



Global Populism: A Lineage of Filipino Strongmen from Quezon to Marcos and Duterte

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ABSTRACT. The rising global phenomenon of populism has been framed as a reaction to the unmet promises of globalization in nominally democratic nations. Rodrigo Duterte has similarly been positioned along this trend. This article traces the lineage of Filipino strongmen from Quezon to Marcos and Duterte and shows that they emerged through juxtaposition of skilled diplomacy and local controls. This situates Duterte at an intersection of global trends and local political tradition, beyond the flat application of the term populism to the Philippines. Studying these Filipino strongmen reveals the role of performative violence in projecting domestic strength and a complementary need for diplomatic success to demonstrate international influence. These overlooked aspects of global populism can be used to speculate about the political fate of populist strongmen in disparate corners of the globe.

KEYWORDS. Manuel Quezon · Ferdinand Marcos · Rodrigo Duterte · populism · strongmen

INTRODUCTION

In the last years of his martial law dictatorship, President Ferdinand Marcos sanctioned some 2,500 extrajudicial killings, and during his first months in power President Rodrigo Duterte has presided over 7,000 such executions for his drug war. Are these simply senseless murders, or do they have some larger significance that can help us understand the sudden proliferation of populist leaders in nominally democratic nations around the globe?

The rise of Duterte as a populist strongman not only resonates deeply with his country's political culture but also reflects broader global trends that make his blunt rhetoric and iconoclastic diplomacy seem unexceptional. After a quarter century of globalization that followed the Cold War, displaced workers around the world began mobilizing politically to oppose an economic order that privileged

corporations and economic elites. Emerging with a surprising speed and simultaneity from the margins of their respective societies, a generation of populist leaders gained influence by giving voice, often with violent or virulent inflections, to public concerns about the social costs of globalization. Whether the politics were leftist like the Kirchners in Argentina or deeply conservative like Erdogan in Turkey, the resulting populist regimes often shared a “serious backlash” against the “highly inegalitarian” impact of neoliberal economic policy marked by deregulation and open markets (Aytaç and Öniş 2014, 41–59).

Reflecting these global trends, just 19 percent of Americans polled in July 2016 believed that trade creates more jobs despite numerous economics studies showing otherwise, while an earlier survey of public opinion in forty-four countries found that only 26 percent of respondents felt trade lowers prices. Adding to this skepticism about the benefits of trade, Chinese imports eliminated 2.4 million American jobs between 1999 and 2011, closing plants for furniture in North Carolina, glass in Ohio, and auto parts and steel across the Midwest (Goodman 2016). As nations worldwide imposed a combined 2,100 restrictions on imports to staunch a similar loss of jobs, world trade started slowing and actually fell during the second quarter of 2016 for the first time during a period of economic growth since World War II (*New York Times* October 30, 2016).

Across Europe, hypernationalistic parties like the Danish People’s Party, French National Front, Greece’s Golden Dawn, Alternative for Germany, Sweden Democrats, UK Independence Party, and others won voters by cultivating nativist reaction to these global trends. And in the most visible rejection of global integration, the British public voted, in June 2016, to quit the European Union. Simultaneously, a generation of populist demagogues gained popularity or power in nominally democratic nations around the world—notably, Norbert Hofer (Austria), Marine Le Pen (France), Miloš Zeman (Czech Republic), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), Geert Wilders (Netherlands), Vladimir Putin (Russia), Recep Erdogan (Turkey), Donald Trump (United States), Narendra Modi (India), Prabowo Subianto (Indonesia), Thaksin Shinawatra (Thailand), and Rodrigo Duterte (Philippines) (Ashkenas and Aisch 2016; Lyman 2016).

“Demagogues are still emerging, in the West and outside it,” observed Indian essayist Pankaj Mishra, “as the promise of prosperity collides with massive disparities of wealth, power, education, and status” (2016, 46–54). Giving weight to those words, the Philippine economy grew by a sustained 6 percent per annum from 2010 to 2016,

but the number of the poor remained largely unchanged. Just forty elite Filipino families on the Forbes's wealth ranking controlled 76 percent of this growth, while a staggering 26 million poor struggled to survive on a dollar a day as development projects, accelerated by this economic expansion, were evicting many from their squatter shacks and subsistence farms (Agence France-Presse 2013; Sicat 2016; Yap 2016).

