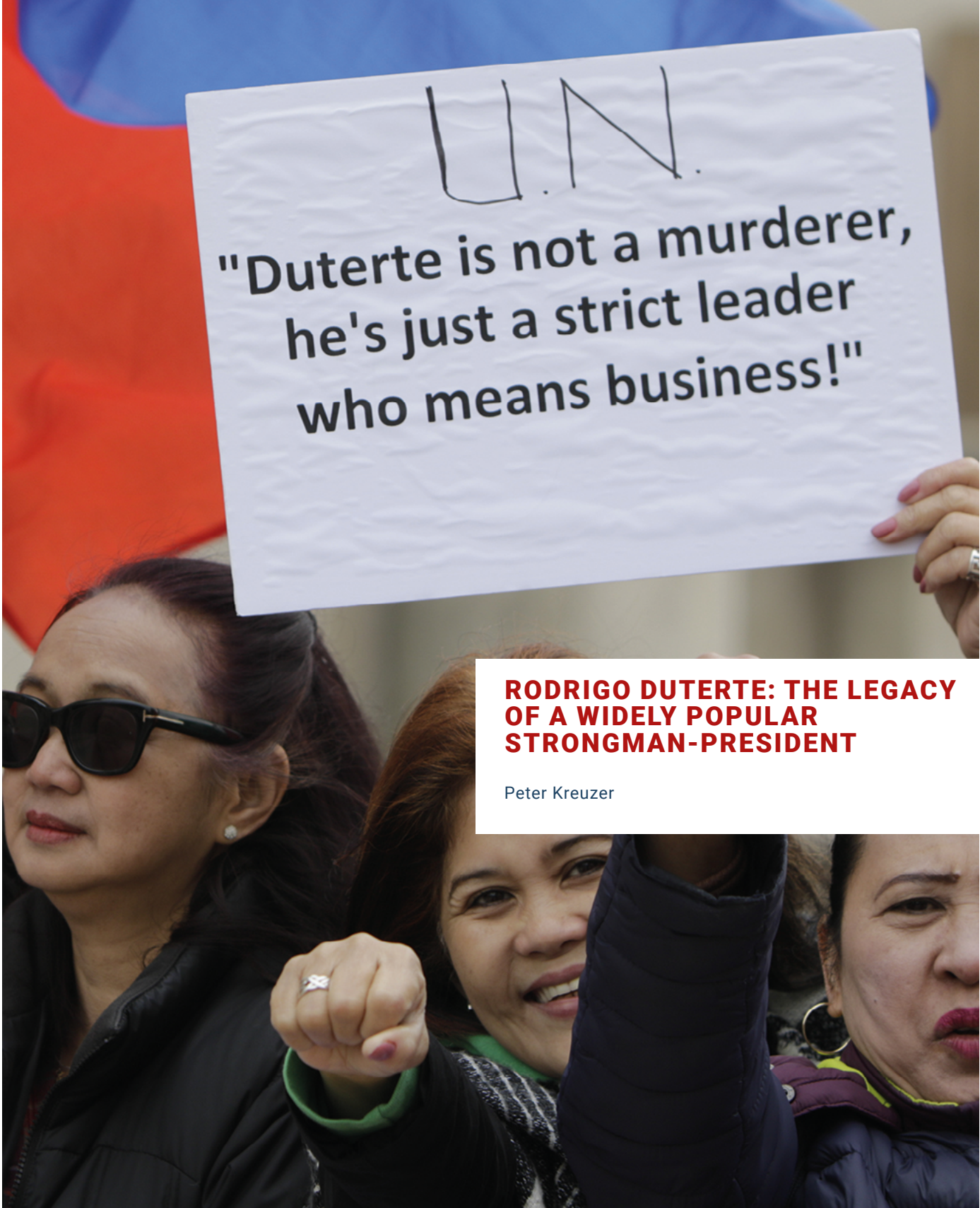




# report



## **RODRIGO DUTERTE: THE LEGACY OF A WIDELY POPULAR STRONGMAN-PRESIDENT**

Peter Kreuzer



PRIF Report 7/2023

# **RODRIGO DUTERTE: THE LEGACY OF A WIDELY POPULAR STRONGMAN-PRESIDENT**

Peter Kreuzer



Peace Research Institute Frankfurt  
Leibniz-Institut für  
Friedens- und Konfliktforschung



PRIF – PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE FRANKFURT  
PRIF – LEIBNIZ-INSTITUT FÜR FRIEDENS- UND KONFLIKTFORSCHUNG

Funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG, German Research Foundation) –  
439281758.

**Cover:**

Filipino ex-pats living in Paris protest in front of the Eiffel Tower for the President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte. Photo taken May 8, 2017.

© picture alliance / ZUMAPRESS.com | Michael Debets

**Text license:**

Creative Commons CC-BY-ND (Attribution/NoDerivatives/4.0 International).

The images used are subject to their own licenses.



**Correspondence to:**

Peace Research Institute Frankfurt  
Baseler Straße 27–31  
D-60329 Frankfurt am Main/Germany  
Telephone: +49 69 95 91 04-0  
E-Mail: [kreuzer@prif.org](mailto:kreuzer@prif.org)  
<https://www.prif.org>

**ISBN: 978-3-946459-91-0**

**DOI 10.48809/prifrep2307**

This report explores the enduring impact of Rodrigo Duterte's 2016–2022 presidency on public expectations of governance and politics in the Philippines, with a special focus on public security, crime control, and their implications for core tenets of Philippine democracy.

Duterte is most notably remembered for his uncompromising approach to combatting drug-related issues, which led to a substantial number of deaths at the hands of both law enforcement and vigilante groups.

Despite the extensive human rights violations associated with his strategy, Duterte managed to amass considerable support from the Filipino populace. Notably, his initial 40 percent share of votes during the presidential election surged to a consistent 80 percent approval rating throughout his six-year term, even in the face of numerous reports detailing the casualties of the law enforcement campaign against drug suspects.

To assess Duterte's impact on public perceptions in the Philippines, this report follows a three-step approach, all based on public opinion surveys to establish its findings.

The first step involves an investigation into whether Duterte capitalized on existing public discontent and demand for more robust anti-crime measures, or whether he effectively manipulated public views surrounding crime and personal safety to gain support during his electoral campaign.

The analysis concludes that the available surveys provide little evidence to support the notion of a prior shift in public punitiveness. Perceptions regarding the importance of crime, government approaches to handling the issue, and personal feelings of victimization and fear remained relatively stable in the years leading up to Duterte's presidency. In contrast, a noticeable shift across all these dimensions occurred during the Duterte campaign, indicating that to a large extent, Duterte and his portrayal in the media contributed to creating a fearful public, which subsequently voted for him as the candidate they believed to be most capable of addressing the perceived threat.

The second step of the report focuses on enduring cultural foundations that shape Filipino perspectives on the legitimacy of violence, support for democracy, rule of law, and leadership. The objective is to illuminate the persistent support among a large majority of Filipinos for Duterte's policies, despite the considerable casualties during his tenure.

Surveys reveal a notable acceptance of violence as a means to resolve conflicts or assert interests. This encompasses support for radical uses of violence and a blurring of distinctions between legal and illegal behaviors. This attitude is intertwined with an instrumental view of democracy and human rights, which are seen as contingent on fulfilling fundamental human needs, primarily tied to economic progress, security, and social services. Additionally, a considerable number of Filipinos adhere to a distinctly traditional mindset, envisioning an ideal leader with substantial authority and responsibility. They favor resolute leaders who are compassionate yet resolute, willing to employ coercion for the perceived greater good and the satisfaction of basic human needs in the economic, social, and security domains.

The third step delves into Filipinos' assessment of Duterte's six years and its consequences. Strikingly, the vast majority of Filipinos regard his presidency as exceptionally successful, with substantial positive transformations across various governance aspects, extending well beyond his anti-drug efforts. Notably, his "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure program garnered particular acclaim. Most Filipinos view Duterte not as a human rights antagonist, but rather as a determined president effectively addressing national issues, including economic and social concerns. The public's trust in the president also translated into notably higher trust in government institutions, indicative of increased confidence in the state. Whether objectively substantiated or not, the favorable evaluation of government actions is also reflected in citizens' subjective assessments of their own economic situations. Overall, the preexisting inclination towards authoritative leaders was significantly reinforced.

The widespread perception of multidimensional success during Duterte's presidency poses a significant challenge to Philippine democracy. It is crucial to recognize that the majority of Filipinos lean towards an illiberal perspective on democratic governance. Furthermore, citizens' primary concerns revolve around fundamental human needs such as sustenance, health care, education, and security, prioritizing these over abstract principles like due process, rule of law, or human rights for individuals deemed as societal threats.

To effect meaningful change, proponents of liberal democracy must acknowledge these realities. However, the public's desire for a secure environment should not be misconstrued as an endorsement of harsher punishments for wrongdoers.

Therefore, advocates of liberal democracy must demonstrate that security can be achieved while upholding liberal human rights principles. By prominently addressing crime control in their political agenda and presenting a convincing alternative vision for tackling crime, they can prevent politicians with punitive inclinations from monopolizing the discourse on this crucial aspect of human needs and concerns.

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Duterte's election: a previously punitive public electing its president or a candidate creating a fearful public?	2
1.2 Enduring broad support for a strongman president	3
1.3 The structure of the report	4
2. The salience of crime in public perception before Duterte	5
2.1 Development of crime levels from Aquino to Duterte	6
2.2 Crime as a public concern and government performance assessment	9
2.3 Crime as a threat to well-being: fear and victimization	12
2.4 Summing up: crime development and public perception	14
3. Violence, illiberalism and the limits of support for democracy and human rights in the public mind before Duterte	14
3.1 Justifying violence in social interaction in a wider context of justifying extra-legal behavior	15
3.2 Relating democracy and human rights to basic human needs: the demand for output	19
3.3 Support for the decisive leader: care and coercion	22
3.4 Summing up: Latent discontent with a low-performing democracy, high tolerance for coercive problem-solving, and a yearning for a caring but stern father-leader	25
4. Consequences of Duterte's "successful" presidency	26
5. Conclusion: The Duterte presidency as a blueprint for the future	32
References	36





## 1. INTRODUCTION

On June 30, 2016 Rodrigo Duterte was sworn in as President of the Philippines. Since June 30, 2022, his presidency has become a thing of the past. Internationally, he is mostly remembered for his war on illegal drugs, which led to thousands of civilian deaths, either at the hands of the police in what were claimed to be legitimate operations, or by vigilantes who were often suspected to have ties to local police members. In fundamental contrast, domestic support for him and his war on drugs was overwhelming. The questions at the center of this report are why Filipinos supported him from the beginning to the end of his term as president, and what this bodes for the Philippines.

The exact number of victims of Duterte's drug war remains a subject of controversy, but the official police figures provide the lowest confirmed assessment. According to these figures, 4,353 people died in police operations related to the drug war in the first two years of the campaign from June 30, 2016, to June 30, 2018. The following year until mid-2019 saw an additional 1,173 deaths, followed by 248 deaths up to July 2020. In the period ending May 31, 2022, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) reported 6,252 persons killed in anti-drug operations by law enforcement organizations, primarily the Philippine National Police (Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency no year).

When Duterte was elected on May 9, 2016, it was widely understood that he would realize the intentions he made clear during his election campaign. He repeatedly promised to "get rid of corruption, drugs, and criminality" (Duterte quoted in: Tejada 2016). He promised to eliminate the latter two, drugs and criminality, within three to six months, and stated "I will ask the military and the police to go after the criminals and drug lords, and my order is, if they would resist with violence, kill them" (Duterte quoted in: Ranada 2016a).

Duterte based his proposed strategy on his experience as the long-standing mayor of Davao City, where he confronted a highly violent environment when he took over in 1988. Throughout his more than twenty years as mayor, his approach involved combating violence with violence. There were many reports of a "Davao Death Squad" (DDS) operating in the city for at least two decades, responsible for the killing of over 1,000 drug suspects.

During his election campaign, Duterte consistently argued that the Philippines faced the imminent danger of becoming a narco-state, threatening the survival of the Philippines: "This is a clear national security threat. This is an invasion of a new kind. Drug lords, domestic and foreign, have declared a war against our families and children, and the government is helpless about it" (Duterte quoted in Philippine Daily Inquirer 2016).

Given his explicit language and the widely assumed links to the DDS, it was evident to the public that the rights of suspects would be secondary to Duterte's strong determination to eradicate illegal drugs swiftly and by any means. By the time of the election, the public had become well aware of three crucial aspects: 1) Duterte's political analysis of illegal drugs as a grave national security threat requiring urgent action, 2) his past as a mayor with alleged connections to death squads, and 3) his

unwavering commitment to pursuing an aggressive, iron-fisted anti-crime strategy that regarded drug pushers and users alike as reprehensible and expendable.<sup>1</sup>

This report will explore the reasons behind the public's support for Duterte's iron-fisted crime control policy by dividing the inquiry into two parts.

- First, I will detail why he won the elections with 39 percent of the vote, more than 60% more than his closest competitor, Mar Roxas (24 percent).
- Second, I will analyze why he and his policy of massive killings received enduring support from 70 to 80 percent of the people, regardless of class or gender, throughout his entire six-year presidency.

A final section focuses on the probable consequences of his presidency, discussing its probable effects on public opinion and the expectations of future politics and politicians.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.1 DUTERTE'S ELECTION: A PREVIOUSLY PUNITIVE PUBLIC ELECTING ITS PRESIDENT OR A CANDIDATE CREATING A FEARFUL PUBLIC?**

One common explanation for Duterte's election victory describes him as a penal populist who capitalized on existing public dissatisfaction and demand for a tougher anti-crime stance in the context of a worsening drug crisis<sup>3</sup> (Curato 2016; Kenny/Holmes 2020; Kenes 2021). In other words, it is argued that there was already a growing trend of public support for harsher punishment, which Duterte skillfully harnessed for his political agenda.

The causal relationship of this penal populist argument can be summarized as follows: A change in public punitiveness, meaning a stronger demand for harsher penalties, is taken up by incumbent politicians or candidates seeking political positions. This punitive stance becomes a defining feature

- 
- 1 For an excellent sketch of Duterte's early years and the myth built up in Davao City see: Coronel 2016.
  - 2 Many thanks go to my colleagues Ariadne Natal, Pascal Abb, Matthias Dembinski and Laura Bannan-Fischer for their critical remarks, comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this text. Of course, the responsibility for any shortcomings lies with the author.
  - 3 Put simply, there were no serious data on the extent of use of illegal drugs in the Philippines at the time of Duterte's election campaign. There were a few early estimates of dubious quality in the early 2000s that assumed up to 6.7 million drug users. A few years later, equally dubious estimates by the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB) put the overall numbers at below 2 million. Information on the small number of users in government administered rehabilitation centers suggests that approximately 80 percent of users are addicted to shabu (crystal meth) (Students from UP 2016).

These numbers typically lump drug use and addiction together, which often is not the case. Thus, the much smaller number of addicts is lumped together in the discussion with casual drug users using drugs either on a weekly basis or occasionally. According to a fairly detailed 2008 DDB survey, about 7.8 percent of shabu users used it on a daily basis, and 13 percent used it several times a week; the largest share seems to have been weekly users (26.7 percent) and occasional users who use illegal drugs once a month or less (30.4 percent; Dangerous Drugs Board 2008: 35–36, 43). Later reports did not change this picture of a much smaller share of drug addicts than the widely used numbers of users of illegal drugs might suggest. One should further mention that, according to the 2015 DBB report, almost 50 percent of the assumed 1.8 million drug users are single drug users and use only marijuana. However interpreted, the scarce data suggest that the Philippines clearly did *not* have an exceptionally serious drug problem in 2015 (Dangerous Drugs Board 2015).

of their political agenda and is translated into action, either by enacting tougher laws, or by sending messages to law enforcers and judges to be tough on crime and impose severe sentences. This resonates with the public's punitiveness, enhancing their political support and chances of (re-) election. Penal populism relies on a popular "trigger" for politicians' punitiveness, and thus emphasizes the influence of the public and its representatives on penal affairs (Pratt 2007: 32). It argues, first, that politicians are significantly influenced by outsiders' demands and activities, such as victims' groups, surveys, and media campaigns. Second, it assumes that those groups demand tougher punishment.

