointed activists and individuals associated with, and nominated by, leftist social and political movements to be members of his cabinet, even though these appointees had supported other presidential candidates. A turf war in Duterte's bureaucracy soon ensued.

By the last months of 2017, it was increasingly evident that Duterte was severing ties with his allies from the left and the progressive movement. First, the leftist, progressive and activist appointees in his cabinet – especially Gina Lopez at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Judy Taguiwalo at the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and Rafael Mariano at the Department of Agrarian Reform – failed to obtain confirmation from the Commission on Appointments, whose membership is dominated by allies of Duterte from the Senate and House of Representatives. Second, despite a promising start, the Duterte government eventually scrapped the peace negotiations with the CPP–NPA–NDF (Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army–National Democratic Front), officially calling them «terrorists» and ordering the rearrest and detention of their most senior notables, among them the CPP leaders Benito Tiamzon and Wilma Tiamzon, and the CPP founder Jose Maria Sison.

Duterte's populism derives its strength from a broad cross-class coalition. But its underlying weakness has been revealed in actual circumstances when Duterte had to face the *realpolitik* of class interests, and inevitably choose side between competing social and economic groups even within his own bloc. Long-term success and the survival of populists like Duterte may necessitate sacrificing his own political friends and favouring the «correct» faction within his supporters at the right time. After a year as president, Duterte has shown whose side he is on, and the composition of his support base has swung from a cross-class alliance to a centre-right social bloc.

2.8. *Strategies for social and political hegemony*

The strategies deployed by the Duterte administration to secure social and political hegemony are instructive of some of the important features of emerging authoritarian populism. A number of notable strategies deployed in 2017 go beyond the repressive methods typical of autocratic regimes, such as state harassment of the opposition to silence dissent. They include the creative use of legalism as a political disciplinary tool against critics, proactive mass mobilisation and aggressive social media operations.

The Duterte government enjoyed relative political stability during 2017 despite several problems. These problems included the impeachment complaint filed against the president by an opposition lawmaker in March (which was subsequently rejected by the House of Representatives, dominated by a pro-Duterte supermajority); the charges initiated at the International Criminal Court with regard to thousands of cases of extrajudicial killings relating to the anti-drug war; the controversy dragging the name of Duterte's son Paolo into smuggling issues, especially the seized shipment of narcotics from China amounting to US\$ 125 million; the increasing criticism from the local opposition; constant negative international media headlines; and, last but not least, the imposition of martial law in the whole of Mindanao due to the five-month battle (May–October) between government security forces and the ISIS-inspired Maute group.

The balance of online political forces remained largely the same – and was characterised by the continuing bickering between Dutertards and Yellowtards. Offline, the main political opposition to Duterte, though growing, was disorganised and comparatively weak. The strongest domestic opposition personalities and groups include:

- a) Senator Antonio Trillanes IV, who has emerged as Duterte's most vocal critic since the campaign period, particularly on corruption allegations;
- b) Senator Leila de Lima, who was detained in February 2017 for her alleged involvement in the illicit drug trade when she was Secretary of the Department of Justice (2010–2016) and who has long been critical of Duterte's record of abuses since she was Chair of the Commission on Human Rights (2008–2010);
- c) Yellow personalities, including opposition politicians in the Senate and House of Representatives as well as in the civil society, who were connected with the Liberal Party of Roxas and Aquino (though it is important to note that most previous members of the Liberal Party changed sides and are allied with Duterte);
- d) sections of the left, among which the social movements Laban ng Masa (Struggle of the Masses) and iDefend (In Defence of Human Rights and Dignity Movement);

- e) anti-Duterte netizens and bloggers like those behind *Pinoy Ako Blog*, *ProPinoy Project* and *Change Scamming*; and
- f) the far-left CPP–NPA–NDF.

In dealing with his critics, it is noticeable how Duterte has utilised the legal system as a disciplinary tool against dissent. Accordingly, he advanced his political agenda in the name of justice, rule of law, patriotism or nationalism to gain popular legitimacy, as well as to undermine the credibility of his critics. This has been observed in the case of de Lima's detention, as well as in Duterte's conflicts with media outlets that are perceived as being critical of his administration, such as the social news site *Rappler* and the newspaper *Philippine Daily Inquirer*.¹⁸ These strategies are related to the well-known «culture of impunity», which not only exonerates the rich and powerful from legal punishment but has also shown time and again how the rule of law can be used by the government in power as an instrument for political vendettas. The incumbent executive has frequently been able to file trumped-up criminal charges in court against its political enemies, aimed at having them condemned to long-term jail sentences or, failing that, keeping them in detention, as long as possible, during their trials.

Besides the incumbent's strategy to legally prosecute dissidents, the proactive mass mobilisation project, the creation of a critical mass in support of the Duterte regime, is also key to the populist movement's hegemonising project. The social media serves as a strategic tool to this end by sustaining the movement's online presence. In May 2017, Duterte officially appointed his most famous social media supporter, the entertainer-turned-blogger Mocha Uson, as Assistant Secretary for Social Media of the Presidential Communications Operations Office. Part of the online strategy of Duterte's cybertroopers – both the organised groups and the individual volunteers – in their battle for hegemony has been attacking, harassing and bullying whoever they regard as «enemies of change» among opposition politicians, human rights defenders, social media critics and critical news media organisations.

Such tactics for mass mobilisation were present in the RevGov, or Revolutionary Government, agenda, which was launched in late 2017. Though Duterte became president through a regularly-conducted democratically contested election, supporters of the proposed RevGov behave as if they had led and won a political revolution. As early as 2015, Duterte expressed his idea about the need for a «revolutionary government» to «stop criminality, stop corruption and fix the government».¹⁹ He reaffirmed the same idea a year after becoming president, particularly insisting on the need to

18. 'Duterte raises foreign ownership vs Rappler', *GMA News Online*, 24 July 2017; 'Duterte's target: The Philippine Daily Inquirer', *Rappler*, 16 August 2017.

19. 'Duterte eyes revolutionary government', *Inquirer.net*, 27 August 2015.

protect the government from «destabilisation» plots.²⁰ Thus, it can be said that the RevGov agenda is akin to a revolution-from-above project through bottom-up mass mobilisation.

Top military officials have publicly declared that they will not back a revolutionary government.²¹ Apparently, considerable support of the military is pivotal to transitioning from a democratic republic to a full-blown authoritarian regime. Owing to the country's history of coups d'état, it is a fact that the Philippine military is not a monolithic entity, and that there are sections within it that have been politicised. Duterte has been in power for less than two years; arguably, he has not yet solidified the military and police forces behind his regime. In comparison, Marcos was already in his second term, or nearly eight years as president and commander-in-chief, when he established martial law in 1972. Duterte continued to hold out inducements to the military and police by making frequent visits to their camps across the country and increasing their salaries.

At about the same time as the RevGov idea was floated, the administration also sought popular mass support for the notion of revising the 1987 constitution. It promoted the idea of changing the constitution to make possible a form of government embodying Duterte's long advocacy of federalism. This charter change agenda is bound to be an issue of major debate and political contestation in the coming years.