To explore the ideology that underlies the appeal of these demagogues, rhetoric scholar Michael J. Lee analyzes populism as a movement that, above all, defines the national community by both "shared characteristics" and a common "enemy," much like the Nazis excluded certain groups by race. Just as American prairie populists of the 1890s once demonized banking, so their contemporary counterparts are "systemic revolutionaries battling present perversions on behalf of past principles." Finally, populist movements exhibit, Lee argues, a desire for "apocalyptic confrontation . . . as the vehicle to revolutionary change" through "a mythic battle" (2006, 357–64).

With a similar emphasis on inclusion and exclusion, political scientist Jan-Werner Müller argues that "the tell-tale sign of populism" is leaders who "claim that they, and only they, represent the people." That claim is "always distinctly moral" with the result that populists, once in office, purport to act in the name of the "real people" and "will not recognize anything such as a legitimate opposition" (Müller 2016). Somewhat more succinctly, Cas Mudde defines current populism as "an ideology that separates society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite,' and that holds that politics should be an expression of 'the general will' of the people" (2016). Taking that division further, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris argue that populism "emphasizes faith in the wisdom and virtue of ordinary people (the silent majority) over the 'corrupt' establishment," while defining those ordinary people through "nativism or xenophobic nationalism, which assumes that the 'people' are a uniform whole" (2016, 6–7).

Although seemingly universal in depicting the way populist demagogues often rely on violent rhetoric, this literature omits their actual violence and its potent political symbolism that frequently accompanies contemporary populism. For over a decade, Russia's Vladimir Putin, the likely progenitor of this recent resurgence of populism, has demonstrated his bare-chested power by murdering opponents—memorably, a lethal spritz of polonium 210 for KGB defector Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006, shooting journalist Anna Politkovskaya outside her Moscow apartment that same year, a

fusillade for opposition leader Boris Nemtsov in downtown Moscow in 2015, and four fatal bullets for defector Denis Voronenkov on a Kiev sidewalk in March 2017 that Ukraine called “an act of state terrorism.” While some killings exhibited clever attempts at concealment, several prominent victims—the politician Nemtsov and the journalist Politkovskaya—were gunned down right in Moscow, apparently to amplify Putin’s aura and silence any would-be opponents (Kramer 2016, 2017).

In Turkey, the Islamic populist Recep Erdogan has projected his personal power by staging a bloody repression of the Kurds in 2015–2016 that displaced five hundred thousand people and by purging, in the aftermath of an abortive military coup in mid-2016, fifty thousand officials, including academics, teachers, and military. In Erdogan’s vision of his national community, the Kurds are a cancer within the body politic whose identity must be extinguished, much as his forebears excised the Armenians (Cumming-Bruce 2017; MacKinnon 2017).

In 2014, retired general Prabowo Subianto came close to capturing Indonesia’s presidency with a campaign theme of strength and order that resonated with some of the most luridly visible violence in that country’s fraught political history. Back in 1998 when the regime of his then father-in-law Suharto was trembling at the brink, General Prabowo, as commander of the elite Kopassus rangers, reportedly staged the kidnapping-disappearance of a dozen student activists, the lurid rapes of 168 Chinese women to incite racial violence, and the burning of over five thousand buildings in Jakarta that left more than a thousand dead (McIntyre 2005, 187; Fabi and Kapoor 2014; Richburg 1998; Liljas 2014).

In the closest parallel to Duterte’s drug war, the Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra launched his “red shirt” populism in 2003 with a campaign against methamphetamine abuse that prompted the police to carry out 2,275 extrajudicial killings in just three months (Human Rights Watch 2004, 9–12; Mydans 2003).