An alternative explanation for presidential candidate Duterte's public support would argue that he ran a highly successful campaign that established the preconditions for his success. Thanks to the extensive support of the media, both positive and negative, he successfully fueled previously marginal concerns about crime. This changed voters' perceptions about their local and national crime situation and established the narrative that made him the preferred choice for president. This was based on the public perception of his successful suppression of crime in the city of Davao, where he had governed for most of the past three decades.

Crucially, this explanation does not require a punitive public. Instead, public support is driven by perceptions of personal security and fears about crime, reflecting a perceived lack of fulfillment of core human safety needs. Heightened concern about crime may then lead to a greater acceptance of or support for more iron-fisted approaches to crime control, if no viable alternatives for successful crime control are presented by other politicians. When the significance of fear of crime and concern for local and national security is brought to the forefront, experienced politicians advocating for punitive measures will garner support unless countered by liberal politicians who can persuade the public that crime control is a vital component of their political platform, that their strategies are effective, and that they can produce results.

The fundamental premise here is that, in numerous instances, security is considered a fundamental need of top priority for the general population. In simple terms, democracy and human rights must deliver in the realm of basic human needs which "apply a greater sense of urgency to be satisfied than the needs at the next level" (Carducci 2021: 270). If the population believes that a crime control strategy based on due process and human rights can effectively provide a similar degree of security as a more authoritarian approach, these limitations tend to be accepted and endorsed. Therefore, for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law to be deemed valid and essential aspects of state actions, they must also demonstrate that they are able to provide adequate output and outcomes in the sphere of citizen security and other fundamental human needs.

## **1.2 ENDURING BROAD SUPPORT FOR A STRONGMAN PRESIDENT**

There is a significant leap from choosing a hardliner who promises a solution to perceived insecurity to supporting a president known to support a war on drugs that results in the violent deaths of thousands at the hands of law enforcers and vigilantes. Thus, explaining why he was elected differs

from explaining why he received enduring super-majority support as president, although or because he pushed through his violent war on drugs.

One possible explanation for the further increase in support for Duterte's war on drugs is rooted in theories of denial, deliberate ignorance, and information avoidance. These theories examine how, why, and when people choose not to acknowledge things they are aware of (Cohen 2001, Sweeny et al. 2010, Sutton/Norgaard 2013, Golman/Hagman/Loewenstein 2017, Brown/Walasek 2021, Hertwig/Ellerbrock 2022).

While denial may play a role, often in the form of interpretive and implicatory denial (giving a different meaning and minimizing the implications of human rights violations), it is argued that active support for Duterte and the war on crime cannot be fully explained by attributing it solely to denial of the killings. Instead, I propose that there are certain cultural dispositions towards violence that create a conducive backdrop, allowing for the condoning and justification of actual violent practices.

Therefore, I examine several indicators that show a preference for strongman rule and high levels of legitimacy for violent forms of self-help. These in turn are associated with how Filipinos perceive democracy, aligning with the earlier assumption mentioned above that the popular legitimacy of democracy hinges on its ability to fulfill basic human needs like welfare and security. The analysis delves into the extent to which support for the violent practices of the Duterte government has its roots in cultural norms and beliefs that 1) tolerate violence, 2) value strong leadership, and 3) relativize democracy and human rights. I argue that these norms and beliefs were triggered by Duterte and the widely perceived success of his presidency in the field of crime control and beyond, with potentially long-lasting consequences for Philippine democracy.

### **1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT**

Chapter two examines whether Duterte's election success is due to penal populism aligning with prior preferences, or to a Presidential campaign reframing crime, elevating its salience, and making Duterte the preferred choice due to his perceived ability to tackle the perceived threat effectively. This chapter focuses on the core dynamics: punitiveness versus fear of crime, while analyzing the question of timing: was Duterte reacting to a prior public groundswell or creating the respective public dynamics?

Chapter three will concentrate on those cultural frames that could elucidate why the vast majority of Filipinos, regardless of social class, gender, or educational level, chose to support the president and his policies despite being aware of the high number of victims.

In chapter four, the consequences of Duterte's presidency will be discussed. The aim is to disentangle the dimensions of success that are most important to Filipinos' positive assessment of these six years. This is crucial because the idea of the Duterte years as a "positive collective memory" might serve as a blueprint for future public political demands or be adopted by political entrepreneurs.

The conclusion will summarize the results of the empirical chapters and propose a central demand for liberal-minded politicians: to prioritize citizen security in their political agenda and offer a viable and culturally appropriate alternative strategy to the iron fist of violent repression.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. THE SALIENCE OF CRIME IN PUBLIC PERCEPTION BEFORE DUTERTE

The hypothesis suggesting that Duterte capitalized on a prior increase in public punitiveness or a worsening perception of local or national security would require some support from available data indicating that such shifts had been occurring before Duterte's entry into the national political scene in the second half of 2015.

The relationship between punitiveness, fear of crime, perceived crime victimization, and actual crime levels is complex. Punitiveness and fear of crime can establish a feedback loop, with one pushing the other. Thus, heightened punitiveness can create a perception that crime is a serious and imminent danger, leading to increased fear. Also, heightened fear of crime can lead individuals to support and advocate more punitive measures. Perceived higher levels of crime victimization may escalate fear of crime and simultaneously reframe the public discourse towards narratives that emphasize the need for punitive responses to crime. Finally, rising crime rates reported in the media can result in fear of becoming a victim, cause people to reevaluate the security parameters of their own environments, and influence assessments of what law enforcement practices are perceived as most effective, to mention only a few of the manifold links between these dimensions. Ideally, each of the above mentioned dimensions would be assessed individually. For the Philippines, data that would allow a measurement of punitiveness to be established directly are all but absent.

Therefore, this study has to rely on indirect assessment via time series data on crime levels, subjective experience of victimization, and fear of crime. While these three dimensions are not directly linked to punitiveness in any linear, causal manner, they are associated, albeit in complex ways, when moderator variables are considered: i.e., age, education, and most importantly, sex (Amorost 2017). Thus, while crime levels, subjective victimization perception or fear of crime are in themselves not

---

4 As public opinion is central to all three empirical chapters, it is not surprising that the bulk of the analysis relies on representative population surveys.

For this purpose, two main sources of data were used. First, the international comparative surveys conducted by Asian Barometer (AsBa) and World Values Survey (WVS). Second, the analysis made use of numerous surveys conducted by Social Weather Stations (SWS) and Pulse Asia (PuAs). These organizations typically conduct several surveys with identical questions each year, and many questions have been asked regularly for over a decade. Data on all waves of Asian Barometer surveys can be requested at: <https://www.asianbarometer.org/>; for the World Values Survey see: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>; for Pulse Asia see: <https://www.pulseasia.ph/>; for Social Weather Stations see: <https://www.sws.org.ph/>.

Additionally, more recent surveys from Publicus Asia (PubAs) and regular local surveys in Davao City, administered by Ateneo de Davao University, were incorporated into the study (see: <https://www.publicusasia.com/> and <https://research.addu.edu.ph/downloads>).

While each of these data sources and the items assessed in the surveys has its limitations, when combined into clusters, as we will see, they provide a detailed and consistent picture of all the dimensions listed above.

sufficient as a proxy for the *level* of punitiveness in a population, a significant shift in punitiveness is not possible without a shift of one or several of the other factors in the same direction, as long as the overall composition of the group with respect to fundamental characteristics such as age and gender does not change.

The thesis of a previously punitive public would suggest that such a shift in levels of reported crime, subjectively perceived crime victimization, or fear of crime should have been visible before Duterte's campaign, whereas the thesis that Duterte, with the help of the media, reframed the Philippine public's security narrative during the campaign period would suggest that this shift took place in the pre-election months from late 2015 to early 2016. Additionally, it is argued that any public discontent and increase in public punitiveness in the years before Duterte should have manifested as a rise in public dissatisfaction with government crime control policies during those years.

The analysis is divided into three parts as follows: first, an examination of crime variation from 2012 to 2016; second, a discussion of crime as a public concern and the public's evaluation of government performance in crime control, and third, an assessment of crime victimization and fear of crime. If public punitiveness played a role as a driver of penal populism, there should be evidence of change prior to Duterte's emergence on the national stage.

## 2.1 DEVELOPMENT OF CRIME LEVELS FROM AQUINO TO DUTERTE

Considering the potential impact of actual crime levels, it is essential to note that the Philippine National Police (PNP) does not provide data on drug-related offenses, such as trafficking or consumption. Therefore, this analysis focuses on developments in four crimes against persons: murder and manslaughter as well as physical injury and rape; and three crimes against property: robbery, theft, and motor vehicle theft. As the absolute numbers of these offenses vary significantly, they have been normalized to allow trends over time to remain visible while being adjusted to a common scale.

The findings for the pre-Duterte period (i.e. to 2015) are mixed (see figure 1 below). Murder levels remained relatively stable until a spike during the first six months of Duterte's presidency, indicating an increase in the number of persons killed by vigilantes. On the other hand, all other crimes show a dramatic spike in 2013 and 2014, with overall numbers more than doubling. This increase is likely largely due to the temporary inclusion of crimes that were previously not reported to the police but were documented by other law enforcement agencies or local barangays (municipal wards, villages), which handle cases within the context of the barangay justice system, independent of the PNP.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the introduction of the electronic blotter system CIRAS by the PNP helped to address prior

---

5 One may assume that in practice the vast majority of lesser crimes, as for example physical injury and theft, are never reported to the police, but are dealt with by the barangay authorities. In many cases, it is also sensible to assume that even serious crimes like rape or robbery stay with the barangay authorities, even though they would be legally required to inform the police and hand such cases over to the court system. More recent PNP statistics indicate that reporting has returned to the old system of documenting "PNP blotter only." This explains the sudden drop in crime levels. On the other hand, the inclusion of two years shows a significant share of the overall hidden statistics on crime.

practices of underreporting. While a few media outlets reported on this (see Cupin 2014), they were the exception. Thus most if not all of the spike may be explained not by changes in the crime situation, but by a shift in reporting practices.

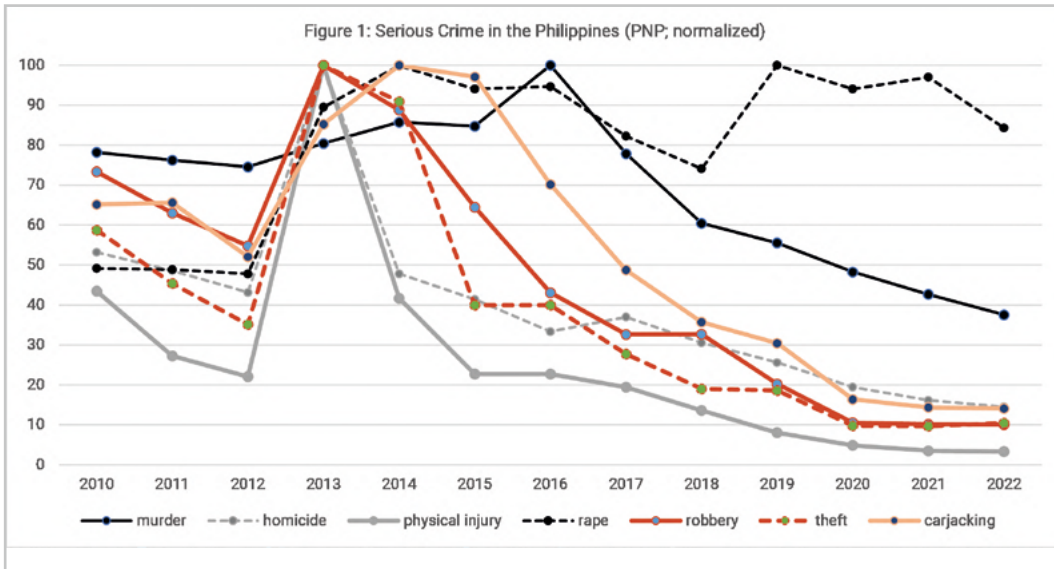


Fig. 1: Sources: to 2015: Philippine Statistics Authority various years. Philippine Statistical Yearbook; since 2016: Philippine National Police various years. Annual Accomplishment Report.

Reported crime data do not allow for a clear-cut assessment of the probable impact on public opinion. While one may assume that the dramatic rise in 2013 should have a serious effect, especially given that the underlying reason signaling its artificial character was barely publicized, the subsequent drop would suggest reassurance.

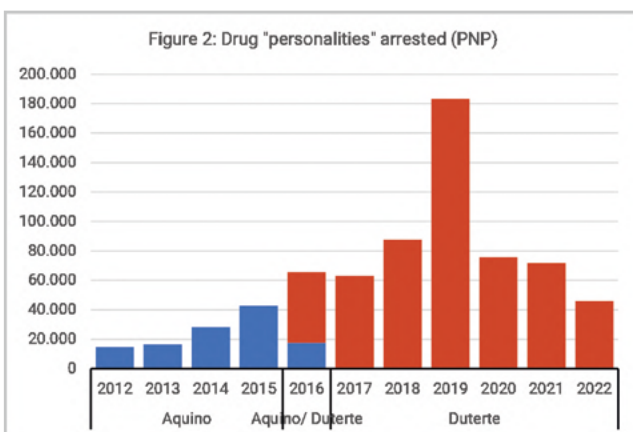
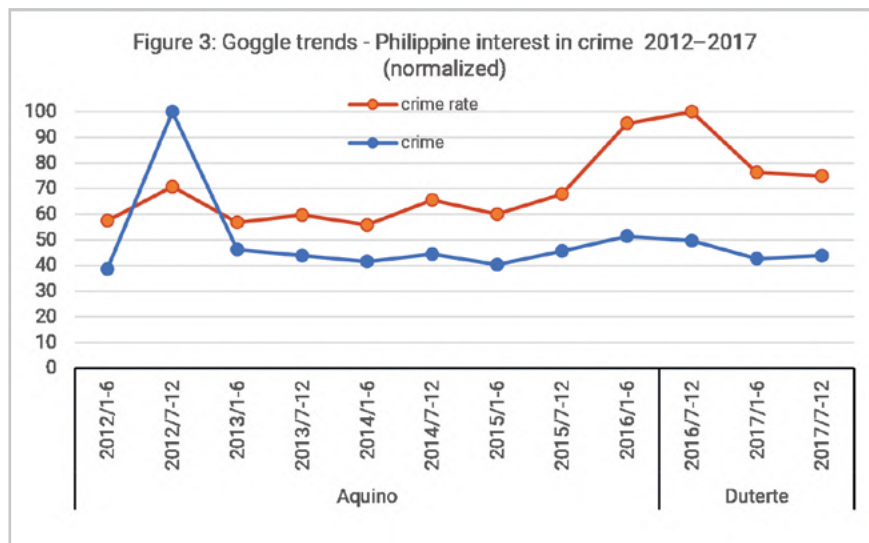


Fig. 2: Source: Philippine National Police. Annual Accomplishment Reports. Various years.

The severity of illegal drugs is assessed through information on police arrests (see figure 2 above). There was a significant shift in the years before Duterte, with a strong rise in arrests by the PNP and the caseload for the prosecution growing from 10,000 to nearly 50,000 cases between 2009 and 2015. However, while these data can be culled from various government websites, they have not been part of the media-driven public discourse on security and crime. Thus, this trend is unlikely to have significantly influenced public opinion before the Duterte presidential campaign.

In summary, the impact of crime data on public perceptions remains uncertain. It is unclear whether the artificial spike in crime data in 2013/14 or the reported downward trend from that point onward had a significant effect on public perceptions. Similarly, the rise in drug-related cases in all probability did not have a notable impact on the population's views.

If a rise in crime levels had become a matter of wider public interest, one would assume that this also translated into a heightened interest in additional information and respective web searches. However, an analysis of crime-focused Google searches from the Philippines during the period under consideration indicates that interest in crime-related issues remained stable overall until the summer of 2015 (see figure 3 below).