2.9. Governance approach: police-centric and militaristic without a class perspective

In terms of governance, the Duterte-led authoritarian populism has been police-centric and militaristic in its approach to complex historical social problems, such as criminality and armed insurgencies. It also lacks a class perspective, notwithstanding Duterte's leftist, socialist and anti-élite rhetoric.

2.9.1. Policing socio-economic problems

Police-centric governance was best exemplified in the Duterte administration's centrepiece programme on the war on drugs, whose main implementers are the 160,000-strong Philippine National Police (PNP). The programme was to be carried out through a two-pronged strategy: the «Oplan Double Barrel» project of aggressive police operations, aiming at simultaneously targeting high-value drug lords and their street-level ped-

20. 'Duterte threatens to adopt Cory style revolutionary gov't vs destabil plotters', *Inquirer.net*, 13 October 2017.

21. 'We won't back a revolutionary gov't, Defense, AFP chiefs assure Robredo', *Inquirer.net*, 8 November 2017.

dlers; and the community-based project «TokHang»,²² according to which the police, in cooperation with local *barangay* (village) leaders, would knock on every household's door to convince drug users and pushers to surrender for rehabilitation and change of their lifestyle. In 2017, these policing activities were twice suspended and reactivated by Duterte after police officers were implicated in two controversial crimes that sparked public outrage: the kidnap of a South Korean businessman and his murder inside the PNP headquarters, and the killing of 17-year-old Kian Delos Santos.²³

The Duterte administration's policing approach to the supply and demand of illegal drugs appeared to be a simple solution to a complicated problem. It has caused the loss of thousands of lives. The PNP's last news release for 2017 reports that «3,933 died during the reinforcement of police operations» between 1 July 2016 and 10 October 2017.²⁴ However, Human Rights Watch – and their local partner organisations – cites media reports that the anti-drug campaign's death toll has reached «an estimated 12,000 lives of primarily poor urban dwellers, including children» since Duterte assumed office – a figure which takes into account both legitimate police operations and extrajudicial killings.²⁵ Notwithstanding the competing claims over the exact number of deaths resulting from the drug war, Duterte himself agreed with the perception of the majority of Filipinos (54%) that so far «rich drug pushers are not killed; only the poor ones are killed».²⁶ Duterte and his police officials have constantly denied that they condone these killings and that extrajudicial killing is a state policy. However, even if these killings are not state-sponsored, the fact remains that the government has not taken any serious measure to put an end to them.

The issue of illegal drugs is a microcosm of the major social problems in Philippine society. Profiles of drug users suggest that most of them are from vulnerable sectors of the population. Instead of pursuing painstaking social and economic reforms, Duterte has put the police in charge, if not to resolve then at least to put a lid on the hard socio-economic consequences

22. TokHang is a contraction of Filipino/Visayan words '*toktok*' (knock) and '*hangyo*' (request).

23. The PNP-led war on drugs has so far undergone two phases: the 'alpha' phase (November 2016–February 2017) and the 'reloaded' phase (March 2017–October 2017).

24. Philippine National Police – Public Information Office, 'PNP: 1.26 Million Drug Personalities Surrendered Nationwide', PNP News Release, PR No. 17-1203, 17 December 2017.

25. 'Philippines', in Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2018: Events of 2017*, p. 429.

26. Presidential Communications Operations Office, Republic of the Philippines, *Speech of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during the Commemorative Session and Concert Program of the ASEAN Law Association Governing Council*, 25 October 2017; 'Third Quarter Social Weather Survey: 54% of Pinoys agree that rich drug pushers are not killed, only the poor ones are', *Social Weather Stations*, 28 October 2017.

of issues such as poverty, unemployment, school drop-outs and the inaccessibility of education. In effect, the campaign against drugs criminalizes the poor, the unemployed, the homeless, the mentally ill, the sick, out-of-school youth, and members of lonely, disconnected or alienated families, burdened by the social costs of economic migration.

Philosophically, Duterte has a punitive and fearmongering approach to the prevention and resolution of criminality, perhaps taking a cue from a Nietzschean motto: «What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger.» Policy-wise, Duterte's police-centric approach to the war on drugs suffers from «the law of instruments», according to which, «if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail». This means that if the Duterte administration's main tool is the police, all deep-seated socioeconomic problems look like police and criminality problems.

2.9.2. *Militarising social and historical conflicts*

The militaristic approach of the Duterte administration to historical conflicts, insurgencies and radicalisation has also been witnessed in two major security events and issues: the Marawi crisis and its aftermath in Muslim Mindanao; and the termination of the government's peace negotiations with the CPP–NPA–NDF.

First, the government's primary responses to the Marawi crisis, which lasted five months, were aggressive military operations – including airstrikes that accidentally killed Filipino soldiers – aimed at eliminating the ISIS-linked Maute group and their sympathisers, coupled with the imposition of martial law for the whole of Mindanao. There were also media reports of the activities of US Special Forces in aid of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) during the Marawi siege.²⁷ But this is hardly news if the long-established cooperation in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism efforts between the military institutions of the two countries is understood beyond Duterte's anti-US rhetoric.²⁸

Historical experience, however, suggests that purely military means is not the way to address Islamist radicalisation and insurgency in southern Philippines. As in many parts of the world, ISIS-inspired ideology was already present, especially in Muslim Mindanao. Such ideology cannot just be eliminated militarily. Even though top officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) – including Duterte as the commander-in-chief – recog-

27. 'US spy planes helping Philippine troops in Marawi', *Inquirer.net*, 11 June 2017; 'U.S. Troops in Besieged City of Marawi, Philippine Military Says', *The New York Times*, 14 June 2017.

28. See David S. Maxwell, 'Foreign Internal Defense: An Indirect Approach to Counter-Insurgency/Counter Terrorism, Lessons from Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines for Dealing with Non-Existential Threats to the United States', paper for the Conference of the Foreign Policy Research Institute on Irregular Warfare Challenges and Opportunities, Washington, DC, 6 December 2011.

nise the multi-dimensional nature of conflict in Mindanao, the perspective of their counter-insurgency strategy derives from a tactical warfare perspective in which military authority must reign over other social considerations. This militaristic approach to conflict management and resolution is contradictory to the needs for more strategic, inclusive, comprehensive and cohesive programmes that draw lessons from, or build on, past peace processes with Moro and Islamic rebel groups. Specifically, these include the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 1996 Final Peace Agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front, and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro region with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which should have led to the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.²⁹

Both Congress and the Supreme Court overwhelmingly approved the Presidential Proclamation No. 216 for Martial Law, and twice granted its extension – currently until 31 December 2018 – despite Duterte’s declaration of the end of the Battle of Marawi in October 2017.³⁰ Hence the Duterte administration institutionally secured legitimacy to subject the whole island of Mindanao to military rule, on the grounds of the prerogative given by the republic to the president over military and national security matters. However, this decision did not take into account that the enduring resentment, fear and horror of Muslim Filipinos are largely rooted in the historical abuses, human rights’ violations and cruelty perpetrated against them by the military.

Second, Duterte officially terminated the government’s peace negotiations with the NDF–CPP–NPA, considered as the world’s longest- running armed communist insurgency, through Proclamation No. 360 signed on 23 November 2017.³¹ Subsequently, Duterte declared «the CPP-NPA as an entity designated and/or identified as a terrorist organisation» through Proclamation No. 374, signed on 5 December 2017.³² This has happened in spite of the fact that, when Duterte was elected, the peace talks with the communist rebels were regarded as a promising priority because of his much-publicised friendship and alliance with leaders of the far left group.

29. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, ‘Winning the peace: Beyond antiterrorism’, *Inquirer.net*, 9 June 2017.

30. The President of the Philippines, Proclamation No. 216, *Declaring a State of Martial Law and Suspending the Privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus in the Whole of Mindanao*, 23 May 2017 (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2017/05may/20170523-PROC-216-RRD.pdf>).

31. The President of the Philippines, Proclamation No. 360, *Declaring the Termination of Peace Negotiations with the National Democratic Front – Communist Party of the Philippines – The New People’s Army*, 23 November 2017 (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2017/11nov/20171123-PROC-360-RRD.pdf>).

32. The President of the Philippines, Proclamation No. 374, *Declaring the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) – New People’s Army (NPA) as a Designated/Identified Terrorist Organization Under Republic Act No. 10168*, 5 December 2017 (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2017/12dec/20171205-PROC-374-RRD.pdf>).

But while the Duterte government and the NDF–CPP–NPA accused each other of insincerity, more fundamental and deeply institutionalised problems characterise the long history of this conflict. One is the contradiction between the armed struggle, namely the CPP–NPA tactical and ideological framework in pursuit of its revolutionary vision, and anti-communism, which is the basic orientation of the government’s police and military forces. Another basic problem is the fact that, administration after administration, there has been a glaring absence of key stakeholders from the military institution (the AFP) in the government negotiating panels dealing with the communist insurgents. A final key problem is that for decades the NPA and the AFP have been engaged in a vicious cycle of vendetta and violent feud. Despite the surprising ceasefire declaration announced during Duterte’s first State of the Nation Address in July 2016, both AFP military operations in the countryside (particularly within CPP–NPA claimed communities and territories) and the NPA’s ambushes of military and police personnel have continued unabated.

2.9.3. *Missing a class perspective*

If police-centrism and militarism starkly delineate Duterte’s right-wing character, his discourse on anti-elitism depicts his left-wing populist idiosyncrasies, which has tremendous mobilising powers. Duterte taunts sections of the country’s ruling class, represented by the political élites that thrives on power by corruption despite incompetence, and those business oligarchs who expand their wealth by avoiding taxes. Duterte always criticises the Yellow faction, albeit remaining ambiguous on the actual individuals who he considers his enemies. Furthermore, he has threatened the filing of tax evasion cases against the country’s oldest cigarette firm, Mighty Corporation, and the national flag carrier, Philippine Airlines, although his threat has been qualified by his declared preference for a legal compromise with tax evaders, which would avoid lengthy court processes. In October 2017, the Office of the President announced that «Mighty Corporation [...] has entered into a P40-billion compromise settlement with the government regarding its tax liability», to be used to fund the administration’s infrastructure programmes and other priorities, including the rehabilitation of Marawi.³³ The same method of compromise is being sought in the case of the Philippine Airlines, owned by the long-time crony capitalist Lucio Tan.³⁴

Notwithstanding Duterte’s assertion of being a «leftist» and a «socialist», even at that level of rhetoric what is missing in his worldview is a co-

33. Presidential Communications Operations Office, Republic of The Philippines, *Palace welcomes P40-B tax settlement of Mighty Corp.*, 7 October 2017 (https://pcoo.gov.ph/news_releases/palace-welcomes-p40-b-tax-settlement-mighty-corp).

34. ‘PAL offers to pay gov’t P4B to settle debt issue’, *CNN Philippines*, 29 September 2017.

herent class perspective. Consider his view on criminality. On the issue of juvenile delinquency, Duterte blames the rising incidence of youth crimes on what he calls the «libertarian» principle. Hence, he has been pushing for a law that would lower the age of criminal liability to below 15 years.³⁵ He gets strong populist support for his tough stance against criminality, which he highlights by pointing out the most extreme cases of crime (for example, a child killing someone, a child getting raped and the massacre of a family). In the battle for public opinion, such an emotive argument easily gains the upper hand against the counter-arguments of his critics that may be regarded as rational, evidence-based or commonsensical. Contrary to his campaign narrative, which presented Duterte as a candidate who purportedly understood social injustice, his style of governance has shown his indignation at the *individual* drug addict, rather than at the *socio-economic and historical-institutional conditions* that create the possibility for drug addiction and the perpetration of crimes. Within such an ideological and governance framework, the Duterte administration's war on drugs has indeed become a war against the poor. What is more, it appears increasingly clear that the power bloc that supports the Duterte regime is represented by the faction of the political élites allied with the Marcoses and the Arroyos, and by the coercive state institutions of the police and the military.

3. *Economic policy and political economy*

Despite Duterte's admission that he is not adept at economics, his administration's economic policy straightforwardly continues with neoliberal capitalist development. The political economy – specifically, the politics behind the economy – of Duterte's authoritarian populism became clearer as the government's economic priorities and major development plans were unveiled in 2017.

3.1. *Dutertenomics as authoritarian neoliberalism*

So-called Dutertenomics was officially launched in April 2017. Its implementation was said to usher in a «golden age of infrastructure» through the government's «Build, Build, Build» programme, an investment worth around US\$ 36 billion aimed at transforming the Philippines into an upper middle-income country by 2022.³⁶ Financing for this ambitious programme will primarily come from taxes, and, to a lesser extent, from official development assistance and commercial loans. Yet the deeper *logic* underpin-

35. 'Duterte blames Pangilinan for juvenile justice act, rise of «criminal minds»', *Inquirer.net*, 3 April 2017.

36. See 'Build, Build, Build: Philippine Infrastructure Transparency Portal' (<http://www.build.gov.ph>).

ning Duterteconomics is that of «authoritarian neoliberalism», or a neoliberal economy embedded in an authoritarian political framework. Which is somewhat similar to the German «ordoliberalism» idea where a strong state acts as an authoritative «market police» to secure economic freedom and complete competition.³⁷ Here, the function of the strong state is not really to socialise the market economy nor impose control on market activity, but to politically intervene in the society for the free economy. An integral project of the strong state's social policy is the incorporation of the culture of entrepreneurship and the principle of private property relations in the mentality of the governed.³⁸

In 2017, the Duterte administration adopted two major economic policies that are bound to have important implications for the socio-economy in the years ahead. One was the Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022 (PDP); the other was the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN). The PDP provides the institutional framework to attain Duterte's 10-point Socioeconomic Agenda whose primary aim is to reduce poverty from 21% in 2015 to 13% by 2022 and to initiate the implementation of *Ambisyon Natin 2040*, which was drafted by various stakeholders as the country's collective development goal for the next 25 years. The current development plan has several goals. They include: «enhancing the social fabric» through clean and efficient governance and the promotion of Filipino culture and values; «inequality-reducing transformation» through the expansion of economic opportunities and human capital development; «increasing growth potential» through science, technology, and innovation; «enabling and supportive economic environment» for investments through sound macroeconomic policy and competitiveness; and, building the «foundations for sustainable development», in accordance with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, through infrastructure development, the promotion of a healthy environment and the maintenance of peace and order.³⁹

For its part, the TRAIN law, scheduled to take effect on 1 January 2018, was to be the first instalment of the administration's Comprehensive Tax Reform Program, which is envisioned to fund the government's programmes for education, healthcare services and infrastructure. As a «progressive» tax, the TRAIN law promises «an equitable relief to a greater number of taxpayers and their families», particularly the poor and middle class. This goal is to be reached by: lowering personal income taxes; simplifying estate and donors' taxes; introducing and adjusting various excise taxes for

37. Werner Bonefeld, 'Freedom and the Strong State: On German Ordoliberalism', *New Political Economy*, Vol. 17, No. 5, 2012, pp. 633-656.