In America, President Trump’s populism has directed its violence outward with a drone blitz of unprecedented intensity on Yemen in March 2017 against what he called a “network of lawless savages” and its virulence inward by branding Mexicans as rapists, by demanding the death penalty for drug dealers, and by branding Black inner cities as a “catastrophe” of spreading violence—resonating with the white fears of eclipse that sparked, in earlier generations, mob violence and lynchings (Blake 2017; Reuters Staff 2017; Ferdinando 2017; BBC 2018).

Even a cursory review of these cases from around the world indicates that we cannot understand populism solely by looking skyward into the ether of ideology, but should also look down to ponder the meaning of all this blood on the pavement. Offering a revealing instance of this global phenomenon, violence has long been a defining attribute of Philippine populism—in particular, through the way that Filipino leaders combine the high politics of great-power diplomacy and the low politics of performative violence, with corpses written upon and read as texts.

Among this contemporary generation of global populists, President Duterte seems somewhat exceptional in both his blunt defiance of the world order and the unalloyed brutality of his social policy. Yet no matter how extreme he might seem, Duterte, like any national leader, still lies at the intersection of global trends and local political traditions in ways that invite exploration of both his historical antecedents and contemporary politics. To schematize this analysis, we will thus explore two intersecting political axes, seeking to understand how, within a single, synchronous moment in world history, global forces produced this cohort of generally similar populist leaders, yet probing, through diachronic depth, to see how one of them has arisen within a particular historical tradition that gives resonance to this virulent rhetoric and political violence.

In the eighty-year history of the modern Philippine state, just three presidents—Manuel Quezon, Ferdinand Marcos, and Rodrigo Duterte—have been adept enough to juxtapose geopolitical calculus with manipulations of local power to gain extraordinary authority. All three were men of their respective eras, shaped by global political currents. Like others who led anti-colonial liberation struggles, Quezon was both a statesman and would-be president-for-life; Marcos was, in his greed and brutality, similar to the autocrats who emerged across the Third World in the succeeding authoritarian age; and Duterte's mix of machismo and narrow nationalism seems typical of this current crop of anti-globalization populists.

Yet while practicing a domestic politics with deep cultural roots, all three were equally skilled in manipulating the dominant world powers of their day, using the consequent international imprimatur to reinforce their domestic authority. As the world lurched toward war during the 1930s, Quezon's leadership of the independence movement complemented Washington's decision to shed its strategic responsibility for the defense of the Philippines. During the Cold War decade of the 1970s, Marcos won Washington's support for his authoritarian rule

by posing as a mediator who could contain nationalist opposition to the US military bases. Amid rising superpower tensions over the South China Sea, Duterte played upon subliminal popular resentments toward America to distance himself from this historic alliance, allowing him to extract resources from both Beijing and Washington.

Apart from a shared ability to navigate the great power politics of their eras, these successful Filipino strongmen also offered a promise of order, projecting an aura of personal power that appealed to their country's impoverished masses. Focusing on this element of their ideological appeal cuts against the grain of the dominant themes or tropes in modern Philippine historiography and highlights an issue long overlooked in the country's study: the popular need for order. With its inherently conservative view of the people as willing to accept almost any government—colonial or national, authoritarian or democratic—that offers peace and prosperity, the study of order contradicts the thrust of nationalist studies, which tends to view the masses as innately revolutionary, yearning for liberation and struggling against oppression (Agoncillo 1956; Iletto 1979).

These strongmen also gained support by their ability to mediate the contradictions, the structural flaws if you will, in the Philippine polity. Since its emergence as a Commonwealth under US colonial rule in the 1930s, the Philippine state has faced a recurring tension between a nominally strong central government, headed by an empowered executive, and local elites who control their provincial peripheries through economic assets, political office, and extralegal violence.

To control the centripetal pull of its provincial peripheries, Manila has developed—in addition to conventional electoral and economic maneuvers—some extraordinary political mechanisms that both amplified the violence and, paradoxically, provided mechanisms of state control. Reaching out from the country's epicenter, Manila has exercised a supple strength over the sprawling archipelago and its volatile peripheries, particularly the Muslim south, by deputizing a panoply of parastatal elements—bandits, warlords, smugglers, gambling bosses, militia chiefs, special agents, forest concessionaires, planters, industrialists, and vigilantes (Sidel 1999, 146–47; Hedman and Sidel 2000, 108, 172–73).