There was a notable spike in the second half of 2012, particularly during the months of September and October, which shows that the public actually reacted to a change in the specific dynamics in this field. However, this surge in searches was related to the enactment of the Philippine Cybercrime Prevention Act in September 2012. Another smaller spike in searches occurred in the second half of 2014, shortly after the PNP reported a rising crime rate in several cities during the first half of the year.

However, these modest reactions were overshadowed by a substantial increase in searches that began in late 2015, when the public discussion on Rodrigo Duterte and his focus on preventing the Philippines from becoming a “narco-state” gained momentum. Interest in crime-related searches



continued to rise during the six months leading up to and following the election. The public's interest in internet-based information about the actual amount of crime in the Philippines only shifted when Duterte made the topic a prominent part of his agenda. Starting from the day Duterte announced his intention to run for President on November 21, 2015, until the national elections on May 9, 2016, the most frequently used alternative search terms, apart from "crime rate" with a national focus, were exclusively centered on Davao (e.g., variations on "Davao crime rate"). This significant public interest in crime-related searches indicated a strong desire for more detailed information regarding the claims made by the presidential candidate concerning the national crime situation and crime reduction in Davao. Taken together, this suggests that the public's attention was strongly influenced by the discussions surrounding Duterte and his anti-crime agenda during the election period.

Summing up, data on crime are inconclusive and do not allow for easy and clear-cut interpretation. Public interest in such data remained stable and unrelated to the dramatic fluctuations in crime rates until Duterte and his narrative took center stage in the Philippines media. Thus, this first approximation suggests that public interest in crime and its control remained stable throughout the years preceding the pre-election period. It was the media's focus on Duterte's narrative of crime as a national threat, the perceived failure of crime control, and Duterte's promise to deal with it effectively if elected president, that triggered public interest in this topic.

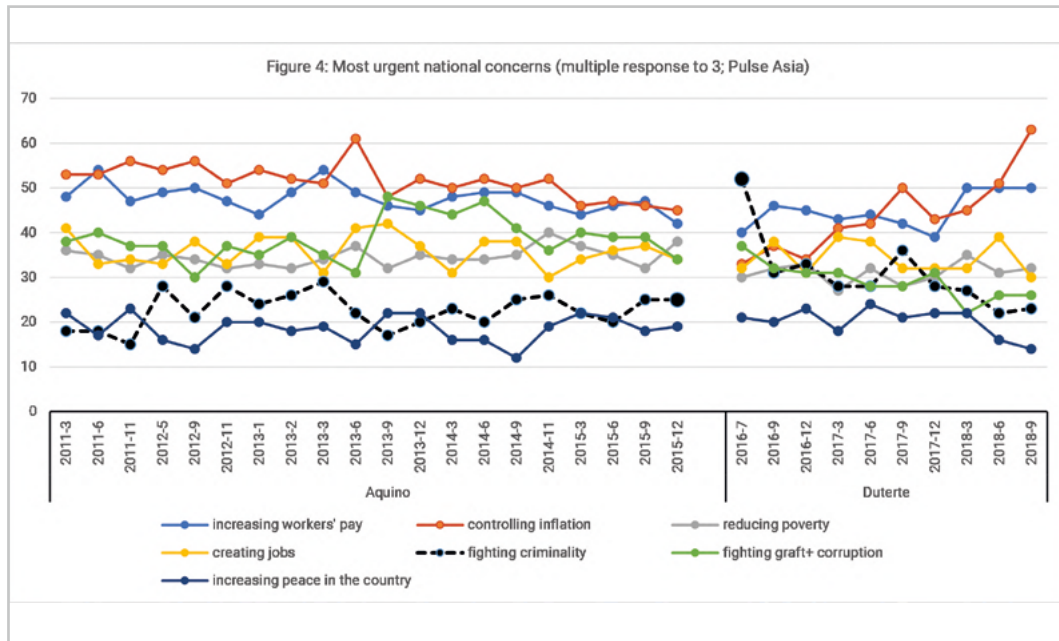
## **2.2 CRIME AS A PUBLIC CONCERN AND GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

Let me now address the public assessment of crime as a perceived urgent national concern. If crime was perceived to be a serious concern and law enforcement seriously deficient, one would assume that this would translate into public assessments, as reported in the various surveys administered nationwide each quarter.

However, figure 4 below demonstrates that throughout the pre-Duterte years, the need for fighting crime never ranked among the top four national concerns perceived to be most urgent and in need of government attention. Crime control not only lagged behind various dimensions of economic security, it was also perceived as less problematic than the fight against graft and corruption. This changed only with the new presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, and in a dramatic way, and even then only for a relatively short period.<sup>6</sup> Put simply, one may argue that the public assessment of the urgency of national concerns is a reflection of the narratives to which the public is exposed in the traditional and social media. With Duterte's story of a seriously endangered Philippines taking center stage in the media discourse, this singular item of crime control was dramatically reevaluated to be in dire need of government attention.

---

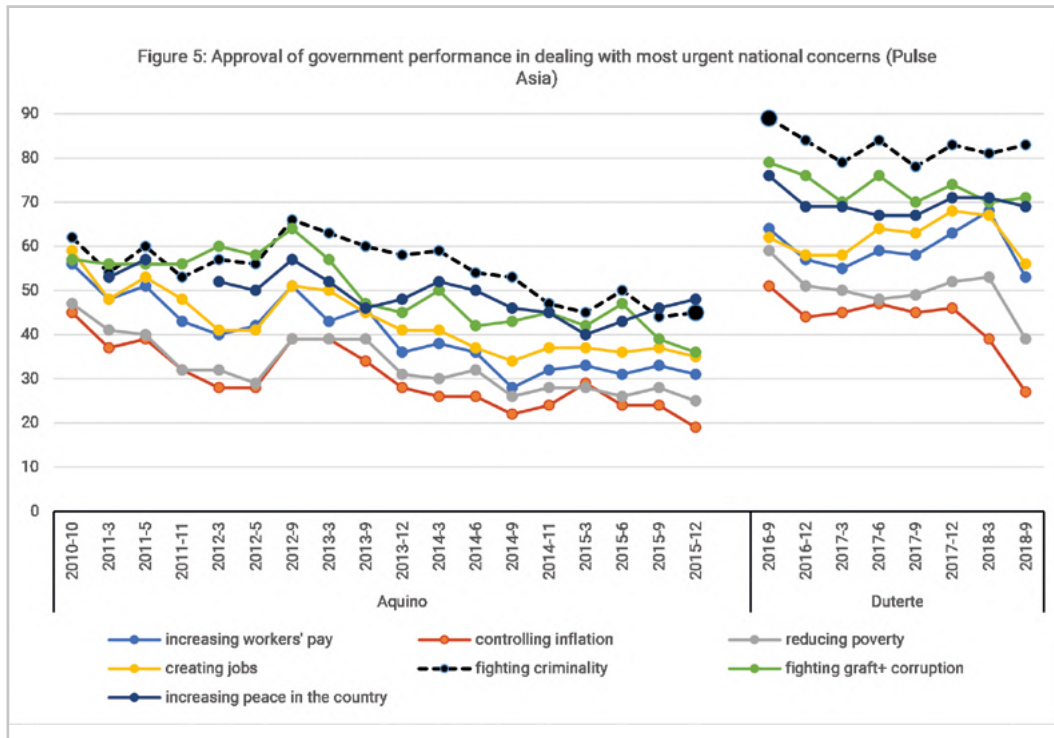
<sup>6</sup> Regrettably, no survey was conducted in the spring of 2016, leaving us uncertain about whether the shift towards prioritizing the fight against crime occurred before the elections, or only after Duterte's election victory. Consequently, the exact timing of this change remains unclear.



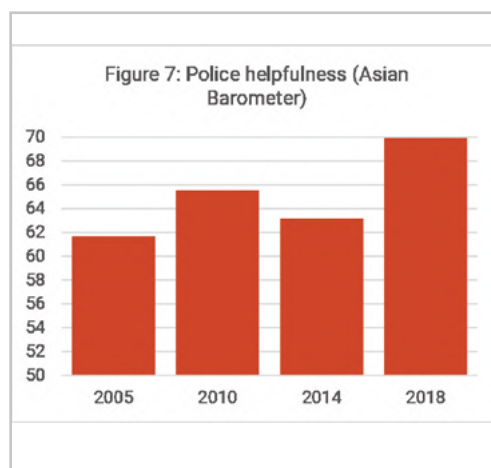
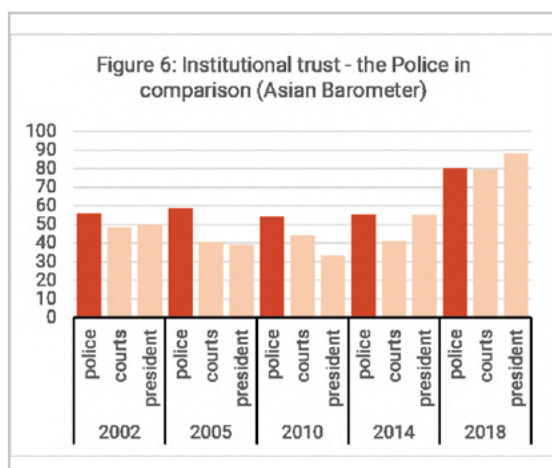
Public approval of the government's efforts to fight crime under Aquino had been generally quite positive until the final months of 2015 (see figure 5 below). Although it declined over time from approximately 60 percent to less than 50 percent, it remained exceptionally strong compared to approval for all other "urgent issues." Therefore, while discontent with government performance was growing, one would have expected that a credible promise by a candidate focusing on inflation control, poverty reduction, and pay increases, which consistently ranked as the highest priorities in terms of urgency but received low approval rates with respect to government performance, would have been much more successful than a campaign centered around a secondary issue with comparatively high levels of public support for the current government's policies.

Further, given a serious public discontent with the crime situation in the years before the election campaign, one would assume low levels of satisfaction with and trust in the police and policing. The Asian Barometer surveys provide some rough assessments, especially regarding temporal changes (figures 6 and 7 below). Assuming that inadequate police performance should lead to a decrease in trust in the police, the analysis of Filipinos' trust in the police over time is quite informative. In four waves of surveys conducted from 2002 to 2014, police trust ratings remained stable at a relatively high level of 55 percent or more, opting for quite a lot and a great deal of trust.<sup>7</sup> These ratings consistently surpassed trust ratings for both the courts and the president. The consistently high level of trust suggests that there were no growing concerns about police failure in crime control during the Aquino years, which is also supported by the high number of people who feel it is easy or very easy to get help from the police when they need it (figure 7 below).

<sup>7</sup> Options were either to decline to answer, which hardly any respondent used, or to answer critically (no or minor trust) or positively (quite a lot, a great deal).



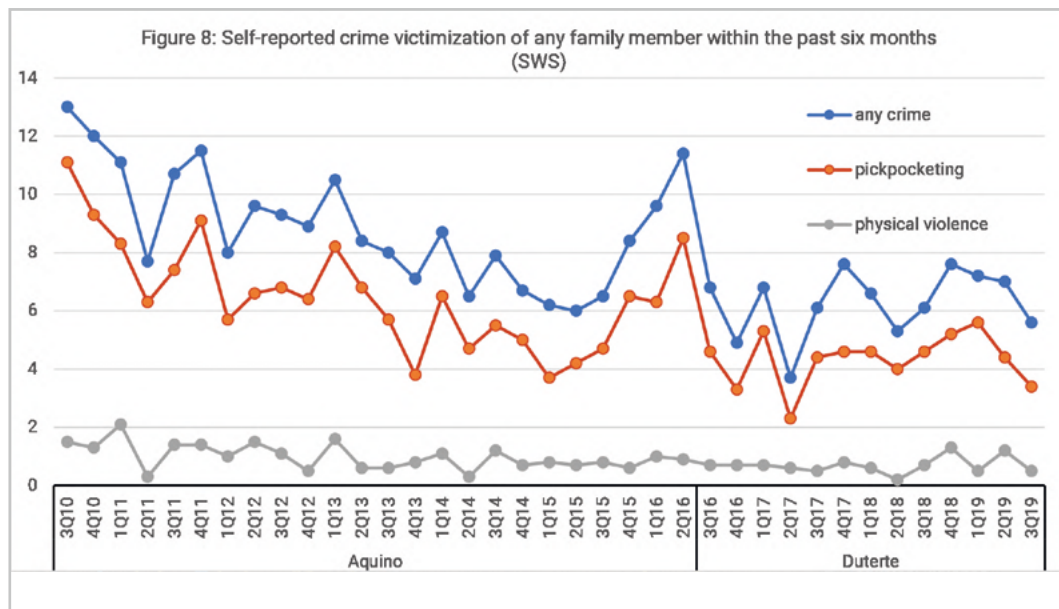
The results of the various polls discussed above indicate that the population did not consider fighting crime as a priority or urgent task until shortly before the election. Furthermore, there was a relatively high level of satisfaction with government and especially police performance. The analysis does not provide any reason to believe that there was increased public concern about internal security or specific dissatisfaction with government actions that would lead to heightened support for a radical and iron-fisted law enforcement.



### 2.3 CRIME AS A THREAT TO WELL-BEING: FEAR AND VICTIMIZATION

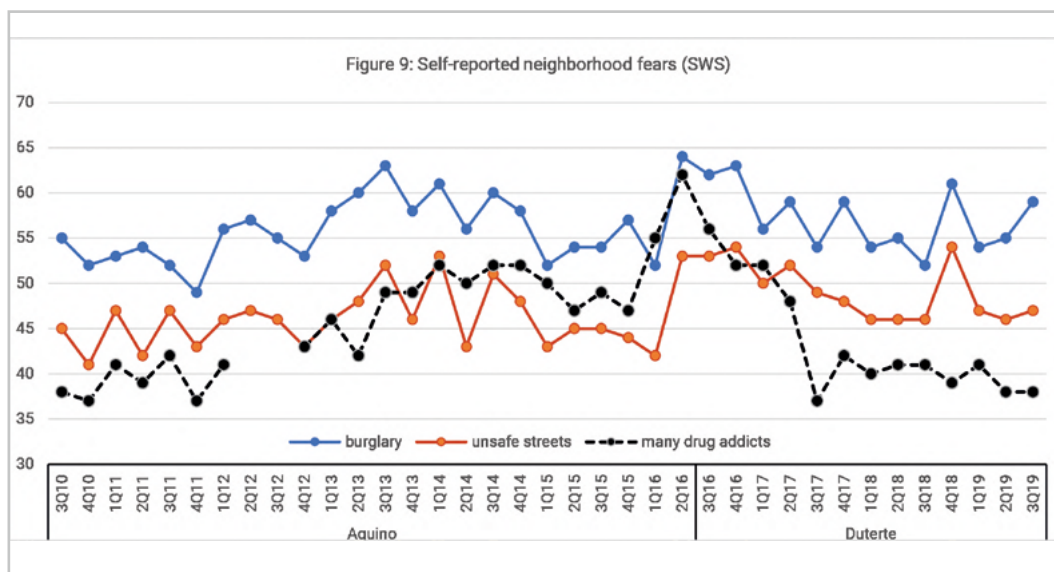
Further indicators for public assessments of policing and changes in the level of public punitiveness can be derived from the analysis of public perceptions of security from crime in one's personal or immediate environment, which is often measured through self-reported crime victimization and fear of crime.

Self-reported victimization experiences (figure 8 below) showed a nearly linear decrease during the years of the Aquino presidency up to mid-2015. Experiences with physical violence remained relatively stable. These findings do not indicate an increase in victimization that would lead to a demand for more effective and harsher policing.