38. *Ibid.*

39. National Economic and Development Authority, Republic of the Philippines, *Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022* (<http://www.neda.gov.ph/2017/12/12/abridgedpdp>).

oil and vehicles; and expanding value-added taxes of several goods and commodities.⁴⁰

While the *intentions* of these policies are clear, their economic and social *consequences* remain to be seen. Nevertheless, what is certain is the continuity of policies associated with neoliberalism. From a political economy perspective, Duterteonomics encourages an ideal-typical capitalist accumulation regime in which continued neoliberal economic policies are to be combined with state guarantee of law and order for business stability and societal progress.

The dynamics of Duterteonomics also needs to be understood in the context of globalisation. Duterte's negative human rights record could impact on Philippine economic, trade and investment relations. But a «reality check» of the contemporary political economy of Asian capitalisms – specifically the realities of authoritarian neoliberalism in the region – shows that capitalist enterprises and investments can tolerate authoritarianism (discipline), but not totalitarianism (control). After all, capital is not always a socio-political force for democracy and human rights. Profitable opportunities have always been the main consideration of capitalists and investors. This means that capital *can* tolerate an authoritarian-populist Duterte as long as the regime provides the accumulation activities and properties of national and international capital with a high degree of predictability and security, and that state disciplining does not extend to their profitability and business operations.

3.2. *Between economic populism and neoliberalism*

Statistically, the Philippine economy's growth rate averaged 6.7% in 2017. But since economic performance is path-dependent, any single-year indicator (for example, gross domestic product and foreign direct investments) is not sufficient to pass judgment on the extent to which the Duterte administration's policies and activities have impacted on the economy's condition.

When Duterte assumed the presidency, there were *relatively* good «market signals» for the Philippine economy, providing favourable «initial conditions» for Duterteonomics. Popularly elected, the administration started off with considerable political capital (solid institutional support from different branches of government); economic capital (an upbeat 6–7% GDP projection and credit ratings upgrade); and social capital (mass support and legitimacy). In addition, there were other positive economic prospects such

40. Department of Finance, Republic of the Philippines, Republic Act No. 10963, *Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion*, Passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate on 13 December 2017, Approved by the President on 19 December 2017 (<https://www.dof.gov.ph/index.php/ra-10963-train-law-and-veto-message-of-the-president>).

as: expected Chinese capital for infrastructure investments; continuity of Japanese investments and official development assistance; continued US investments especially in the business process outsourcing sector; the EU's GSP+ grant on Philippine exports (Generalised Scheme of Preferences plus programme); rising micro-small-medium entrepreneurship; promising sectors of the automotive and shipbuilding industries; and the counter-cyclical nature and effect in the economy of remittances from millions of overseas Filipino workers.

Arguably, socio-economic development is key to the stability of an authoritarian-populist regime. The strategies required to realise this goal must therefore lead to increasing employment, real wages and the general standards of living of the population. This then raises two big challenges about populism vis-à-vis effective development strategies over the long-term for a country with more than 100 million people.⁴¹ First, how will Duterte's populism translate into *agricultural modernisation* which requires political will from state functionaries to enforce genuine land reform, and proactive investments from the government in technological innovation to manage the law of diminishing returns in the agricultural sector? Second, how does populism explore opportunities for *national industrialisation* and diversify the country's economic activities and specialisations?

As discussed above, Duterte's *political* populism has apparently shifted from catch-all rhetoric to a centre-right ideology. On the other hand, the left-wing elements of his *economic* populism are hollowing out. Duterte's economic populist promises when he was a candidate included the end of labour contractualisation, free tuition in state universities, increased pension benefits for the retirees, and increased salaries for government personnel, especially the police and military. These promises, however, have to contend with the compulsions of competitive capitalism today, the existing practices for fiscal discipline in governance, and the presumed rationality of the technocrats in Duterte's cabinet's economic team.⁴² This tension, if not contradiction, between the rhetoric of economic populism and the structural imperatives of neoliberal capitalism is, and will be, a defining feature of the political economy of the Duterte regime.

4. *Foreign relations and policy*

Besides the infamous war on drugs, Duterte has hit the global headlines for his foreign policy pronouncements and international activities.

41. See Erik S. Reinert, *How Rich Countries Got Rich and Why Poor Countries Stay Poor*, London: Constable, 2007.

42. Duterte's economic team is led by Benjamin Diokno of the Department of Budget and Management, Carlos Dominguez of the Department of Finance and Ernesto Pernia of the National Economic and Development Authority.

In 2016 and 2017, two features have shaped the process of authoritarian populism in the Philippines as far as the international dimensions are concerned: first, the policy shift from idealistic nationalism to pragmatic realism; and second, the concepts that may be called «authoritarian peace» and «populist peace».

4.1. *From idealistic nationalism to pragmatic realism*

The rise of populism can be construed as a resurgence of the ideology of nationalism. Hence, it is a contemporary backlash against the historical processes of capitalist globalisation, imperialism and cosmopolitanism. Recent populism has taken several forms, notably right-wing populist parties in Europe that promote the ideologies of nativism, anti-regionalism and the like; and left-wing populist movements in parts of Latin America that articulate policies such as protectionism and anti-neoliberalism. Similar to other populist candidates during election periods, Duterte presented himself as an idealistic nationalist when the issue of the Philippine foreign policy was debated. However, soon after assuming the presidency, there was a change of tune, and greater ambiguity, in Duterte's speeches and in the government's foreign policy decisions. Faced with hard geopolitical realities, there are signs that the Duterte administration is choosing a pragmatic, yet delicate, balancing act in its relations with China and the US.

A number of elements stand out in Duterte's foreign relations' strategy:

- a) «neocolonial analysis», a perspective which became popular in the 1960s and the 1970s when Duterte was a student and that might have influenced his understanding of the country's underdevelopment and his critique of dependency relations with US imperialism;
- b) «hedging» between geopolitical rivals, the US and China, to advance Philippine national interests;
- c) Cold War-era «non-aligned» strategy of a Third World country which, in practice, is not zero-sum, and neither totally anti-US nor totally anti-EU, but which, at times, appeared to «lean to one side» (especially that of China and Russia);
- d) «Look East», in which the priority is on friendship and cooperation with Asian neighbours such as China and Japan, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states; and
- e) pragmatic economic cooperation, or a foreign policy for domestic economic development, where the focus is on economic diplomacy through trade and business, rather than security and geopolitics.