Though many are at best quasi-legal and some are outright outlaws, these fragments of the state are not mere aberrations but are integral facets of the Philippine polity. Instead of fulfilling Max Weber's requirement that it claim "the monopoly of the legitimate use of

physical force within a given territory,” the Philippine state seems to sanction a virtual oligopoly on armed violence. This informal devolution of coercive authority has also allowed these Philippine variants of what Weber called “autonomous functionaries” to privatize police power, producing recurring incidents of spectacular abuse that have periodically weakened legitimacy of executives implicated in these excesses (Gerth and Mills 1946, 81–83).

Such delegated authority comes with high costs—political violence, environmental degradation, and systemic illegality. Such endemic violence by politicians’ private armies can grind on unnoticed for years until it erupts in iconic incidents, such as the burning of Ora Este, Ilocos Sur, by a private army in 1970 or the Maguindanao massacre of fifty-seven victims by the provincial governor’s militia in 2009.¹

Whether charismatic like Quezon, authoritarian like Marcos, or acquisitive like Estrada, most successful Philippine presidents over the past eighty years have found ways to manipulate this substrate of provincial violence for either election or effective administration. Those with a military background (Quezon, Magsaysay, and Ramos) have relied on the armed forces to control provincial violence; those with more exclusively electoral experience (Quirino and Corazon Aquino) allied with provincial power holders to exercise an extralegal coercion and control; while both Marcos and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo used the military for extrajudicial killings and local warlords for electoral violence. As governments from Quezon to Marcos and Duterte indicate, control over this localized violence is a defining attribute of Philippine executive power and a requisite for any would-be Filipino strongman.

QUEZON’S COMMONWEALTH

As leader of the Senate (1916–1935) and Commonwealth president (1935–1942), Manuel Quezon was the first Filipino politician to integrate all levels of politics into a synergy of power. To control the

1. Supreme Court, Republic of the Philippines, People of the Philippines, petitioner, v. Hon. Mario J. Gutierrez, Judge of the Court of First Instance of Ilocos Sur, Camilo Pilotin, Francisco Plano, Delfin Plano Pedro Patao, Vicent Crisologo, Camillo Plano, Camilo Patao, Pedring Plano, Isidro Pugal, Antonio Tabuldo, Lorenzo Peralta, Veneracion Pacleb, Antonio Plano, Fermin Pugal, Carlito Pugal, Flor Plano, Erning Abano and eighty two (82) John Does respondents. En Banc, G.R. Nos. L-32282-83. (1970). Accessed January 22, 2017. https://www.lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1970/nov1970/gr_32282_83_1970.html; Tran 2009.

local vote banks that determined legislative elections, Quezon devoted considerable energies to the mastery of provincial rivalries, seeking always to maintain two equally balanced factions at a peak of conflict that would allow his intervention and manipulation. Quezon once confessed to an aide that “90 percent” of his dealings with politicians involved the disposition of patronage for such manipulations (Gwekoh 1971, 385).

One of Quezon’s close allies, Senator Claro Recto, once described him as “a master of political intrigue” who could “excite envy, distrust, ambition, jealousy, even among his own loyal followers . . . He played Roxas against Osmeña, Yulo and Paredes against Roxas, . . . the Alunan group and the *plantadores* [sugar farmers] against the Yulo group and the *centralistas* [millers] in the sugar industry, dominating both by means of the loan-giving and loan-denying power of the Philippine National Bank” (1971, 394). Since most Manila politicians based their power on provincial vote banks, these manipulations of local leaders allowed him the means to control national politics, and both elements in turn strengthened his hand against the US High Commissioner or his superiors in Washington, DC.