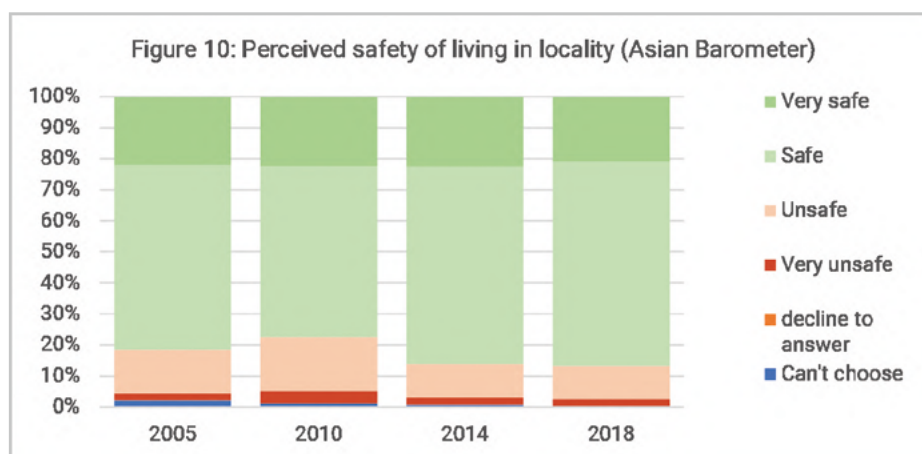
There are some differences in terms of fear of crime and the perception of an insecure local environment in general (see figure 9 below). While stable overall, data on fear of burglary and unsafe streets show a rise during the years 2013 and 2014, which corresponds to the official crime data. However, by early 2015, both fears returned to earlier rates. A similar pattern of increase, although with a more significant rise, can be observed for fear of drug addicts in the neighborhood. Unlike other fears, fear of drug addicts did not return to prior levels in 2015 but remained significantly higher than during the early Aquino years.

Interestingly, despite the decrease in self-reported crime victimization, fear of crime seems to be influenced by a partly different logic. The difference between the trends for fear of burglary and unsafe streets compared to fear of drug addicts indicates that there might have been negative changes in the public perception of the local drug situation in their immediate environments.



The observed shifts in public perception of security during the first five years of the Aquino presidency until mid-2015 were relatively minor compared to the much more dramatic changes that occurred from the third quarter of 2015 onwards, when the topic of crime was significantly elevated in Philippine public discourse by Duterte and media reporting.

Data on respondents' perceptions of safety in their locality (figure 10 below) also corroborate the impression of a relatively stable security environment during the pre-Duterte years. The majority of respondents reported living in a safe or very safe environment in surveys conducted from 2005 to 2019. In fact, the overall percentage of respondents reporting a safe environment grew from 77.5 percent in the 2010 survey to 86.25 percent in 2014, suggesting that the Aquino years were *not* perceived as a time of increasing crime or rising fears among the population.



## **2.4 SUMMING UP: CRIME DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

When considering the various survey items together, they consistently reveal that the public attributed secondary importance to crime control compared to other social and economic issues. Perceptions of the local security environment were generally positive, with a decline in perceived victimization and largely stable levels of fear of crime. Notably, there was a significantly high and stable institutional trust in the police, surpassing trust in the courts or the president.

While the perceived urgency of crime as a national issue remained stable, public approval of the government's performance in crime control decreased slightly. However, this decline was in line with the approval of government performance in all other areas, and crime control still received the highest levels of approval. Institutional trust in the police remained steady, and experiences of victimization actually declined. Neighborhood fears remained stable, except for a fear of drug addicts in the neighborhood, which did not impact other fears or victimization experiences. Thus, a significant shift in public demand for a clear change in crime control was not evident before mid-2015.

However, all perceptual data changed dramatically towards the end of the year and in the first half of 2016. By the time the new president took office, crime had become the most urgent national concern, despite crime rates remaining stable until the end of the previous administration. Fears of various local crimes rose dramatically, coinciding with the onset of Duterte's election campaign and the extensive media coverage of his vision of the Philippines facing a narco-state and the need to eradicate drug crime by any means.

During the nine months leading up to the elections, victimization reports doubled, indicating a growing sense of insecurity among the public. This was largely driven by the election campaign and the media's focus on Duterte's dire messages. As a result, the public became fearful, security-focused, and supportive of a punitive approach to tackling drug crime.

In the public perception, drug crime became the number one problem due to the tough and widely publicized aim of a war on drugs. However, this perception quickly eased after the elections, as people believed that the problem was now being addressed effectively. While approval for government performance remained consistently high, both the perceived urgency of the problem and reported fears and victimization levels returned to "normal" within months after the election.

## **3. VIOLENCE, ILLIBERALISM AND THE LIMITS OF SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PUBLIC MIND BEFORE DUTERTE**

The data presented above indicate that changes in public perception can be directly linked to the presidential campaign. The following section addresses why this rapid shift could plausibly occur. It argues that in the Philippines, several factors combine to create a backdrop where support can grow for a president who promises to eradicate serious crime through force, even if it means using brutal

methods. It further contends that Duterte’s bid for the presidency interacted with three fundamental characteristics of the Filipino public:

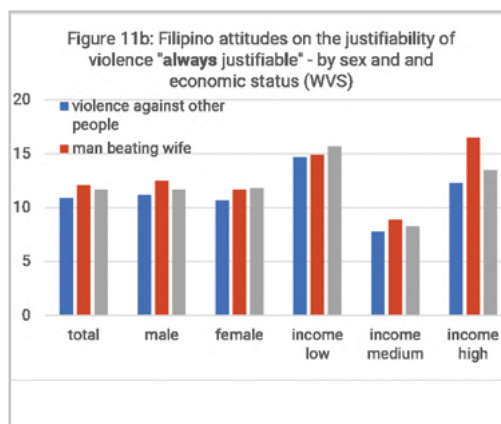
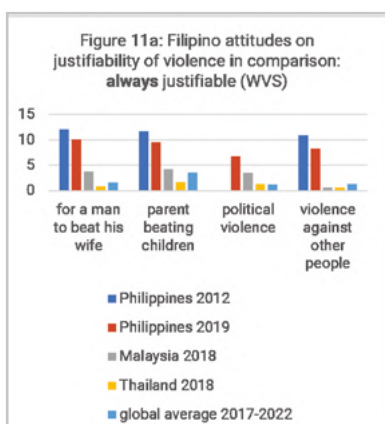
- A strong inclination towards violence as a means of resolving conflicts, be it for asserting interests or seeking revenge.
- A distinctly illiberal mindset shared by many Filipinos, which leads them to envision a certain ideal image of a leader.
- An instrumental view of democracy and human rights, perceiving them as dependent on fulfilling other human needs.

### 3.1 JUSTIFYING VIOLENCE IN SOCIAL INTERACTION IN A WIDER CONTEXT OF JUSTIFYING EXTRA-LEGAL BEHAVIOR

Data on public perceptions of violence are limited, and specific information to gauge the extent to which the Filipino population would be willing to justify or tolerate violent measures in a comprehensive campaign against serious crime is lacking. Such questions are typically not asked in this country, as in many others. However, several datasets allow us to approach the topic in a way that enables a fairly detailed assessment of Philippine attitudes towards violence as a means of social interaction.

Central to this assessment are various questions asked in the World Values Survey (WVS) concerning the acceptability of using violence in specific relationships (e.g., parent-child, husband-wife) and in general. The survey uses a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from “never” to “always.” Since people generally tend to avoid extreme responses on scales, selecting “always” would indicate that there are no normative limits to the use of violence, making this choice quite uncommon across countries.

However, the situation in the Philippines differs significantly (figures 11a and 11b). Surprisingly, over 10 percent of respondents in the country chose the most extreme option for each form of violence: husband against wife, parent against child and violence against other people in general (see figures below). This stands in stark contrast to their immediate neighbors included in the study and the global average. The Philippines rank highest in terms of justifiability for all three forms of violence in wave 6 of the WVS (2010–2014).



The Philippine sample showed no notable differences between male and female respondents. Nevertheless, support for radical uses of violence was strongest among lower-income respondents, followed by those from the high-income group. Even respondents from the middle-income group still ranked higher than most other national samples overall.

Based on the answers to these questions, it appears that the social acceptance of violence is somewhat distinctive in the Philippines compared to other countries.<sup>8</sup>

This is further supported by several other, albeit unfortunately rather fragmented, survey data from the pre-Duterte period.<sup>9</sup>

For instance, in 2005, the Asian Barometer conducted a survey asking people about their agreement with the immediate punishment of cruel criminals without following legal processes, resulting in a 70 percent overall agreement rate (with 44 percent strongly agreeing). Similarly, a representative local survey in Davao City, Rodrigo Duterte's hometown, shortly after the 2016 elections but before he assumed office, asked respondents about their opinions on the Davao Death Squad, a group accused of killing over 1,000 suspects in Davao City during Rodrigo Duterte's tenure as mayor. In this survey, 60 percent of respondents stated that the death squad "will help solve criminality," with an additional 10 percent considering the death squad's actions as "just." Only 18 percent of respondents chose critical options, such as being against human rights (8 percent), considering it unjust (8 percent), or immoral (2 percent) (Ateneo de Davao University 2016).

The most direct reflection of Filipino acceptance of violence as a means for providing order and security is public satisfaction with the performance of the Duterte administration in the illegal drugs campaign. While SWS did not ask about support for the use of deadly force, it was generally assumed or at least considered possible that the campaign included targeted killings. In eight surveys by Social Weather Stations from late 2016 to late 2019 only 30 percent were of the opinion that the police did not tell the truth when they claimed that suspects fought back; a full 45 percent claimed to be undecided on this matter, signaling that they did not exclude this option of a vigilante police force.

---

8 This also holds true for the acceptance of political violence. Although this aspect was not previously addressed, the 2019 WVS (World Values Survey) survey revealed that the Philippines once again demonstrated extreme values. Specifically, 6.8 percent of respondents selected the highest point (10 out of 10) on the Likert scale, indicating high acceptance of political violence. In comparison, the average for the four Southeast Asian countries used as a reference was only 1.95 percent, and a mere 1.2 percent of the total sample of countries showed such high acceptance levels.

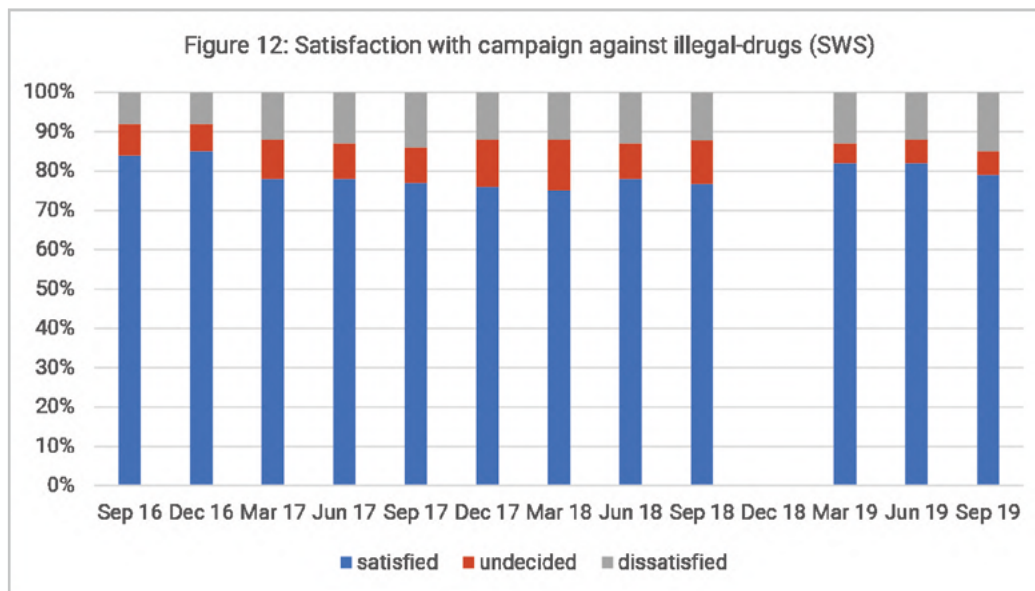
This peculiarity also holds even if the range of support is extended from the most extreme value of 10 to a broader range of 7–10, signaling the assumption that violence can often be justified. Again, Philippine rates of support are significantly higher than those of its neighbors and the overall average. On the opposite end of the scale, Filipino rejection of the justifiability of violence, signaled by values 1 and 2, which would allow for only a small number of exceptions, is lower than that of its neighbors and the overall average.

9 Substantial information has become accessible for the years since mid-2016. However, it may not fully explain the reasons behind Duterte's election as president, despite shedding light on the factors that later contributed to his unprecedented popularity, surpassing all previous Philippine presidents. Additionally, the surveys conducted during Duterte's tenure provide insights into how and why he was able to significantly alter public attitudes towards hard-line policing.



Given a different wording, results become much clearer. When SWS asked in June 2017 whether people agreed with the statements that most people killed by the police in the campaign did NOT really fight against the police and that many of those killed were not really drug dealers, skepticism about the official narrative was strong. With 54 percent agreeing that in many cases there was no real fight and 49 percent agreeing that many of the victims had not been drug dealers. Only a minority reflected the official narrative (20 and 24 percent, respectively).

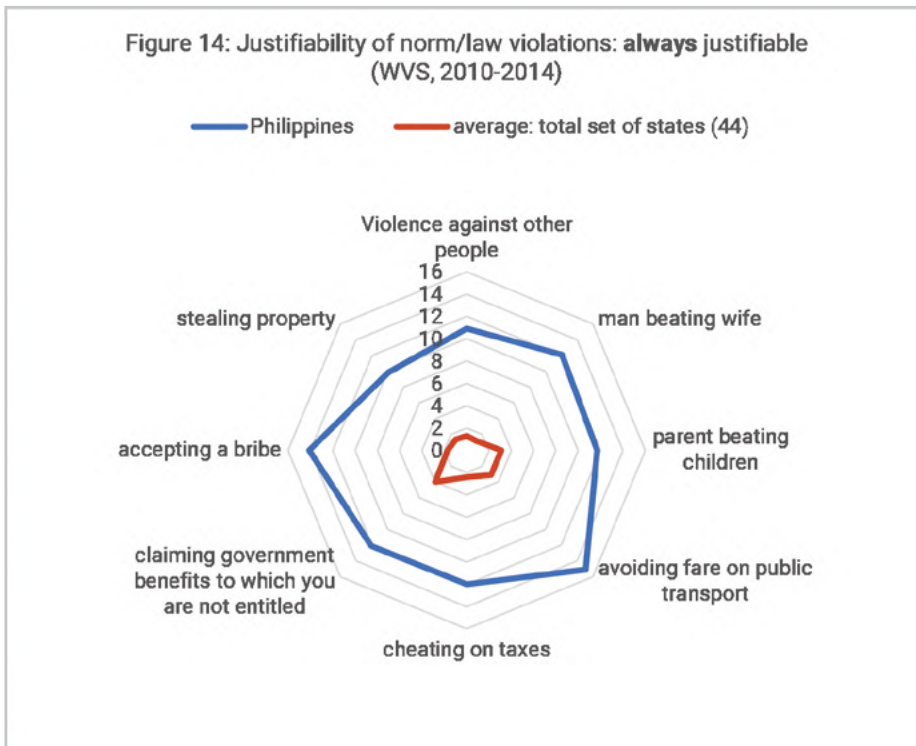
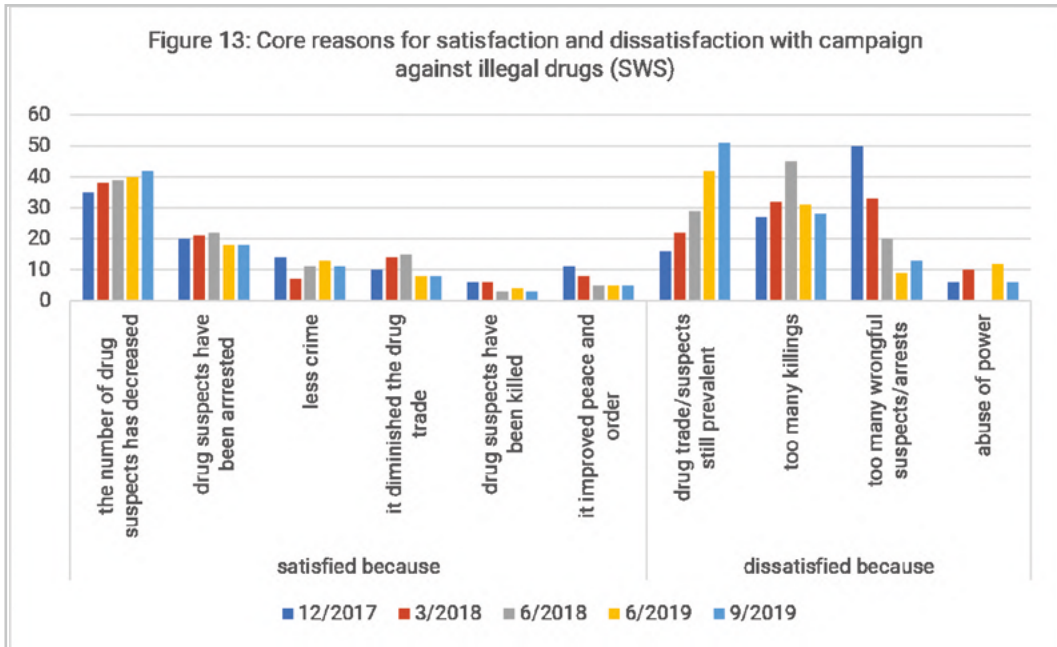
Despite this distancing from the official narrative of self-defense, about 80 percent of respondents were satisfied with the performance of the administration in the campaign against illegal drugs in 12 quarterly SWS-surveys, with only 12 percent dissatisfied (see figure 12 below). This high level of support signals that a significant part of Filipinos accepted the killings as a price to be paid for enhanced community security. Others chose various forms of denial, pretending not to know (being undecided) what they actually knew.