To evaluate a populist foreign policy, it must be tracked in three main phases: (1) the period of election (populist campaign); (2) the period of governance (populism in power); and (3) their consequences (both intended

and unintended). Consider, for example, Duterte's foreign policy statements about the US and China. As a candidate Duterte exuded nationalist rhetoric, popularly conjured up by his hyperbole to ride a jet ski to plant the Philippine flag on the disputed islands in the South China Sea. As president, he has constantly expressed a new-found friendship with China and Russia, and has made varying friend/enemy statements about the US (critical of former President Barack Obama, but friendly with Trump). While the *intended* consequences of Duterte's foreign policy choices can be assumed to be in good faith in accordance with the national interest, the *unintended* consequences will have to be monitored regularly and assessed in the near future.

Duterte is thus far the most travelled president of the country in his first year in office.⁴³ If anything, this is largely due to official obligations of the Philippines as it assumed the annually rotating chairmanship of ASEAN in 2017. Among his foreign trips in 2017 there were state visits to the Gulf countries Bahrain and Qatar, and Saudi Arabia; official visits to Myanmar, Russia and Japan; and participation in the World Economic Forum in Cambodia, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in China, and the Economic Leaders' Meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Vietnam. Among these trips, the most anticipated were those related to the priorities of Duterte as chair of the ASEAN's 50th anniversary (ASEAN@50) and to his unfolding relationships with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Trump.

As chair of ASEAN@50, there was great anticipation of how Duterte would act in relation to two major pressing issues in the region: (1) the South China Sea maritime and territorial disputes (which have tremendous implications for the geopolitics involving China, the US and ASEAN, and for the effectiveness of the *liberal* international law order within the United Nations multilateral system); and (2) the ongoing great humanitarian crisis regarding the plight of almost a million Rohingya refugees, implicating the government and military of Myanmar in state violence and ethnic cleansing. In Duterte's Chairman Statement, which was an outcome document of ASEAN@50 meetings, both of these issues were addressed during the summit but in ways that preserved the status quo – in particular, to the advantage of China's geopolitical interests, and endorsing the point of view of the government of Myanmar.

Instead of rallying ASEAN as a collective bloc to compel China to follow international law in accordance with the favourable ruling awarded to the Philippines on 12 July 2016 by the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA),⁴⁴ Duterte actively reaffirmed the regional bloc's agree-

43. 'Duterte: 21 trips, 17 countries, 77,542 miles', *Inquirer.net*, 25 June 2017.

44. Permanent Court of Arbitration, 'PCA Case No. 2013-19: In the Matter of the South China Sea Arbitration before An Arbitral Tribunal Constituted Under Annex VII to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea between the Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China,' Award of 12 July 2016.

ment to adopt a Code of Conduct (COC) as a framework of engagement between ASEAN and China regarding their maritime disputes.⁴⁵ The Duterte administration has also not openly protested against the dredging, land reclamation, artificial island-building and construction activities, as well as the alleged militarisation, undertaken by China even after the PCA ruling. ASEAN's preference for a COC with China, rather than for the enforcement of international law as recently interpreted by the PCA, was in accordance with China's long held opinion and strategy to resolve international conflicts through bilateralism. With Duterte's constant criticisms against US imperialism and interventionism, plus the COC between ASEAN and China, the effect was to keep the US at bay in the Asian region. His critical attitude towards the US has, in turn, made the US woo the Philippines to their side at this time of heightened regional rivalry. The Duterte administration seems to be choosing a delicate balancing act, hedging between the US and China to advance Philippine national interest.⁴⁶ A recent survey by the Pew Research Center shows that «Duterte's balancing act between the two powers has received mostly positive reviews: 63% of Filipinos approve of his handling of relations with the U.S. and 53% approve of how he's handled relations with China.»⁴⁷ In the current geopolitical competition between a rising China and a US adamant in maintaining its global hegemony, it appears that whereas these great powers treat international relations essentially as a zero-sum game, the perspective and interest of small players are shaped by the opportunities to make the most of the newly opened political space to overcome the constraints of underdevelopment.

The PCA Tribunal's decision came out just a few days after Duterte had officially assumed the presidency. The ruling declared that China's claims to historical rights, particularly encompassing the maritime areas within what it indicates as the «nine-dash line» of its sovereign jurisdiction, are contrary to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).⁴⁸ The award – which, *inter alia*, confirmed the Philippines' sov-

45. Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *Chairman's Statement of the 31st ASEAN Summit*, Manila, Philippines, 13 November 2017, p. 27: «We discussed the matters relating to the South China Sea and took note of the improving relations between ASEAN and China and, in this regard, are encouraged by the adoption of the framework of the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea (COC), which will facilitate the work and negotiation for the conclusion of a substantive and effective COC.»

46. See Temario C. Rivera, 'The ASEAN and the Politics of Major Powers: Impact on the Quest for Regional Order', in Edna E.A. Co & Carlos C. Tabunda, Jr. (eds.), *The ASEAN Drama: Half a Century and Still Unfolding*, Philippines: University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies & Development Academy of the Philippines, 2017, pp. 46-74.

47. Pew Research Center, 'People in the Philippines still favor U.S. Over China, but Gap is Narrowing', *Global Attitudes and Trends*, 21 September 2017.

48. See ASEAN Studies Centre, *ASEANFocus - Special Issue on the South China Sea Arbitration: Responses and Implications*, Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, July 2016.

ereign rights in its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf – could have been a ready template for Duterte’s negotiation with China. But he chose a strategy different from the one followed by his predecessor, despite the overwhelming support (78%) of Filipinos for the decision of the former Aquino administration to file the case at the PCA.⁴⁹ This shows that Philippine foreign policy is largely defined, shaped and directed by the *domestic* political equation – which also means that every incumbent administration determines its preferred relationship with the US and China. Duterte’s decision must be put in perspective, comparing it to the policies followed by his immediate predecessors – Arroyo and Aquino – in regard to the same question.⁵⁰ The Arroyo administration was friendly to both the US and China, and explored bilateral cooperation with China through investments, business and trade, as well as the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU) including China, Vietnam and the Philippines. However, the consequences of Arroyo’s bilateral engagements with China were controversial, especially in two instances: (1) the corruption and bribery cases regarding Chinese investments, such as the NBN-ZTE deal and the Northrail project; and (2) the unconstitutionality of the JMSU, allegedly violating the constitution’s provisions for national economy and patrimony.⁵¹ The Aquino administration, which succeeded Arroyo, took a strongly pro-US stance, put in place the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the US, while adopting an antagonistic attitude towards China, which included resort to multilateral international legal institutions, such as the PCA, to challenge the legality of China’s historical claims in the South China Sea and its continuous construction activities there.⁵² This rather bellicose approach resulted in three consequences. First, there was the Scarborough Shoal standoff in 2012, which further established China’s military position in the contested waters and hence prevented Filipinos from accessing this fishing ground. Second, there was a missed opportunity for the Philippine economy to obtain more

49. ‘SWS March 16-20 Survey: 78% support government’s filing of a case at UN for peaceful resolution of PH-China dispute; 87% confident of Philippine win’, *Social Weather Stations*, 12 July 2016.

50. For a comparative study of the political economy of Philippine-China relations during the respective administrations of Arroyo, Aquino III, and Duterte, see Alvin Camba, ‘Inter-state relations and state capacity: the rise and fall of Chinese foreign direct investments in the Philippines’, *Palgrave Communications*, Vol. 3, No. 41, 2017, pp. 1–19. .