During the independence debates of the early 1930s, Quezon used his growing dominance over Philippine partisan politics to manipulate these colonial superiors, a success that, in turn, reinforced his authority over Filipino politicians. To reduce Philippine agricultural imports during the Depression and meet the US military’s concern about the archipelago’s vulnerability to Japanese attack, Washington played upon the persistent Filipino agitation for independence to translate these domestic concerns into colonial policy. By negotiating terms of independence that both pleased his nationalist constituency and American patrons, Quezon marginalized his political rivals and emerged as the country’s unchallenged leader (Berry 1981, 50-60; Friend 1965, 100-101, 126-48).

In the 1935 elections for a transitional Commonwealth executive, Quezon triumphed through a synergy of US support, bureaucratic manipulation, and local interventions conducted via the colonial police, the Philippine Constabulary (PC). As leader of the entrenched Nacionalista Party, Quezon’s main opposition came from General Emilio Aguinaldo, the former president of the defeated revolutionary republic. After his surrender to the US authorities in 1901, Aguinaldo had returned to his native Cavite Province where he became a local political boss through large landholdings and leadership of the revolutionary war veterans. Although his national campaign was weak,

Aguinaldo's command of a local constituency capable of violence posed a serious threat (Sidel 1999, 56–61).

With the presidential campaign on the horizon, Quezon's first move was an attack on Aguinaldo's provincial power base. In late 1934, as the general prepared his presidential campaign, agriculture secretary Eulogio Rodriguez Sr., a close Quezon ally, suddenly discovered the general's arrears on a twenty-year-old government loan for the acquisition of a former friar estate in Cavite Province. In one of the very few instances of prewar land reform, Secretary Rodriguez summarily stripped Aguinaldo of all but 344 hectares and then distributed the bulk of his lands to the tenants (Soriano, del Castillo, and Alfonso 1982, 257–61).

During the campaign, constabulary officers provided Quezon with personal security, public order, and covert controls over volatile provinces. Just a month before the elections, PC headquarters sent Quezon a report detailing "political undercurrents" with data culled from units across the archipelago that were conducting partisan operations to support his candidacy (MLQ, unsigned letter to Manuel Quezon).

After the campaign began in June, Aguinaldo, the candidate for the National Socialist Party, soon realized he would be crushed by Quezon's formidable machine and reacted angrily, publicly charging fraud and privately threatening murder. Just days before the voting on September 15, the Quezon-controlled *Philippines Herald* denounced Aguinaldo and the other leading opposition candidate, Bishop Gregorio Aglipay, declaring that "their very breaths smell of assassination." When Quezon won a crushing 69 percent of the vote against Aguinaldo's 17 percent and Bishop Gregorio Aglipay's 14 percent, the general attacked his rival's "abuse of power" and refused to concede (Hayden 1955, 387–92, 409–18, 426–29; Gleck 1998b, 36).

In the election's bitter aftermath, Aguinaldo threatened assassination, armed uprising, or both. In a confidential report to its superintendent, the Constabulary's Intelligence Division described the "high tension" at a September 21 meeting of the general's National Socialist Party in Manila, with speakers "lambasting the entire government machinery in having coordinated smoothly to defeat GEA [General Emilio Aguinaldo]." When Aguinaldo spoke, claiming that the government had stolen fifty thousand votes from his final tally, the "irresponsible elements present ... murmured, '*Ayan ang mabuti, revolucion na!*'" [That's good, it's time for revolution!] (MLQ, confidential memorandum).

Just two days later, the Constabulary's confidential Agent 110 called on the deputy intelligence chief, Capt. Jose P. Guido, to warn that Aguinaldo was plotting an assassination attempt against Quezon (MLQ, Capt. Jose Guido). A week after that, the Constabulary's Cavite commander reached a similar conclusion during an otherwise "cordial" visit to Aguinaldo at his home in Kawit. Speaking with great indignation, the general said, "the only way to free the government of undesirable officials and save the people from suffering, hardships, and miseries is to put down President Quezon." By the end of this visit with Aguinaldo, the captain reported: "I could infer or read that he is nursing a sinister or evil design to assassinate President Quezon" (MLQ, Capt. Severo C. Cruz).