The reasons for being satisfied provided by respondents all focus on community gains with respect to security; a punitive drive seems to be absent (see figure 13 below). Among the small minority of the dissatisfied, initially the failures with respect to human rights and due process dominated; over time however, the security assessments gained in prominence, albeit in the form of a critique of the campaign's effectiveness.

Collectively, these data indicate a high level of tolerance towards violence as a means to address societal issues, which strongly implies a significant disregard for due process and the rule of law. This inclination is also evident in Philippine assessments of the justifiability of other forms of illegal behavior. In an international comparison, Filipinos exhibit a rather unique pattern of responses, with exceptionally high numbers believing that various types of law violations can ALWAYS be justified. Considering all the topics for which "justifiability" was assessed in the WVS, the Philippines ranked

first in two, second in four, and third in one, in terms of choosing the most radical option, as compared to an overall sample of 44 states (figure 14 below). The only country with worse results was Haiti, which ranked first six times.



The detailed results mentioned above indicate that several crucial conditions were met for the widespread acceptance of Duterte's goal to eradicate drug crime and his "promise" not to hesitate in carrying out targeted killings of suspects, which he publicly proclaimed multiple times during the pre-election period:

- A strong acceptance of violence as a method of conflict resolution and enforcement against resistance.
- A willingness to tolerate extralegal violence when dealing with criminals.
- A pronounced relativization of norms regarding the boundary between legal and illegal behavior.

### **3.2 RELATING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS TO BASIC HUMAN NEEDS: THE DEMAND FOR OUTPUT**

In a broader context, these dimensions are connected to Filipino perspectives on democracy and human rights, which can be seen as largely instrumental. They attribute less inherent value to these principles, but perceive them as dependent on their ability to fulfill fundamental human needs. These needs are primarily related to physiological and security concerns (Carducci 2020).

In simpler terms, for the vast majority of Filipinos, these needs translate into basic well-being for themselves and their families, a reduction of poverty and inequality, access to social security, and fair opportunities for a better life. Additionally, they seek an environment perceived as low in crime and secure enough overall to pursue their other goals without worries. Carducci summarizes this by explaining that the "logic of the hierarchy of needs is that the needs at the lower end of the hierarchy exert more power in that they apply a greater sense of urgency to be satisfied than the ends at the next level" (Carducci 2020: 270).

From the perspective of an individual experiencing deficiencies in core human needs, a prioritized sequencing of actions may seem completely acceptable as long as the alternative promise of better fulfilling lower-level needs seems plausible. If perceived severe physiological or safety needs exist, democracy and human rights are valued only if they are perceived to be capable of providing a minimum level of need fulfillment, equal to or superior to that promised by alternative approaches.

Unlike its relevant peers in Southeast Asia, the Philippines did not experience rapid fulfillment of the most critical human needs but rather stagnation in the decades leading up to Duterte's presidency. GDP per capita growth was the lowest, inequality remained the highest, poverty reduction progress was slow, child mortality reduction was slowest, and homicide rates remained the highest.<sup>10</sup>

This is also reflected in subjective experience, as for example with respect to hunger. Self-reported hunger in the family increased from 2004 to 2012 and did not fall to earlier levels again until 2018 (see SWS quarterly surveys).

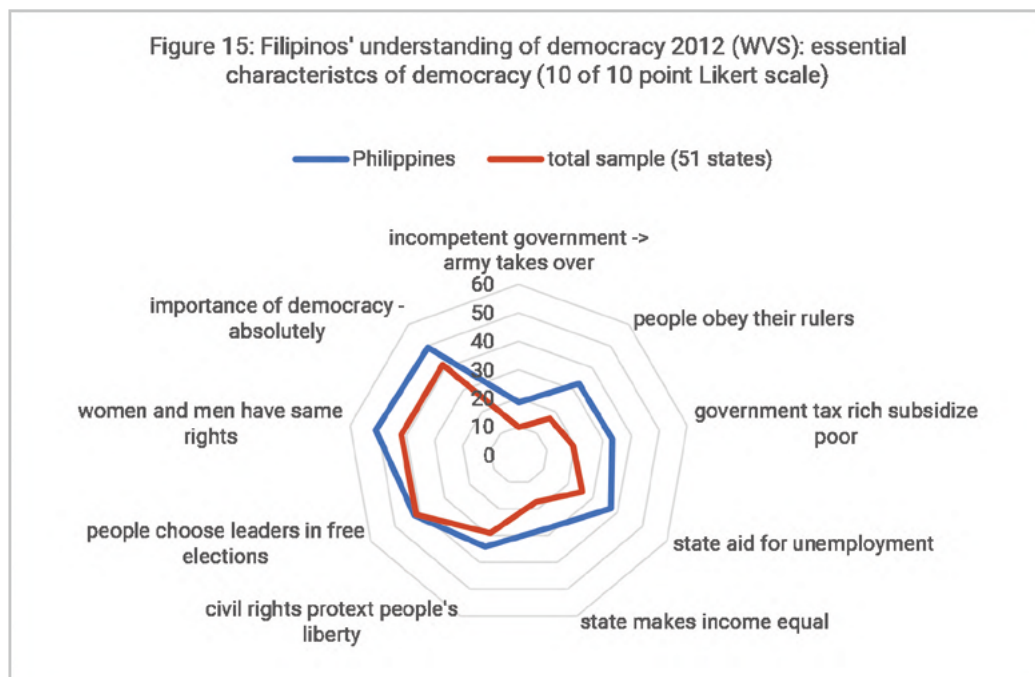
---

10 For details, see the respective comparative dataset on the World Bank website (<https://data.worldbank.org/>).

Therefore, considering the relative inadequacy in meeting the most fundamental human needs, Filipinos are likely to place a higher value on these basic necessities compared to higher-level needs that are more directly associated with democracy.

Data to confirm this hypothesis are limited. However, a strong indication can be found in responses to two questions posed by the Asian Barometer regarding the importance of democracy and economic development versus political freedom and economic inequality. In both cases, a clear majority of Filipinos chose economic improvement as more important, ranking democracy and political rights second.<sup>11</sup>

Consistent with this preference for economic needs, Filipinos have a specific understanding of what constitutes the essential characteristics of democracy (see figure 15 below). While democracy holds importance for Filipinos, their perception requires it to deliver significant economic progress and actively work towards fulfilling people's economic rights. Thus, Filipinos exhibit a strong participatory and rights-based understanding of democracy. However, this perspective is balanced by an almost equally strong perception that links democracy to a state that actively provides essential services for the poor and implements economic redistribution in favor of disadvantaged groups.<sup>12</sup> In response, Filipinos appear to be highly willing to follow their leaders. The strong support for subservience to leadership as an essential characteristic of democracy in the Philippines is surpassed by very few countries, most of which do not qualify as democracies. Examples of such countries include Qatar, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and Kuwait.



11 For details, see the Asian Barometer datasets downloadable at: <https://www.asianbarometer.org/>.

12 While this focus on state responsibility for economic equalization as a dimension of democracy is widely shared in Southeast and East Asia, it is clearly more pronounced in the Philippines compared to its Southeast Asian neighbors.

Collectively, the patterns observed in the Philippines suggest an understanding of democracy that largely revolves around the concept of government FOR the people, where leaders are entrusted with significant responsibility and authority, and the people have an obligation to submit to their leadership. Consequently, the rejection of illiberal alternatives is not absolute but rather dependent on the perspective on leadership performance.

An illuminating example in this regard is a local representative survey conducted in Davao City (Ateneo de Davao University 2022: 177–186), which may not be representative of the entire Philippines but offers a highly nuanced template for assessing Filipino perspectives on authoritarian politics in the specific historical context of martial law under former president Ferdinand Marcos. When asked to assess this period (1972–1981), Filipinos exhibited a pronounced ambivalence, combining strongly positive assessments of perceived performance in meeting basic needs with negative assessments of human rights repercussions.

Overall, positive assessments clearly outweighed negative assessments of martial law. A majority of 45.8 percent of respondents viewed martial law as a *golden age* for the Philippines, while only 40.2 percent perceived it as a *dark period* in Philippine history, with 46.5 percent explicitly disagreeing with the negative connotation as a dark period and only 25.5 percent disagreeing with the positive assessment as a golden age. Notably, support was particularly strong for the claim that martial law improved the economy, led to infrastructure development, decreased crime and violence, and promoted discipline among Filipinos (all with over 60 percent support).

Put simply, it appears that for the people of Davao City, martial law was viewed as a necessary evil that, despite severe human rights violations, brought various forms of development to the Philippines. It is primarily remembered as a period when a strong and decisive leader achieved significant progress, and the perceived advantages outweighed the disadvantages.<sup>13</sup>

Crucially, four dimensions of perceived success stand out: economic improvement, infrastructure development, a decrease in crime, and the promotion of discipline in society. These perceived achievements seem to justify the costs in terms of human rights transgressions for the majority of respondents. In essence, the overall sentiment is that martial law, despite its shortcomings, delivered tangible benefits that justify the sacrifices made in the realm of human rights.

In summary, while Filipinos do support democracy, this support is not unconditional. Filipinos tend to assess democracy primarily based on its ability to deliver socioeconomic and political benefits, such as prosperity, security, and reliable public services, rather than seeing it as intrinsically valuable and embodying principles of popular sovereignty, liberty, and individual dignity (Lu/Chu 2021:

---

13 This result is replicated in various national surveys on public perceptions of the former president (1965–1986). Negative statements about Ferdinand Marcos saw consistently less agreement than disagreement in 2016 and 2022 surveys undertaken by SWS (Social Weather Stations 2023). Thus in 2022, only 23 percent perceived him to have been a severe, brutal or oppressive president, only 19–20 percent thought of him as a thief to the nation's wealth who took care of friends who enriched themselves with government funds, whereas 47 percent disagreed with all three characterizations. Positive statements describing him as a defender of the poor and oppressed, as a humble president, true to the duties of a patriotic president saw (almost) consistently majority agreement.

117). The challenge this may pose “to the consolidation and health of democracy” (Lu/Chu 2021: 118) may also be seen as a fairly rational choice by a people who have experienced limited governance performance in their country and, as a result, are still primarily focused on meeting their fundamental needs.

Crucially, in contrast to many social scientists, Filipinos do not perceive the Duterte presidency as a time of democratic backsliding. Regular SWS surveys show that Filipinos have never been as satisfied with the way democracy works as during the Duterte years, with an average satisfaction rate of 81 percent. The same holds true for Filipinos’ perception of how much respect is there for individual human rights. While in the 2012 WVS survey 87 percent already opted for a great deal or very much, this high rate remained stable in the 2019 survey (89 percent) despite the human rights violations during Duterte’s war on drugs. Finally, the share of Filipinos who claimed that they can say anything they want without fear remained stable over 15 years up to the onset of the COVID pandemic, irrespective of the presidency, with 55 percent agreeing and about 21 percent disagreeing (SWS).

The next chapter will explore how these preferences translate into a preference for a specific type of leadership, which I would describe as caring and enforcing. Many Filipinos viewed Duterte as embodying this ideal type of leadership more closely than any of the alternatives.

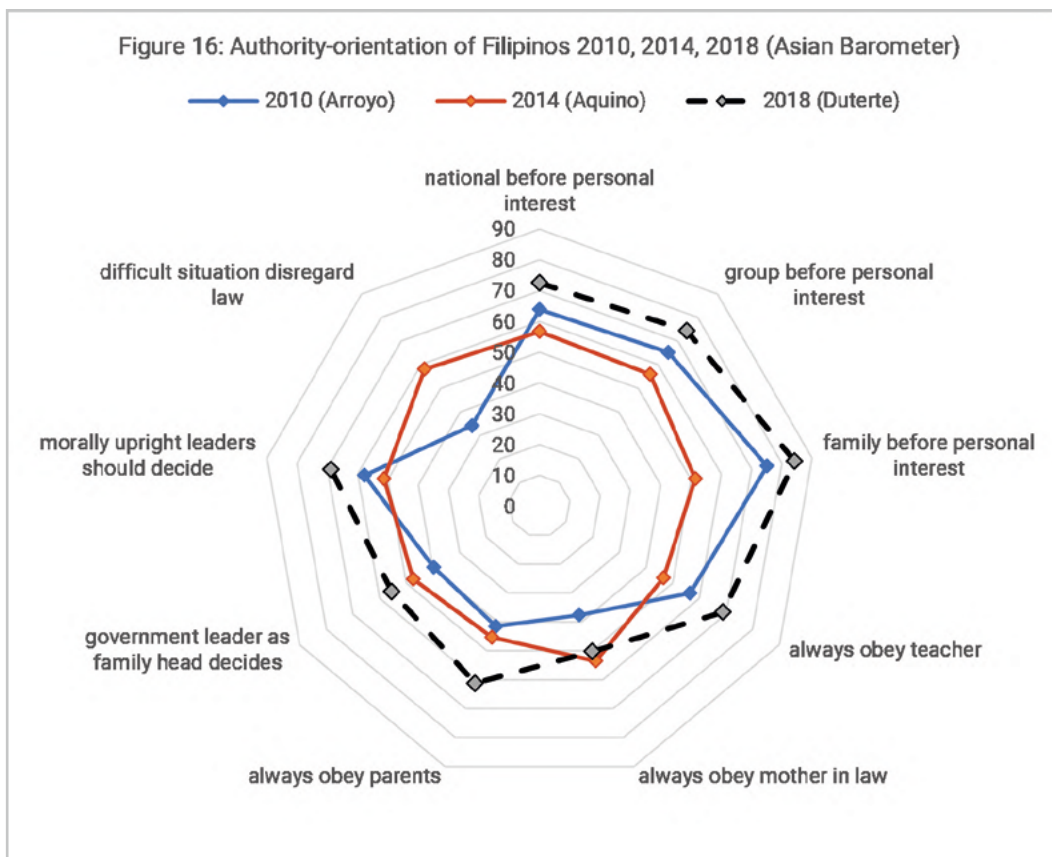
### **3.3 SUPPORT FOR THE DECISIVE LEADER: CARE AND COERCION**

The limitations to support for democracy and human rights are not rooted solely in the focus on fulfilling fundamental human needs. There are also specific cultural inclinations towards strong leadership and a willingness to submit to individuals seen as decisive, caring strongmen, who would not hesitate to use coercion if deemed necessary for the greater good. These two strands—the emphasis on performance and the preference for authoritarian values—have been brought together in recent studies by Ronald Pernia.