51. See Roel Landingin (ed.), *The Seven Deadly Deals: Can Aquino Fix Arroyo’s Legacy of Costly and Messy Projects?*, Quezon City: Public Trust Media Group Inc., 2011; Bonn Juego, ‘Elite Capture and Elite Conflicts in Southeast Asian Neoliberalization Processes’, South-South Tricontinental Collaborative Programme (ed.), *Inequality, Development and Democracy: Under Neoliberalism and Beyond*, Buenos Aires: CLACSO, CODESRIA, and IDEAs, 2015, pp. 68–93.

52. Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr. & Carmina Yu Untalan, ‘The Philippines 2014-2015: Domestic politics and foreign relations, a critical review’, *Asia Maior 2015*, pp. 133–155.

Chinese capital and investments. And third, the PCA award favoured the Philippines' international law rights based on UNCLOS, superseding China's claims to its historic rights.

For its part, the Duterte administration has generally been critical of the US. In particular, Duterte has been disparaging of US colonialism in the Philippines and Obama's human rights rhetoric. In contrast, Duterte later expressed appreciation for and friendship with Trump. At the same time, Duterte has chosen to be friendly with China, showing more interest in economic pragmatism than in hard geopolitics. After his state visit to China in 2016, the most relevant initial consequences of Duterte's attempt at improving the Philippines' relationship with China were two-fold: promised Chinese investments, soft loans, and a credit line – amounting to about US\$ 24 billion;⁵³ and the reopening of access of Filipino fishermen to the Scarborough Shoal.⁵⁴

Since the election period, Duterte has aired his criticisms of the historical role of the US in the maldevelopment of the Philippines and its double standards in international affairs. While asserting the Philippines' sovereign rights over the disputed islands in the South China Sea, Duterte has been vocal about his desire to befriend China and welcome Chinese capital investments for the country's infrastructural development.

Duterte's pragmatic economic cooperation approach towards China was best articulated in his speech at the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit held in Manila 12 November 2017, a day after arriving from the APEC Summit in Vietnam where he had had bilateral meetings with Putin and Xi. In the Manila speech Duterte said:

Today China is the number one economic power in the world, and we have to be friends. The other hotheads would like us to confront China and the rest of the world for so many issues. The South China Sea is better left untouched. Nobody can afford to go to war, either the big powers Russia, China, or the United States.⁵⁵

As corroborated by the Pew Research Center in September 2017, the policy aimed at improving the economic relationship with China, rather

53. See 'What Duterte accomplished in China', *Rappler*, 23 October 2016; cf. Kenneth Cardenas, 'Duterte's China Deals, Dissected', *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*, 8 May 2017.

54. 'Xi tells Duterte that Scarborough Shoal will stay open to Philippine fishermen', *South China Morning Post*, 20 November 2016; 'Driven away from Scarborough Shoal, Filipino fishermen now train in China', *Rappler*, 27 February 2017.

55. Presidential Communications Operations Office, Republic of the Philippines, *Speech of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during his attendance to the ASEAN Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network (AMEN) and Opening of ASEAN Business and Investment Summit (ABIS)*, 12 November 2017 (https://pcoo.gov.ph/presidential_speech/speech-president-rodrigo-roa-duterte-attendance-asean-mentorship-entrepreneurs-network-amen-opening-asean-business-investment-summit-abis).

than engaging in a tense territorial dispute, has the support of the majority (67%) of Filipinos. And this «represents a significant shift since 2015, when Filipinos were split between the two approaches to Chinese relations (43% favoured stronger economic relationship with China and 41% wanted a tougher approach to territorial disputes)». ⁵⁶

Both the intended and unintended consequences of Duterte's economic pragmatism will have to be monitored, including their implications for the maritime interests and territorial integrity of the Philippines. Opting for economic pragmatism seems logical if it is put in the context of both Duterte's reading of the contemporary global political economy – according to which the old capitalist centres of the US, EU and Japan are mired in a prolonged economic crises – and his limited six-year term to implement his ambitious vision of a golden age of infrastructure, which he thinks only Chinese capital is willing and able to provide. In light of this, the critical areas for the Philippines when transacting with Chinese capital are: (1) labour (by ensuring local content); (2) the environment (by tapping into recent Chinese innovations in favour of renewable resources and green technology); (3) corruption and bribery (by learning from controversial infrastructure projects in the past implicating both the governments and private sectors of the Philippines and China); and (4) the risks of sovereign indebtedness (to be prevented by avoiding white elephants). Intriguingly, the secretaries of the Departments of Labor and Employment, Environment and Natural Resources, and Budget and Management were not included in Duterte's large delegation during his four-day state visit to China. ⁵⁷

4.2. *Authoritarian peace and populist peace*

Duterte evidently has an easy rapport with leaders of the putative authoritarian regimes of China, Russia and ASEAN. ⁵⁸ There also appears to be a mutual admiration between the populists Trump and Duterte. ⁵⁹ Such developments suggest the introduction of new concepts in the study of contemporary international relations, which may be referred to as «authoritarian peace» and «populist peace».

Firstly, authoritarian peace, or peaceful coexistence among authoritarianisms, can be observed in the friendly relationship between Duterte, Putin, Xi and the leaders of ASEAN states. Their commonalities are marked by: the critique of the «western» notions of human rights, especially double standards in the doctrine of humanitarian interventionism; the governance

56. Pew Research Center, 'People in the Philippines'.

57. See 'Duterte arrives in Beijing to begin state visit', *Rappler*, 18 October 2016.

58. 'Duterte says meetings with Xi, Putin in Vietnam «most meaningful»', *Inquirer.net*, 12 November 2017.

59. 'Trump hails «great relationship» with Philippines' Duterte', *The Guardian*, 13 November 2017.

narratives of nationalism and sovereignty; and the rhetoric of the principle of «non-interference» in international relations.

Take, for instance, the variety of political regimes in ASEAN – namely, the semi-authoritarian governments of Singapore and Malaysia; the one-party states of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam; the absolute monarchical system of Brunei; and the legacies of military rule in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand. For decades, regional cohesion and the prevention of cross-national conflicts in ASEAN have been upheld by the norm on non-interference in a member state's domestic political affairs. In fact, the ASEAN community-building project is a regionalisation process without an agenda for democratisation. By and large, it is a regionalism of authoritarian regimes.⁶⁰ Even the ASEAN Economic Community 2025 agenda is a project to «modernise» capitalism in the region, embedding the single neoliberal market in ten different cultural orientations and political regime forms in Southeast Asia.⁶¹ Hence, Duterte's election is only the latest addition to the essentially authoritarian character of ASEAN regimes.

Together with the principle of non-interference, ASEAN observes «consensus» in declaring the bloc's decisions. This is recently underscored in the rather careful, yet obscure, Chairman Statement of Duterte for ASEAN@50 with regard to the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. The statement made no specific reference to the condition of the minority Rohingya Muslims as refugees victimised by state violence and forced migration. It noted that «a number of Leaders» from ASEAN «expressed support to the Myanmar government in its efforts to bring peace, stability, rule of law and to promote harmony and reconciliation between the various communities, as well as sustainable and equitable development in Rakhine State.»⁶² The statement put this issue under the section entitled «Building Resiliency in ASEAN», rather than as part of the section on «Regional and International Issues and Developments», which also included the South China Sea disputes. In effect, ASEAN protected the interest of its member state Myanmar, in the name of regional unity as well as national sovereignty, while denying the existence of refugees and the humanity of the Rohingya.