The main threat came from the hundreds, sometimes thousands of General Aguinaldo's supporters, many members of his *Veteranos de la Revolucion*, who met nightly in the yard of his Kawit mansion just south of Manila. Addressing five hundred supporters who gathered there on October 1, the speakers were, according to Constabulary spies, particularly incendiary, leading the crowd in shouting, "*Mag revolucion na*" [It's time to rebel] (MLQ, memorandum for—superintendent). At another meeting, a prominent Aguinaldo follower swore to kill Quezon and asked the crowd, "Who else will volunteer to give his life away if I fail?" According to a PC spy, over five hundred agreed to a roar of approval. Although the general disavowed these death threats, he moved ahead with plans to mobilize fifty thousand angry followers to protest Quezon's inauguration on November 15 (Hayden 1955, 429–30, 433–34; Gleeck 1998b, 36).

Under constant threat of assassination, president-elect Quezon surrounded himself day and night with Constabulary security. His limousine moved in an armed cavalcade. The palace grounds swarmed with guards. He slept aboard the presidential yacht anchored in Manila Bay. To quiet the violent bombast at Aguinaldo's house, a Constabulary detachment occupied the general's hometown, checking buses for guns and taking the names of those who attended the nightly meetings. After Quezon pleaded with Governor-General Frank Murphy to intervene just three weeks before the inauguration, the American met privately with Aguinaldo and, through a mix of blunt threats and his famous Irish charm, persuaded him not to disrupt the inaugural proceedings (Hayden 1955, 429–35; Gleeck 1998b, 36–41; Gleeck 1998a, 3, 377–80, 491–92; MLQ, letter from E. Aguinaldo; MLQ, Major M. N. Castañeda).

After a peaceful inauguration, President Quezon assumed a statesmanlike posture toward the Constabulary, but could not escape the executive's habit of using this force as the strong arm of central authority. The contradiction between the Constabulary's role as an apolitical national police force and its partisan uses as an extension of executive authority would deepen as the attenuation of colonial authority left this unsheathed sword in the hands of successive Philippine presidents (McCoy 2009, 362–66).

Politics under the Commonwealth was truly a system in symbiosis, operating, whether by inclination or design, with a political economy that allowed Quezon's every move to reinforce his ultimate goal, the accumulation and perpetuation of power. It was not a system built without effort or free from restraints. By 1940, Quezon had destroyed all elite opposition within and without the Nacionalista Party and marginalized Pedro Abad Santos of the radical Frente Popular in Central Luzon.

Quezon's greatest triumph, the 1941 elections, demonstrated the extent of his control over the legislature and its base in provincial politics. At the Nacionalista Party's convention in August, despite some grumbling "in private over their emasculation," the delegates accepted Quezon's list of the twenty-four senatorial candidates without a single dissenting vote. Under Quezon's earlier constitutional amendment, the senators now ran at-large on a national ticket that uprooted them from independent regional bases and thus made them beholden to executive patronage (McCoy 1989, 122–25). Although Quezon had thus made the Senate an extension of his executive authority, he still used local loyalties to ensure election of hand-picked candidates. The strategy was successful and all twenty-four of his nominees were elected to the Senate in November 1941 (US State Department, "Convention of the Nacionalista Party").

In these same elections, the Nacionalistas also won ninety-five of the ninety-eight Assembly seats. Party control was stricter and local factionalism less pronounced than in the 1940 gubernatorial elections since only seven ran as "rebel candidates" in defiance of Quezon. The State Department explained that "the degree of victory is due to the impregnability of the party machine achieved by various devices such as that of block voting" for a party ticket, an innovation in the 1941 elections (US State Department, "The Elections of November 11, 1941").

Unfortunately, for Quezon, the US independence legislation that had established the Commonwealth also provided an American High

Commissioner to serve as the US president's personal representative in Manila. Since the commissioner was the only real barrier to the Philippine president's unchecked authority, the most intense political battles of the Commonwealth period revolved around Quezon's efforts to obviate his imperial watchdog's ill-defined authority.