Pernia argues that “expressions of support for strong leadership, which may be seen merely as an authoritarian values [sic], is an individual’s way of signaling to the government and political leadership about their fundamental desires. In other words, casting support for a kind of strong leadership is a consequence of both rational calculation and enduring cultural values of citizens” (Pernia 2023: 66). Hence, authoritarian values serve as an underlying, latent preferential pattern that makes Filipino citizens predisposed to embrace a view of government leaders possessing full decisional authority, akin to a family head (Pernia 2022a). This preference then becomes activated when strongmen leaders come into the picture (Pernia 2022b).

The Asian Barometer survey provides various items that offer a comprehensive analysis of Filipino attitudes towards different aspects of leadership and leader-follower relationships. These aspects include 1) the relationship between the group and the individual, 2) attitudes towards authority figures, 3) expectations of how the government should lead, and 4) the role of due process.

While authority orientation was diminished in almost all aspects from Arroyo to Aquino, the results of the Duterte period survey saw a significant overall strengthening of Filipino authority orientation (figure 16).



This orientation is not absolute and comes with certain conditions and limitations. In practical terms, Filipinos tend to associate the term “government” with its chief executive, viewing the national government as personified in the president, akin to the head of a national family. However, this perception does not grant the president a blank check for arbitrary rule. It is crucial to emphasize the additional requirement of moral integrity. Moreover, as will be seen below, the ideal leadership is also results-oriented, meaning it must be successful in addressing the various socioeconomic dimensions that many Filipinos consider essential for democratic governance.

The familial conceptualization of leadership, characterized by a caring yet stern father figure, is perhaps best exemplified by local chief executives, such as municipal or city mayors and provincial governors. Duterte, both as a candidate and later as president, presented himself as a down-to-earth, decisive, but caring mayor from Davao, prioritizing practical problem-solving for the people over strict adherence to correct procedures (on Duterte’s fit with a set of personality traits, see figure 21 below). His speeches covered a range of topics, from reducing bureaucratic red tape to negotiating with communist insurgents, but consistently centered on his hallmark issue: the fight against crime. His

style of communication aimed to minimize social distance, portraying him as a caring father figure establishing order for his “children.” This image was as evident in his interactions during a local festival in Bacolod City while engaging with a group of female volunteers dedicated to rehabilitating drug users in Pampanga province:

I would like to replicate what we did in Davao. [...] the practice there allows for [...] police clearance to be done uniformly within three days. Only three days for everything. [applause]. I do not want to see Filipinos queuing in line. [...]

When I was mayor, I was very strict, extremely strict. [...] at that time, I had a sense that the crimes evolving were mainly generated by drugs. So, I was very strict then, and I continue to be strict now. I told the people there—and this is what it’s all about—I said to the people there: You kidnappers, you drug syndicates, you drug lords, you troublemakers in people’s lives, leave this place because I will really kill you. [applause] [...] Nothing is free in this life. If you violate something like that, you have to pay. [...] As a mayor, I have a job. I have to keep the city alive. I have to make it more habitable. (Duterte 2016a)

When I became the mayor [...] I told the people that I wanted a peaceful city. The first trouble there was the conflict between the military and the NPA (New People’s Army). They were killing each other, shooting right in the city. So I talked to the NPA and asked them, [...]. Don’t do it in my city [...]. Actually, we talk on the same wavelength. I come from a poor family. [...] So poverty is deeply ingrained in my life. [...] And so, what I wanted was a developed city. I told the NPA, “Comrades, since we’re alike, just move aside for now.” We understood each other because we speak the language of the poor. [...]

You know, I was a prosecutor, so I can read the mind of a criminal. I was a prosecutor for ten years. I could read your mind if it’s a criminal mind. So, when I became the mayor, I went straight to the point. I told them, “Leave Davao. Don’t harm our children, because if you deprive us of the youth for the next generation, I will kill you. Do not destroy my city. [...]” So I said, “leave, or else we will really kill each other here.” (Duterte 2016b)

Another illustration of Duterte’s strong-willed personality, which blurred the lines between the political and the private, between law and social norms, was his 2015 decision to grant a hero’s burial for Leoncio Pitao, a Mindanao commander of the NPA (New People’s Army), who was killed in an encounter with the Philippine army. The burial was accompanied by a funeral march of thousands from various parts of Mindanao, with red flags waving in Davao City (Mindanews 2015; Caduaya 2015). Duterte negotiated an informal temporary ceasefire for Pitao’s burial, opened a city hall for the public wake, and paid his respects to the widow of the slain guerilla leader.



His defense of this decision was rooted in family values of care, respect for a morally upright person, and a knightly understanding of honor. To him it was important to extend these gestures, even to a perceived adversary, as a matter of principle and compassion:

Parago [Pitao] is dead. Death is permanent. But to me when a person is dead it is all even. [...] After all, that guy is not an ugly guy. [...] He was not a robber. He did not sell drugs. He was there dreaming of a different setup for the Philippines. That is all his sin [...]. We should not be contrasting on death. (Duterte quoted in Philippine Daily Inquirer 2015)

With this decision, Duterte clearly exceeded his competencies, pressuring the army into accepting a parade of thousands of guerillas and Communist supporters in Davao City. However, he simultaneously conveyed a highly moralistic message that resonated well within a familistic frame and was appreciated by many Mindanaoans.

Through his actions as mayor, such as establishing a functioning city bureaucracy, engaging with NPA leaders in the hills, and paying last respects to an upright guerrilla leader, Duterte crafted a political persona as a politician capable of getting things done in various spheres of politics. These image solidified his reputation as a decisive and action-oriented leader, who could also succeed on the national level.

#### **3.4 SUMMING UP: LATENT DISCONTENT WITH A LOW-PERFORMING DEMOCRACY, HIGH TOLERANCE FOR COERCIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING, AND A YEARNING FOR A CARING BUT STERN FATHER-LEADER**

This section provided a partial explanation for why many Filipinos embraced Duterte's vision of an unrelenting war against illegal drugs and elected him as president based on this platform. It also sheds light on why he managed to gather almost universal support during the six years of his presidency, despite the media's coverage of large-scale killings. Three key factors are at play:

First, a relatively significant portion of the population justifies violent self-help as a means of resolving conflicts.

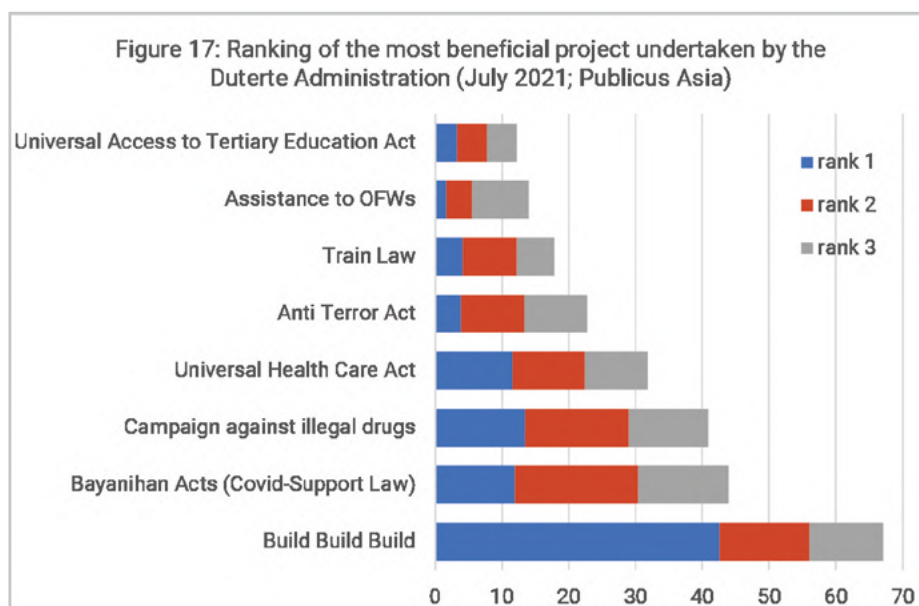
Second, while democracy may hold value, it is not seen as having intrinsic values on its own. Instead, its legitimacy is contingent upon its ability to deliver tangible improvements in core human needs. The positive evaluation of the martial law period (1972–1981) illustrates that Filipinos tend to support a "procedural shortcut" in the form of a strong leader when they perceive potential gains in living conditions and crime reduction. Duterte was seen as an opportunity not just for security but also for development and social justice. The media portrayal of Davao City as an economically successful and orderly city, attributed to the hands-on problem-solving governance of Mayor Rodrigo Duterte, reinforced this perception.

Finally, for many Filipinos, politics should mirror a moral universe similar to the family, with a strong father figure who is decisive but operates within the framework of a familistic moral universe. This figure takes responsibility and defends the good people at any cost and by any means.

#### 4. CONSEQUENCES OF DUTERTE’S “SUCCESSFUL” PRESIDENCY

The above analysis strongly suggests that Duterte won not due to pre-existing shifts in public perceptions of personal or national security but because of a skillful, temporary reshaping of the public’s view of crime at both the national and the local level. This happened within the context of broader discontent with the output of Philippine democracy and a general preference for strong and results-oriented leadership. What then are the consequences of this choice made by 40 percent of the voters and later on broadly and unwaveringly supported by 80 percent of Filipinos throughout these six years? Did this experience lead to a reevaluation of ingrained preferences, and if so, in which direction?

Simply put, in the eyes of most Filipinos, Duterte did an excellent job. As shown earlier, PNP-reported crime levels decreased significantly, with serious crimes like homicide and murder dropping by over 50 percent, robbery, theft, and carnapping by close to 80 percent, and physical injury by 40 percent. These figures were based on official data comparing the last six months of the Aquino presidency with the corresponding period of the Duterte presidency (see figure 1 in section 2.1 above).

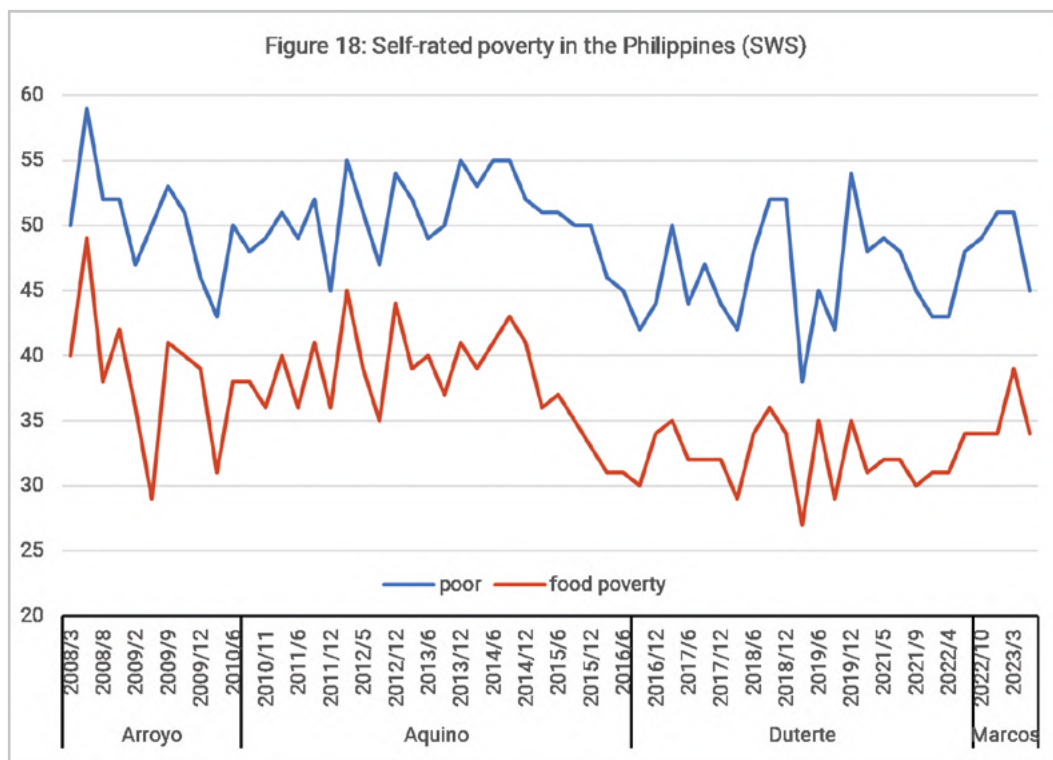


In addition, people had a decidedly positive view on a number of reforms that targeted social and economic problems, from tax reform, over rice tariffication<sup>14</sup> and an ease of doing business act, to the Univer-

14 This 2019 law removed quantitative restrictions on the import of rice and replaced it with high import tariffs, in order to ensure sufficient supply without hurting farmers due to low prices on the global market.

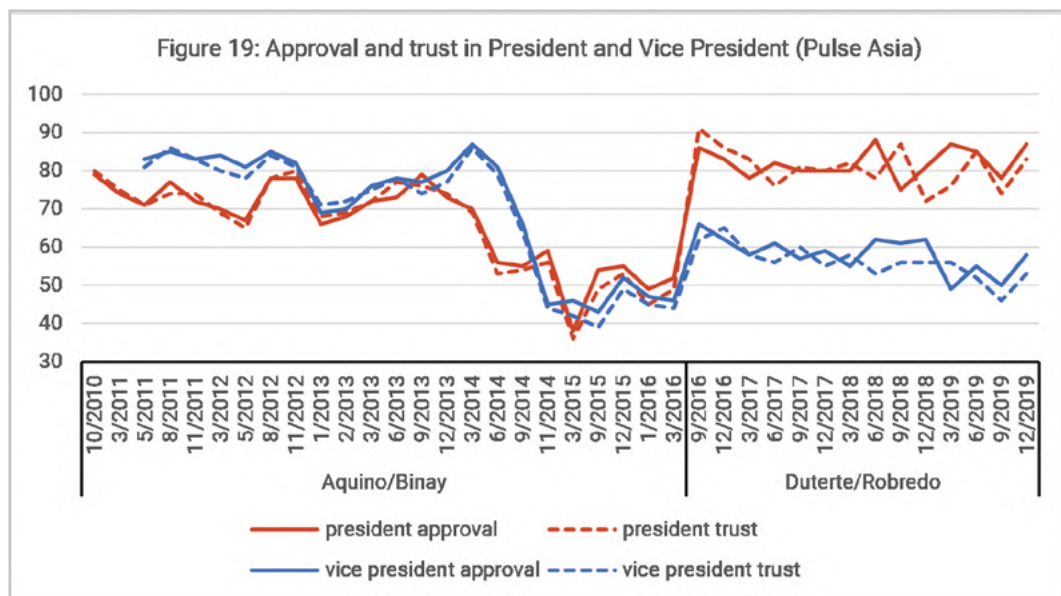
sal Health Care Act and the Free Tertiary Education Law (figure 17). Most importantly, Duterte put in motion a huge infrastructure program called “Build, Build, Build”, aimed at easing the vast infrastructure problems in the Philippines, which was perceived in hindsight as the most beneficial project far ahead of the campaign against illegal drugs, even though it had played no role in the election campaign.

The widely perceived economic success is evident in the self-rated poverty levels, which actually declined under Duterte after a decade of stagnation (figure 18). This is particularly surprising considering the impact of the COVID pandemic and repeated, long-term shutdowns, which would have been expected to cause a rise in self-rated poverty. However, the positive self-assessment is also supported by official poverty data, which recorded a poverty incidence of 23.5 percent in 2015, decreased to 16.7 percent by 2018, and then only slightly increased to 18.1 percent by 2021 (Philippine Statistics Authority, no year, tab 2).