Second, populist peace, or a peaceful coexistence between populists, can be seen in the budding friendship between Duterte and Trump. As Trump assumed the US presidency in January 2017, there was much scrutiny of how his relationship with Duterte would unfold. This was clarified by the headline of *The New York Times*, describing the first phone conversa-

60. Bonn Juego, 'The ASEAN Economic Community Project: Accumulating Capital, Dispossessing the Commons', *Perspectives Asia 2/13: More or Less? Growth and Development Debates in Asia*, Berlin: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, pp. 12-19.

61. Bonn Juego, 'The Political Economy of the ASEAN Regionalisation Process', *Dossier: Understanding Southeast Asia*, Berlin: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

62. 'Chairman's Statement of the 31st ASEAN Summit', pp. 18-19.

tion between the two: «Trump's 'very friendly' talk with Duterte stuns aides and critics alike.»⁶³ Both have been exchanging pleasantries since their long-awaited face-to-face meetings in November 2017 on the side-lines of the APEC Summit in Vietnam and ASEAN@50 in the Philippines.⁶⁴

Modern-day populists seem to have points of unity and similarity across a number of themes and areas. These would include: non-interventionism in the domestic affairs of another state; anti-élite and/or anti-establishment rhetoric; criticism of liberalism and liberal democracy; political incorrectness in speech; a discourse on crisis and change; and a platform on law and order. However, the appeal to ethno nationalism, which is a staple in the recent phenomena of Trump's and Europe's right-wing populism, applied to Duterte's case only during the election campaigns.⁶⁵

Once the reciprocal ideology-based attraction between Duterte and Trump has been highlighted, the fact remains that Duterte's consistent remarks and recent activities are aimed at reorienting Philippine foreign policy away from the US, and towards China and Russia.⁶⁶ This carried in its wake some internal tensions and risks, owing to the pro-US orientation and Americanised socialisation of the Philippines and its people, including the institutions of the police, military, diplomatic corps, the mass media and academia. But politics can change a culture, mentality and worldview. Charismatic populist politicians have influential effects on the psyche of their followers. As the Pew Research Center's global attitudes survey during the spring of 2017 emphasised: «Though there are not significant differences in support for either the U.S. or China across most demographic groups, those with a favourable view of Duterte are more likely to rate China positively (57%) than those who view the president unfavourably (40%).»⁶⁷

Indeed, the Philippines' foreign affairs during 2017 were noteworthy for their impact on the study of international relations and on actual geopolitics itself. Importantly, the year showcased how a small geopolitical player like the Philippines was able to draw out serious attention from the international community of nations, including great powers such as the US and China, as well as attract extensive global media coverage. This has been made possible not only by Duterte's bold personality and colourful

63. 'Trump's «Very Friendly» Talk With Duterte Stuns Aides and Critics Alike', *The New York Times*, 30 April 2017;

64. 'I like Rodrigo, he's a good guy', *The Philippine Star*, 14 November 2017; 'Trump and Duterte', *Inquirer.net*, 15 November 2017.

65. Cf. Julio C. Teehankee, 'Duterte's Resurgent Nationalism in the Philippines: A Discursive Institutional Analysis', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2016, pp. 69-89.

66. Richard Javad Heydarian, 'Duterte's Art of the Deal', *The National Interest*, 22 October 2017.

67. Pew Research Center, 'People in the Philippines'.

character; but also by the particular structural and historical circumstances of the Philippines, which constitute the country's key cards in his current geopolitical projection. These particular circumstances are: (1) the favourable award from the PCA on the territorial disputes with China; (2) the long-standing reputation of the Philippines as a solid and strategic ally of the US in Asia; (3) the country's strategic geographical location, or, in Trump's words, the fact that the Philippines is a «most prime piece of real estate from a military standpoint»;⁶⁸ and (4) the country's growing market opportunities and economic growth potentials.

5. *Concluding remarks: the liberal-democratic roots of authoritarian populism*

It is easy to get distracted by trivial discourses and deceptive imagery during this age of social media and the emotionally-charged populist moment in the Philippines. After one-and-a-half years in office, Duterte appears to be following the same governance pattern and making the same leadership mistakes of the Marcos dictatorship and the succeeding EDSA Republics under the administrations of Corazon Aquino, Fidel V. Ramos, Joseph Estrada, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Benigno S. Aquino III. The longstanding political narrative during the past 40 years is akin to an old-wine-in-a-new-bottle. This is particularly so if one bears in mind that *real* social change is not a question of talks and theatrics. It requires a process of basic transformation in the structures, relations, institutions and practices in a country's economy, politics, society and culture.

Two years after the start of the Duterte phenomenon in the 2016 electoral campaign, the promised «social change» has not yet come about. But there have been slight differences of emphasis in terms of discourse and governance. The prominence of a populist discourse has become more noticeable as far as the presidential style and its reception (including in cyberspace) are concerned. Yet practices in the rest of the political and socio-economic spheres remain largely the same. Old political families and their patron-client networks continue to dominate the Senate, the House of Representatives and the local government units. Corruption persists in the bureaucracy, judiciary, police and military. The structures and relations of inequality are intact, while the economy, the market and the land remain in the hands of a few affluent families.

The discussion in this article has empirically presented and analysed major political, economic and social developments in the Philippines during the presidency of Duterte in 2017. It highlights some of the most important features of an emerging regime of authoritarian populism. These distinct features are manifested in:

68. 'Trump: I fixed ties with PH, a «most prime real estate» militarily', *Rappler*, 15 November 2017.

- 1) the Duterte regime's peculiar election victory and continued popularity resulting from a range of agential, institutional and structural factors;
- 2) its mobilisation around a cult of personality;
- 3) its mix of both right- and left-wing types of populism;
- 4) its construction of a populist language and the public articulation of dominant discourses;
- 5) its discursive critique of the theory and praxis of liberal democracy;
- 6) its utilisation of social media which impacts on current political and societal relations;
- 7) its shifting support base from cross-class alliances to the centre-right;
- 8) its strategies to secure social and political hegemony through disciplinary legalism and proactive mass mobilisation;
- 9) its police-centric and militaristic governance approach to social problems and conflicts, but the absence of a class perspective;
- 10) its political economy of authoritarian neoliberalism whose logic resembles ordoliberal thought in the management of capitalist development by a strong state; and
- 11) its pragmatic yet delicate foreign policy choices that seem to generate friendly relations with other authoritarian regimes and populist state leaders.

While the autocratic Marcoses must be held historically accountable for the greatest damage done to the present society and economy, one should not forget the legacy of the EDSA Republic, which has perpetuated the country's enduring problems and tragedy. With hindsight, the EDSA Republic's legacy (in particular, the actual performance and outcomes, as well as the policies and institutions themselves, of the liberal-democratic regime) has been a spawning ground for the popularity of Duterte's authoritarian populism.

First, like in the rest of Southeast Asia, Philippine politics and governments during the EDSA Republic period were characterised by the recurring themes of elitism, impunity and corruption.⁶⁹ The installation of the EDSA Republic was supposed to build the foundations of the «restoration of democracy» and the industrialisation of the economy. However, Corazon Aquino's democratic experiment failed to break the political and economic power structures of the traditional oligarchy at both the local and national levels, as well as the interests of the landed oligarchical class, to which her family belonged.⁷⁰ The Marcos era social and economic policies continued,

69. See Thomas Fuller, 'Reporting on Life, Death and Corruption in Southeast Asia', *The New York Times*, 21 February 2016.

70. Barry Gills & Joel Rocamora, 'Low Intensity Democracy', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1992, pp. 501-523.

Marcos's old political allies made a comeback thanks to the culture of impunity, and Marcos's crony capitalists survived initial punitive measures and thrived in the already depressed economy. The Marcosian story still has its own fascination because of the dismal and unsatisfactory performance of the EDSA Republic. But the Marcos regime cannot boast of its own merits, let alone in comparison with the successful development experiences of its contemporaries in East and Southeast Asia. In spite of this, both the Marcos family's self-serving version of history and Duterte's populist discourse bank on the valid resentments of a section of the population against the failings of the EDSA Republic.

Second, the EDSA Republic does not have a good record on human rights, including the issues related to extrajudicial killings and press freedom.⁷¹ During the EDSA period, human rights institutions were continuously undermined and marginalised. The difference in the period under review is that while the EDSA Republic was guilty of an *institutional* assault on human rights, through deliberate neglect or otherwise, Duterte's authoritarian populism is a bold and vocal attack on both the *institutions and ideas* of human rights. The populist discourse has created a dichotomy between good and bad citizens – which popularises the idea that only criminals should fear an iron fist law-and-order regime, but conceals the reality that human rights violations are indiscriminate. The populist discourse further exacerbates the maleducation of most Filipinos about principles of human rights and democracy. Duterte's discursive assault on the ideological hegemony of human rights becomes even more alarming and dangerous if one takes a long-term perspective.

Third, the EDSA Republic peddled the myth of the separation of powers between co-equal branches of government. But the real situation is that of executive dominance or hyper-presidentialism.⁷² The rhetoric of Duterte's regime is buttressed by this myth, while his authoritarian methods are being built on the real institutions of the democratic republic.

Fourth, the practice of selective justice by an incumbent government is not new. It appears that the Duterte administration has been engaged in a process of political cleansing of the appointees to key institutions by his predecessor. This has been particularly evident in the attempt at subjecting Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno and Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales to probable impeachment. But recall that when Aquino III was in

71. See various country reports of Human Rights Watch on the Philippines, in particular the annual *World Report*. See also, 'From Marcos to Duterte: How media was attacked, threatened', *Rappler*, 17 January 2018.

72. Mark R. Thompson, 'The philippine presidency in Southeast Asian perspective: imperiled and imperious presidents but not perilous presidentialism', *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2017, pp. 325–345; Susan Rose-Ackerman, Diane A. Desierto & Natalia Volosin, 'Hyper-Presidentialism: Separation of Powers without Checks and Balances in Argentina and the Philippines', *Berkeley Journal of International Law*, Vol. 29, Issue 1, 2011, pp. 246–333.

power, the appointees of his predecessor (Arroyo) were also pressured to resign (former Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez) or were successfully impeached in Congress (the late Chief Justice Renato Corona). The EDSA Republic showed how selective justice and political cleansing can be executed by an incumbent governing élite in the name of the rule of law. The same framework applies to accusations of political persecution under the current Duterte regime.

Fifth, from Marcos to Corazon Aquino to Duterte, a vicious pattern in Philippine politics and governance can be observed. Typically, the process of forming a political coalition in every administration proceeds from a «liberal» to a «repressive» phase. In the initial, liberal, democratic phase after winning the election, reform promises are made and a broad-based coalition is forged. In the second, authoritarian, repressive phase, the old social, economic and foreign policies are continued; plus, the repression of critics and progressive movements takes place.⁷³

Sixth, the evolution of the EDSA Republic was closely bound up with the rise and decline of neoliberalism as a hegemonic development ideology, as well as the continued dependent relationship of the Philippines with the US.⁷⁴ In the aftermath of the Marcos dictatorship, the Corazon Aquino administration was forced by the Washington-based institutions and banks to pay the country's foreign debts. Likewise, the country was subjected to debt conditionalities and structural adjustment programmes by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, resulting in the virtual loss of the necessary national policy space for economic and social development.⁷⁵ The Ramos administration intensified the entrenchment of neoliberal policies that further led to the country's deindustrialisation and the privatisation of state assets. The policies and principle of economic neoliberalism persisted in succeeding administrations, although couched in different political rhetoric discourses: Estrada's *Para sa Mahirap* (for the poor) populism, Arroyo's «strong republic», and Aquino III's *Daang Matuwid* (straight path) for good governance.⁷⁶ Inasmuch as the EDSA Republic has failed to deliver the fundamental development objectives to lessen poverty and inequality, Duterte's authoritarian-populist discourse has gained traction not only as a valid critique against the elitist practice of liberal democracy, but as a desperate response to the search for a viable alternative to the crises of neoliberalism and US colonialism.

73. Cf. Gills and Rocamora, 'Low Intensity Democracy', pp. 518-519.

74. Walden Bello, 'March, but mourn not the demise of EDSA Republic', *Rappler*, 24 February 2017.

75. Walden Bello et al., *The Anti-Development State: The Political Economy of Permanent Crisis in the Philippines*, Manila: Anvil, 2004.

76. Bonn Juego, *Capitalist Development in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Neoliberal Reproduction, Elite Interests, and Authoritarian Liberalism in the Philippines and Malaysia*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Aalborg University, Denmark, 2013.

Seventh, the absence of massive outrage against Duterte's decision to bury Marcos in the heroes' cemetery is indicative of the failure of the People Power uprising that gave birth to the EDSA Republic. At the same time, the burial symbolised the perpetuation of the culture of impunity and a significant advance for the Marcos family's long-term project of historical revisionism, aimed at rewriting history on its own terms. The political revival of the Marcoses has been made possible mostly because their family remains wealthy. In plutocratic societies like the Philippines, economic wealth is, and can easily regenerate into, political power. Indeed, the most crucial shortcoming of the EDSA People Power Revolution – and its theory and praxis of liberal democracy – is that while it brought about more rights to enjoy political and civil freedoms, it did not deliver on the collective aspirations for economic development and social egalitarianism. It has been even more unsuccessful in nurturing a sense of communitarianism and human solidarity among Filipinos.

The emergent Duterte-led authoritarian populism is a symptom of the evolving crises in the political democracy and socio-economic spheres. It is rooted not only in the EDSA Republic's shortcomings, but also in its very institutions. It draws its discursive popularity and legitimacy from the material realities and real-life conditions in the society. As Duterte's ideology and support base signifies a shift to the centre-right, his brand of authoritarian populism is a challenge and test for the surviving democratic gains and institutions in the country. However, this emergent regime is still in the process of becoming. Its future trajectory is open-ended and is currently being fought over.