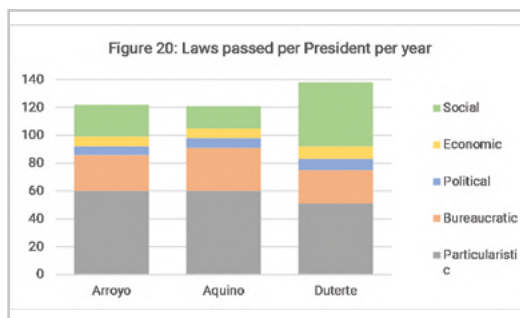


	POOR	FOOD POOR
Arroyo (3/2008–6/2010)	50.7	38.5
Aquino	50.6	38.1
Duterte	46.1	32.1
Marcos (to 6/2023)	49.0	35.3

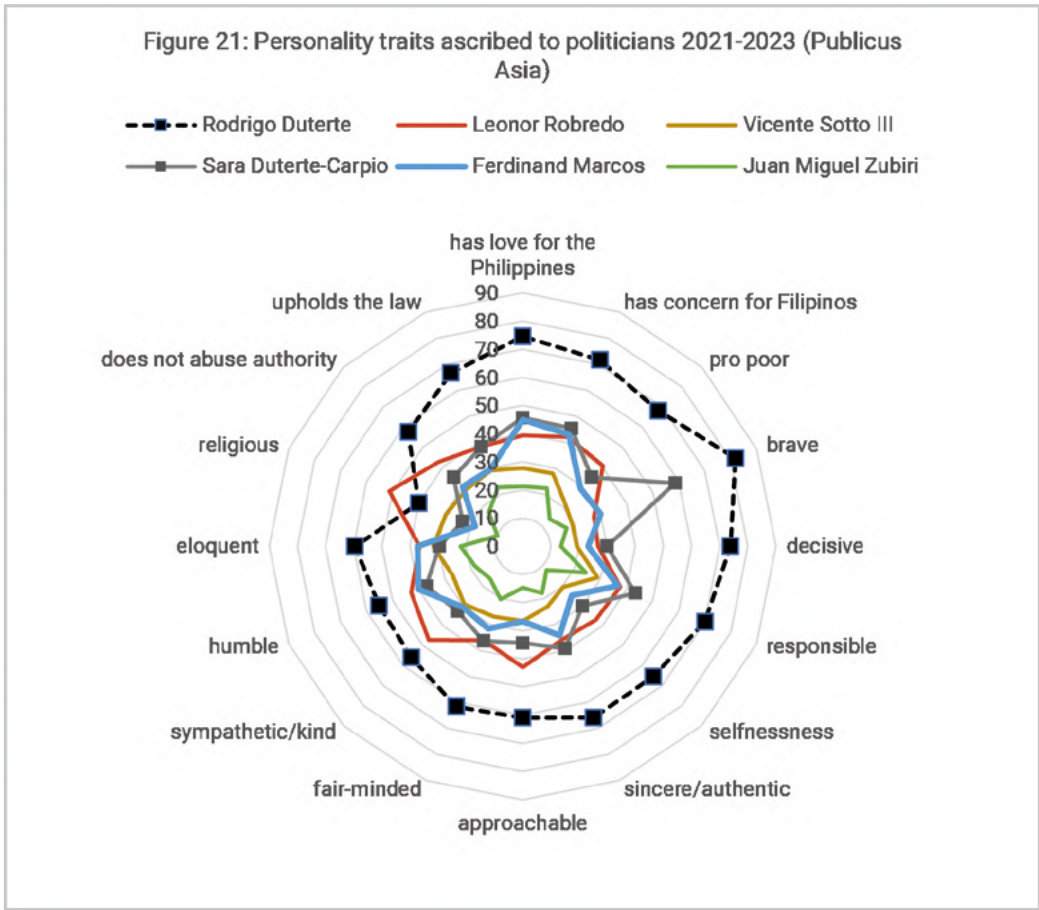
This indicates that, in the long run, Duterte’s image as a successful crime fighter was complemented by his perceived ability to effectively address socioeconomic issues.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Duterte ensured that a considerable portion of programs and resources were allocated to regions beyond Luzon, signaling a heightened focus on the previously neglected “periphery.” It is not surprising that approval rates of government performance, not only on crime control but on other national concerns as well, saw a significant increase and remained stable over time during Duterte’s presidency (see figure 5 in section 2.2 above). Unlike during Aquino’s term, there was no wear-out effect on approval or trust ratings over the years for Duterte, both of which stood at an average of more than 82 and 81 percent respectively until the onset of the COVID pandemic, whereas the ratings for his vice president and liberal opponent stood at an average of 58 and 56 percent, respectively (Pulse Asia; see figure 19).



15 This perceived ability can also be somewhat quantified by measuring the government’s success in passing laws. As Yusingco et al. (2023: 63) note, Duterte’s “presidency stands out for its legislative productivity and the enactment of long-overdue laws.” Particularly noteworthy is the significant number of laws on social, economic and political reforms passed under him (see figure 20 below). Equally significant is the low number of “particularistic” laws that cater solely to the needs of specific local governments, i.e., to the needs of individual politicians and families, reflecting a more rigorous approach to such interests. Furthermore, the Duterte administration succeeded in passing several laws that had been stalled in the legislative process for decades (see Yusingco et al. 2003: 72–73).



The generalized assessments, such as approval and trust in a president, can be further broken down into specific personality traits that Filipinos value in their political leaders. Publicus Asia has conducted a series of representative surveys from late 2020 to the present, using a consistent template since July 2021. This allows for a detailed comparison of how top politicians are perceived as leadership personae in the minds of the people.<sup>16</sup>



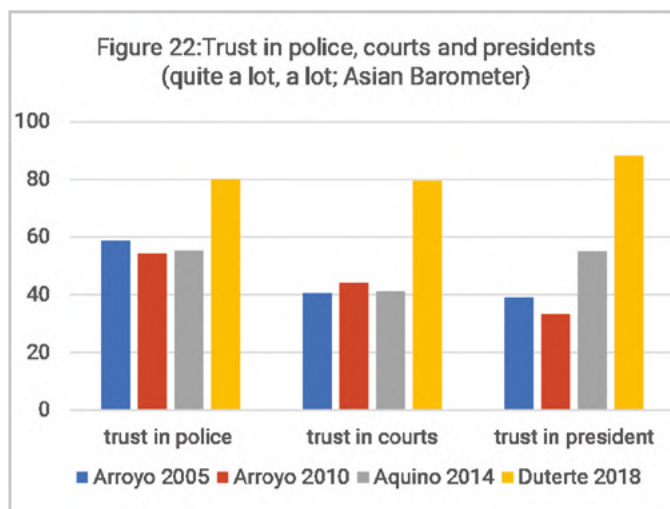
The results are quite remarkable, as Duterte clearly stands out as a leader in the eyes of the majority of Filipinos (figure 21). During his presidency, he received by far the highest ratings for all personality traits, except for religiousness. On average, 64 percent of respondents attributed all characteristics to him, compared to just 39 percent for the second-place finisher, his deputy Leonor Ro-

<sup>16</sup> To facilitate the comparison, I calculated the average of the last four surveys during Duterte’s presidency and compared it to the average of the first three surveys available for the current Marcos presidency. The survey encompassed the president, vice president, and the senate president, as they hold the most prominent positions institutionally.

Since Publicus Asia predefines the personality traits in the survey, the results do not allow measurement of the significance Filipinos assign to each specific trait as essential leadership characteristics. Nonetheless, the survey allows for an assessment of the type of politician perceived to embody certain traits to varying degrees. In this way, it offers insights into the public’s perception of various leaders and how they are perceived with regard to their personal qualities and leadership attributes.

brede.<sup>17</sup> And he still far outperforms all current top officials. In September 2023, more than one year after the end of his term as president, he not only still holds the highest levels of trust amongst all potential candidates for senate elections, but also leads the field with respect to voting predisposition (Publicus Asia 2023).

As demonstrated earlier, this enduring high level of trust in and support for Duterte translated into a significant increase in trust in various government institutions, particularly trust in the police. While data from the Asian Barometer indicated a relatively stable trust level of around 56 percent for police from the early 2000s to the mid-2010s, it surged to 80 percent in 2018. A similar trend was observed for trust in courts, which rose from approximately 44 percent in the decade before Duterte to 80 percent (figure 22 below). Overall, trust in law enforcement institutions seems to have been in line with and dependent on trust in the president.



The favorable perception of Duterte's leadership is also evident in the way respondents assessed their personal and the national economic situation as significantly improved compared to earlier surveys. While previous survey results showed displayed relatively consistent evaluations, the assessment two years into Duterte's presidency stands out as exceptional. Respondents overwhelmingly expressed positive views about both the current economic situation and the perceived changes over the past years, as well as future projections. Over 60 percent of respondents believed that the current economic situations of the nation and the family were either good or very good. A similar percentage of respondents felt that the economic situation had improved, describing it as a little or much better than in previous years. Moreover, most respondents expected this positive trend to continue into the future (Asian Barometer).

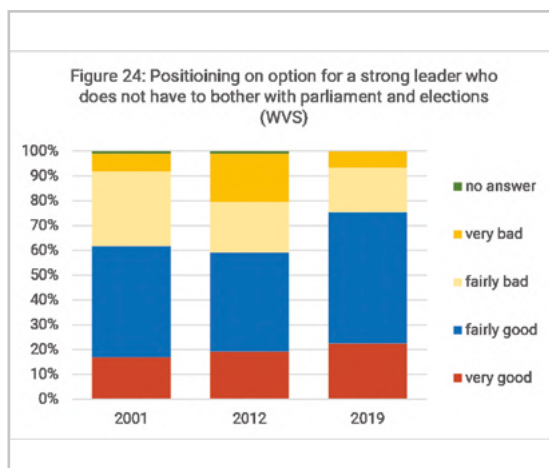
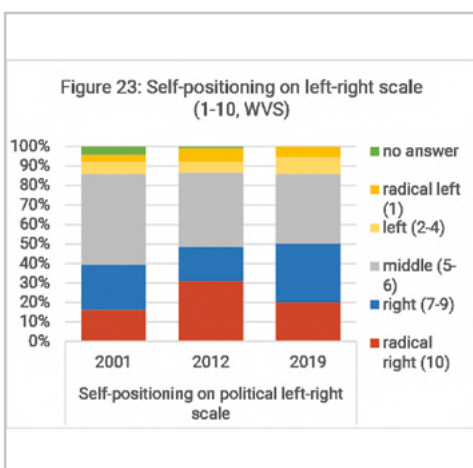
<sup>17</sup> The figure shows the average values for four rounds of surveys on Duterte, Robredo and Sotto in 2021 and 2022 and three rounds on their successors in office Marcos, Duterte-Carpio and Zubiri in 2022 and 2023. Overall values were highly stable for each of the persons over time.

Interestingly, despite the positive changes in economic perceptions and overall support for the Duterte administration’s policies, reported crime victimization and fear of crime remained relatively stable from early 2017 onwards (see figures 8 and 9 in section 2.3). Self-reported crime victimization did not show significant fluctuations, and neighborhood fears remained consistent at levels similar to the immediate pre-Duterte years, except for fear of too many drug addicts in the neighborhood, which declined significantly.

A late 2018 SWS survey revealed that about 66 percent of Filipinos reported a decrease in the number of illegal drug users in their area. Moreover, 95 percent of respondents emphasized the importance of the police capturing drug pushers alive, suggesting a critical stance towards the use of deadly force. However, more than 80 percent also emphasized that they believed that it was also *important to the police* to capture drug pushers alive, suggesting that the majority of Filipinos subscribed to the government’s narrative that police actions were in self-defense (Social Weather Stations 2019). This alignment with the government’s perspective allowed Filipinos to maintain their overall positive assessment of the war on drugs and the performance of the Duterte administration.

The positive assessment of the Duterte administration’s performance had mixed effects on the authority orientation of Filipinos. On one hand, there was a notable decrease in the percentage of Filipinos positioning themselves on the far right of the political spectrum. However, the overall percentage of Filipinos positioning themselves as “right-leaning” remained unchanged at approximately 50 percent of the population. Meanwhile, the proportion of “left-leaning” Filipinos remained small and stable, comprising not more than 12 percent of the population (see figure 23).

At the same time, the Duterte presidency significantly reinforced Filipinos’ preference for strong leaders. Before Duterte’s term, around 60 percent of Filipinos held positive views about having a strong leader who could act without being constrained by parliament or elections. This proportion increased to 76 percent two years into Duterte’s leadership (see figure 24).



In summary, the majority of Filipinos clearly prefer strong leadership both in their immediate social circles and in wider society and politics. They perceive the state as a macro-level family, with decision-making power resting in the hands of the person with the highest status. Instead of relying on democratic institutional controls to prevent abuse of power, Filipinos tend to favor morally upright individuals who they believe should not be bound by due process or law if they see a compelling need to enforce decisions for the public good. Given a strong leader, Filipinos readily embrace state institutions responsible for implementing the leader's projects. This enhanced trust in implementing institutions is drawn from the leader's charisma, giving them credibility.

The widely perceived multidimensional success of the Duterte presidency presents a challenge for Philippine democracy. While it remains unclear whether the campaign against illegal drugs actually reduced drug use in the country, available data indicate that the police's iron-fisted approach significantly reduced various other forms of crime. Additionally, there has been no significant rebound in crime rates following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions. Although police use of deadly force has decreased to pre-Duterte levels since late 2021, there is a risk of reverting to violent repression in response to rising crime levels in the future. The *perceived success* of such strategies, which legitimated targeted killings under the guise of regular police operations, has now become part of the cultural memory, making it easier for a similar demand to emerge independently of leaders' actions and media coverage in the future and simultaneously more attractive for politicians to turn to corresponding vote-maximizing strategies.

## **5. CONCLUSION: THE DUTERTE PRESIDENCY AS A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE**

The analyses above lead to the following essential findings.

Regarding the question of whether Duterte successfully harnessed a public groundswell for tougher crime control policies or created such a perception, data strongly suggest that there was no notable change in public views of crime's political importance or personal threat perception prior to Duterte's presidential campaign. It was only during the 2016 election campaign that a significant shift occurred in public perception of crime. Crime also emerged as the foremost national concern, moving from fifth place to the top spot around and shortly after the elections.

This strongly suggests that public opinion followed the trajectory of the successful candidate's presidential campaign. Duterte, along with the media, shaped the narrative that allowed the public to turn a blind eye to highly excessive police use of deadly force. This was due not to a rise in punitiveness but rather to a short-term change in risk assessment that legitimized extraordinary means in the assumed state of exception, given the belief that society must eliminate illegal drugs. Duterte's image as a successful crimebuster during his time as mayor of Davao City played a crucial role in his promise to nationalize the Davao experience. He made something seem possible which until then was largely ignored by politicians: the eradication of drug addicts and pushers from the streets, leading to the eradication of fear and crime associated with them.



In terms of the underlying public values that potentially justify support for a tough-on-crime approach, a significant number of Filipinos demonstrate a strong belief in the justifiability of using violence in various social relations, blurring the line between legal and illegal behavior in the name of maintaining “order.” The limited information available suggests that Filipinos also exhibit high tolerance or approval for extralegal government actions against criminals that violate due process or human rights. Further, while Filipinos value democracy, they have an instrumental attitude towards it, strongly defining democracy by outcomes with respect to basic needs and granting significant leeway to strong yet caring political leaders, as long as these can present their actions as being in the best interest of the majority of the “good people” and claim the moral uprightness expected from leaders in a “national family” setting.

Taken together, these traits suggest a high cultural legitimacy for leaders who combine caring and punitive traits, as long as they can convincingly present themselves as providing *effective* government for the people. This preference allowed 40 percent of the population to elect as president a hands-on mayor, widely perceived to have successfully transformed a violent backwater into an orderly and thriving regional metropolis. Many of those who were initially hesitant before the elections changed their assessments once they perceived him as delivering on his promises.

For most Filipinos, Duterte was not the human rights villain portrayed in the liberal media. His campaign against illegal drugs was seen as part of a broader effort by a decisive president to address various pressing national issues, primarily economic and social in nature. Duterte’s political persona embodied the personal leadership traits that Filipinos desire in their political leaders. The positive assessment of the “Duterte experience” further strengthened the general Filipino preference for strong leadership that could, if necessary, override parliamentary controls.

Thus, two quite distinct dimensions collaborated to bring about Duterte’s election in 2016 and the lasting, overwhelming public support he and his forceful approach to law enforcement enjoyed among the Philippine population. Long-standing cultural predispositions and a primary emphasis on meeting basic human needs created an enabling background for a widespread pro-Duterte public choice. The catalyst for choosing a strongman-style president, widely believed to be capable of ensuring security, was provided by media hype that gave overwhelming salience to Duterte’s narrative of the Philippines teetering on the edge of becoming a narco-state during the election campaign. This resulted in a sudden shift in popular anxiety and risk assessment.

The change in people’s perception of security and their support for the violent campaign was not driven by punitive sentiments, but by several intertwined dynamics: the desire for a safe living environment, the belief that extreme measures appeared necessary to attain it, and the perception that Duterte had all credentials to successfully keep his promise. In other words, violence seemed acceptable as a means of dealing with an otherwise unsurmountable and growing problem. The reduction in crime experienced during the six years of the Duterte administration provided some outcome legitimacy, based on the supposed fulfillment of the majority’s need for security. This “success,” in turn, consolidated the acceptance of violence as a means to establish and uphold order.

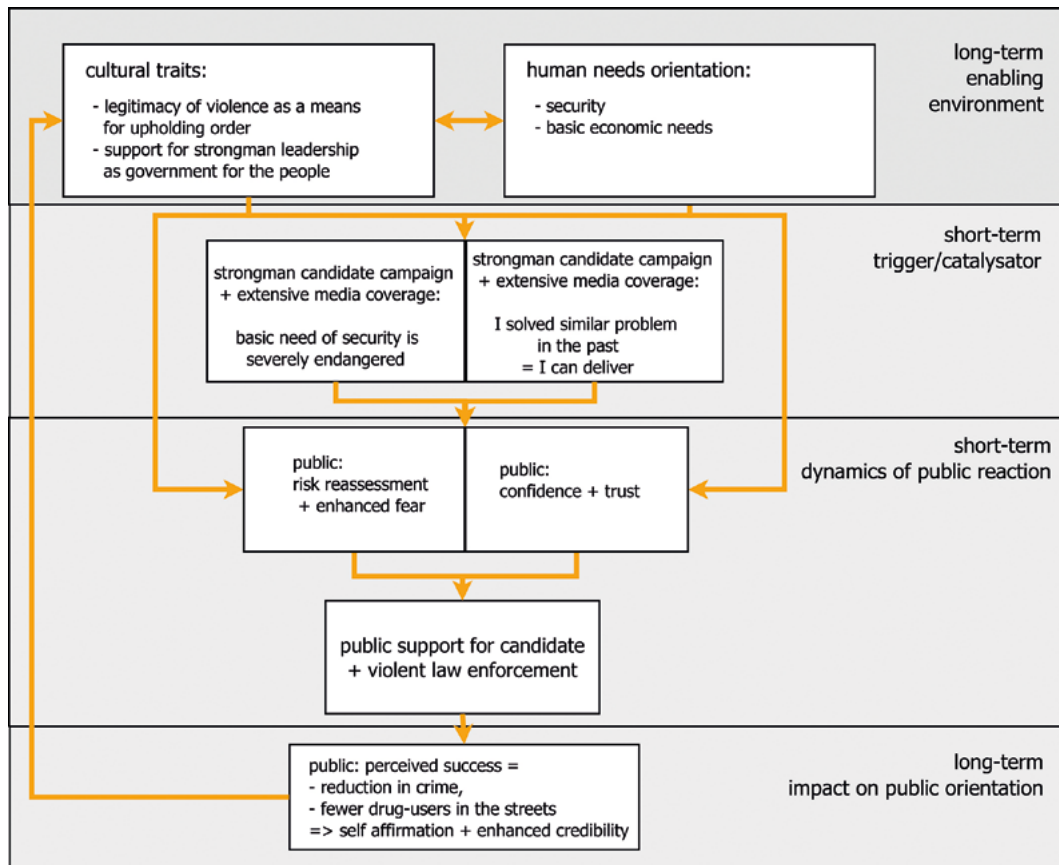


Fig. 25: Dimensions of the shift in and enduring quality of public support for iron-fisted crime control.

Over Duterte's six years in office, despite overwhelming condemnations of Duterte by the international media, liberal politicians, human rights organizations, and the international judiciary, public opinion in the Philippines remained largely unchanged. It is important to understand that the country still leans towards an illiberal outlook on democratic governance. Moreover, the primary concern of citizens revolves around basic human needs such as food, health, education, and security, which often take precedence over abstract principles like due process, rule of law, and human rights for individuals deemed as threats to society.

To make a meaningful impact, liberal democrats need to acknowledge these realities. While this report suggests that Filipinos may have a high tolerance for violence as a means of conflict resolution and a preference for strong and decisive leadership, it does not necessarily imply public punitiveness, that is, a demand for harsher punishment of criminals. The support for Duterte was not driven by punitiveness, but by a latent security need, magnified by Duterte's perceived success in Davao City, which led many to believe he could replicate this success at the national level.

Liberal democrats must be able to speak on the subject of personal and social security and appear credibly able and willing to act. A public demand for a secure environment should not be con-

fused with a demand for harsher punishment of criminals, and liberal democrats must demonstrate that security can be achieved while upholding liberal democracy and human rights principles. Putting crime control prominently on the agenda of liberal politics and presenting an alternative vision for addressing crime can prevent punitivist politicians from monopolizing the discourse on this critical aspect of human needs and fears. When liberal candidates pay little attention to a central issue such as the personal safety of the population, it is hardly surprising that many people place their trust in politicians with radical agendas. In retrospect, it is particularly problematic that most forms of crime declined significantly during the Duterte years. Unlike in many other countries, in the Philippines it is now easier to argue that extremely repressive law enforcement has a crime-minimizing effect, and that the social benefits for the many outweigh the social costs for the few.

Opposing iron-fisted law enforcement on the basis of human rights or due-process concerns will have no sufficient impact as long as liberal democrats cannot demonstrate that liberal democracy delivers on the core human need of security, and that adherence to due process and human rights is no hindrance to effective law enforcement. It is worth noting that this advice to put law enforcement on the liberal political agenda was already given six months before the 2016 elections, when Carlos Conde argued: “We need to fight crime legally, without committing more crime [...]. If other candidates make a strong commitment, they might get a shot at preventing a civil liberties nightmare” (Conde quoted in: Espina-Varona 2015). Unfortunately, none of the other candidates took this opportunity, and Duterte’s victory was realized without a strong challenge to his platform.

## REFERENCES

All sources were last checked on 1 September 2023.

- Amborst, Andreas 2017. How fear of crime affects punitive attitudes. *European Journal of Criminal Policy and Research* 23: 461–481.
- Ateneo De Davao University 2016. City Wide Social Survey – Series 5. <https://research.addu.edu.ph/downloads?page=1>.
- Ateneo De Davao University 2022. City Wide Social Survey – Series 13. <https://research.addu.edu.ph/downloads?page=2>.
- Brown, Gordon/Lukasz Walasek 2021. Models of Deliberate Ignorance in Individual Choice. In: Ralph Hertwig/Christoph Engel (eds.). *Deliberate Ignorance: Choosing Not to Know*. MIT Press: Cambridge MA, 121–137.
- Caduya, Editha Z. 2015. 'People's burial': Thousands march for NPA's Kumander Parago. July 10, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/98884-kumander-parago-pitao-funeral-davao/>.
- Carducci, Bernardo 2020. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In: Carducci, Bernardo/Christopher Nave (eds). *The Wiley Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences, Vol 1 Models and Theories*. Wiley. 269–273.
- Cohen, Stanley 2001. *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*. Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Coronel, Sheila 2016. 'I will kill all the drug lords': The Making of Rodrigo Duterte. *Davao Today* September 21, <https://davaotoday.com/politics/i-will-kill-all-the-drug-lords-the-making-of-rodrigo-duterte/>.
- Cupin, Bea 2014. PNP reports surge in crime in 2014. *Rappler* June 27, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/61798-pnp-crime-stats-2014/>.
- Curato, Nicole 2016. Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: penal Populism and Duterte's rise to Power. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35: 91–109.
- Dangerous Drugs Board 2008. *National Household Survey: Study on the Current Nature and Extent of Drug Abuse in the Philippines*. [http://www.ddb.gov.ph/images/psrsd\\_report/2008%20National%20Household%20Survey.pdf](http://www.ddb.gov.ph/images/psrsd_report/2008%20National%20Household%20Survey.pdf).
- Dangerous Drugs Board 2015. *Nationwide Survey on the Nature and Extent of Drug Abuse in the Philippines*. <https://pcij.org/uploads/5be017bdced4d-DDB-2015-Nationwide-Survey-Final-Reportc.pdf>.
- Duterte Rodrigo 2016a. Speech at the 37th Masskara Festival, Bacolod City. October 2 (original, partly in Filipino).
- Duterte Rodrigo 2016b. Duterte Speech with the Nanay Volunteer, Pampanga, 22 Dec 2016 (original partly in Filipino).
- Espina-Varona, Inday 2015. Killing for peace in the Philippines. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/killing-for-peace-in-the-philippines/74742>.
- Golman, Russel/David Hagman/George Loewenstein 2017. Information Avoidance. *Journal of Economic Literature* 55/1: 96–135.
- Hertwig, Ralph/Dagmar Ellerbrock 2022. Why people choose deliberate ignorance in times of societal transformation. *Cognition* 229: 1–10.

- Kenes, Bulent 2021. Rodrigo Roa Duterte: A Jingoist, Misogynist, Penal Populist. European Center for Populism Studies, [www.populismstudies.org](http://www.populismstudies.org).
- Kenny, Paul D./Ronald Holmes 2020. A new penal populism? Rodrigo Duterte, public opinion, and the war on drugs in the Philippines. *Journal of East Asian Studies* 20: 187–205.
- Lu, Jie/Yun-han Chu 2021. Trading Democracy for Governance. *Journal of Democracy* 32/4: 115–130.
- Mindanews 2015. Thousands pay tribute as NPA's Commander Parago is laid to rest. July 10, <https://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2015/07/thousands-pay-tribute-as-npas-commander-parago-is-laid-to-rest/>.
- Pernia, Ronald 2022a. Authoritarian values and institutional trust: Theoretical considerations and evidence from the Philippines. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 7/2: 204–232.
- Pernia, Ronald 2022b. Explaining the High Political Trust in the Philippines: The Role of Citizens' Subjective Health and Political Values. *Philippine Political Science Journal*.
- Pernia, Ronald 2023. Populists in power. trust in public institutions and support for strong leadership in the post-authoritarian democracies of Indonesia and the Philippines. *Asian Journal of Political Science* 31/1: 63–85.
- Philippine Daily Inquirer 2015. Duterte on Parago burial: 'He was no robber'. July 12; <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/704580/duterte-on-parago-burial-he-was-no-robber>.
- Philippine Daily Inquirer 2016. PH becoming a 'narco state,' Duterte, Cayetano warn. January 28, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/759503/ph-becoming-a-narco-state-duterte-cayetano-warn>.
- Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency no year. #RealNumbersPH. <https://www.facebook.com/real-numbersph/>.
- Philippine National Police no year. Crime Statistics. <https://pnp.gov.ph/crime-statistics/>.
- Philippine Statistics Authority no year. 2021 full year official poverty statistics tables, tab 2, [https://psa.gov.ph/system/files/phdsd2023-01/2021%2520Full%2520Year%2520Official%2520Poverty%2520Statistics%2520Tables\\_f.xlsx](https://psa.gov.ph/system/files/phdsd2023-01/2021%2520Full%2520Year%2520Official%2520Poverty%2520Statistics%2520Tables_f.xlsx).
- Pratt, John 2007. *Penal Populism*. Routledge, Milton Park/New York.
- PublicusAsia 2023. Pahayag 2023 third quarter survey executive summary. <https://www.publicusasia.com/executive-summary-pahayag-third-quarter-survey-sept-7-12-2023/>.
- Ranada, Pia 2016a. Duterte bares details of 3-to-6 month anti-crime plan. *Rappler* April 14, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/129520-rodrigo-duterte-anti-crime-plan/>.
- Ranada, Pia 2016b. Duterte to Binay: no extrajudicial killings, I still have values. April 8, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/128742-duterte-binay-extrajudicial-killings-values/>.
- Social Weather Stations 2019. Fourth Quarter Social Weather Survey: 66% of Filipinos say the number of illegal drug users in their area has decreased. February 16, <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20190216095842>.
- Social Weather Stations 2023. They never left: Popular impressions of Ferdinand Marcos as President after February 1986. <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20230913112336>.

- Students from UP 2016. How serious is the PH drug problem? Here's the data. Rappler, August 27, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/144331-data-drug-problem-philippines/>.
- Sutton, Barbara/Kari Marie Norgaard 2013. Cultures of Denial: Avoiding Knowledge of State Violations of Human Rights in Argentina and the United States. *Sociological Forum* 28/3, 495–524.
- Sweeny, Kate/Darya, Melnyk/Wendi Miller/James A. Shepperd 2010. Information Avoidance: Who, What, When, and Why? *Review of General Psychology*, 14/4: 340-353.
- Tejada, Ariel Paolo 2016. Duterte vows to end criminality in 3 months. *Philippine Star* February 20, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/02/20/1555349/duterte-vows-end-criminality-3-months>.
- World Values Survey no year. Online Data Analysis. <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.
- Worldbank no year. World Bank Open Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/>.
- Yusingco, Michael Henry/Ronald Mendoza/Gabrielle Ann Mendoza/Jurel Yap 2023. A Philippine Strongman's Legislative and Constitutional Reforms Legacy. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 42/1: 63–89.

## PRIF REPORT

*PRIF Reports offer background analyses on political events and developments and present research findings.*

Demirci, Irem / Perras, Clara / Scheyer, Victoria / Wisotzki, Simone (2023): Backlash Against and Resistance To Feminist Peacebuilding, PRIF Report 6/2023, Frankfurt/M., DOI: 10.48809/prifrep2306

Dembinski, Matthias (2023): Zum Design militärischer Interventionen für Frieden und humanitären Schutz. Motive, Trends und Konsequenzen für deutsche und europäische Politik, PRIF Report 5/2023, Frankfurt/M, DOI: 10.48809/prifrep2305.



<https://hsfk.de/PRIF-Reports>

## PRIF SPOTLIGHT

*PRIF Spotlights discuss current political and social issues.*

Barrios Sabogal, Laura Camila / Lopez Alvarez, Santiago / Wolff, Jonas (2023): Reintegration durch lokale Interaktion. Der kolumbianische Friedensprozess aus Sicht ländlicher Gemeinschaften, PRIF Spotlight 10/2023, Frankfurt/M., DOI: 10.48809/prifspot2310.

Kreuzer, Peter (2023): Failing in Control. Legislative weakness in the face of a strongman president in the Philippines, PRIF Spotlight 9/2023, Frankfurt/M, DOI: 10.48809/prifspot2309.



<https://hsfk.de/PRIF-Spotlights>

## PRIF BLOG


*PRIF Blog presents articles on current political issues and debates that are relevant for peace and conflict research.*



<https://blog.prif.org/>

PRIF Reports and PRIF Spotlights are open-access publications and are available for download at [www.prif.org](http://www.prif.org). If you wish to receive our publications via email or in print, please contact [publikationen@prif.org](mailto:publikationen@prif.org).

 [https://twitter.com/PRIF\\_org](https://twitter.com/PRIF_org)

 <https://blog.prif.org/>

# RODRIGO DUTERTE: THE LEGACY OF A WIDELY POPULAR STRONGMAN-PRESIDENT

Peter Kreuzer

Based on various opinion surveys, this report analyses the lasting impact of Rodrigo Duterte's presidency (2016-2022) on politics in the Philippines. Despite massive human rights violations in his war on drugs, Duterte garnered strong and enduring support. The report highlights that Duterte initially manipulated public perceptions of crime and security to secure public backing. His positive legacy rests on cultural acceptance of violence by Filipinos, and their enduring prioritization of basic needs fulfillment due to the long-term development failure of Philippine elite-democracy. This calls for advocates of liberal democracy to advance convincing alternatives for the delivery of welfare and security.

Dr. Peter Kreuzer is a senior researcher in PRIF's research department "Intrastate Conflict." In his research he focuses on Philippine domestic politics, violence in multiethnic societies, and maritime conflicts in East and Southeast Asia.