Whether the High Commissioner was friend or enemy, Quezon was relentless in undercutting his authority. In defense matters where lines of authority were muddled, Quezon played his military adviser General Douglas MacArthur against Commissioner Frank Murphy, using the general's extensive Washington contacts to deal directly with the US Army. In matters of trade, Quezon avoided negotiating with Commissioner Paul McNutt by winning President Roosevelt's support for a joint executive commission, the Joint Preparatory Committee on Philippine Affairs. Finally, Quezon neutralized Commissioner Francis Sayre's opposition to his domestic legislation by dragging him into public debate and outmaneuvering him in bureaucratic infighting with his superiors (McCoy 1989, 140-55).

By controlling both external relations with Washington and the country's volatile provincial politics, Quezon emerged as the first powerful Filipino leader, creating a template that other would-be strongmen would eventually follow.

PROVINCIAL WARLORDS

Only three years after independence, the 1949 presidential elections marked the first appearance of armed violence as a defining feature of the country's politics. Before the Second World War, the Constabulary had enforced strict controls that restricted politicians to registered handguns. During World War II, however, both conventional combat and anti-Japanese guerrilla operations littered the archipelago with loose firearms that provincial politicians amassed after the war to form private armies.

To check the Constabulary and thereby allow their provincial paramilitaries free rein during elections, these nascent warlords pressured Malacañang Palace to restrain its Constabulary commanders. Since local leaders could deliver blocs of votes whose sum was often the margin of victory in national contests, presidential candidates had to court these provincial warlords and incur compromising political debts. From the perspective of a healthy democracy, several of the presidents who followed Quezon did not handle the Constabulary's

unsheathed sword wisely or well. But from a less normative analytical perspective, a president who could not manage this provincial violence deftly, like Elpidio Quirino, would fail, and a presidential aspirant who apparently could, like Ramon Magsaysay, would succeed.²

In the first years of this new regime, Governor Rafael Lacson of Negros Occidental was one of the first provincial politicians to discern the republic's structural flaw and played upon it to win a de facto political autonomy from the central government. The resulting political violence soon became a national scandal under President Quirino, an elite politician of Quezon's generation who lacked the military experience to control provincial violence, and suffered a consequent loss of political authority. By 1948, Governor Lacson had accumulated the iconic elements of postwar Philippine poitics: "guns, goons, and gold." On the pretext of checking communist infiltration, Lacson formed one of the first private armies, which soon expanded into a force of 130 special police (SP) and 59 provincial guards. To fund this ad hoc force, Lacson drew upon diverse sources—municipal taxes, formal provincial appropriations, and national pork barrel from the Presidential Action Commission on Social Amelioration (PACSA) (Negros Occidental Provincial Board 1950b; Abueva 1971, 140–41). Significantly, all the soldiers in Lacson's private army were, in some way, agents of the state.

Such a small force of 190 men could not have been effective had it faced serious opposition from any of three possible rivals: the municipal police, the security forces attached to the province's many sugar mills, and, of course, the Constabulary. With a mix of deft maneuver and brute force, the governor subjugated each in succession. In the 1947 local elections, Lacson had won de facto control of the municipal police by manipulating the mayoral elections. Two years later, after terrorizing the rival political faction that owned the province's sugar mills, Lacson raided several factory compounds and confiscated their arms, effectively neutralizing this industrial security force (*El Civismismo*, May 23, 1948; *Liberator*, October 29, 1949).

To maintain his local monopoly on violence, Governor Lacson required, above all else, the acquiescence of the national government and the neutralization of its Constabulary. During the first two years of his local terror, the local Constabulary command had opposed the governor's excesses, producing a succession of dramatic clashes. In the closing weeks of the presidential campaign of October 1949, however, Lacson's SP arrested twenty members of the Constabulary's elite

2. For a fuller discussion of this period, see McCoy (2009, 379–85).



Figure 1. "Easier said than done." Source: *Philippines Free Press*, September 17, 1949.

Nenita Unit at the hacienda of an opposition senatorial candidate, and brutally tortured these troopers and their captain before locking them in the provincial prison for the next three years on spurious charges of possessing illegal firearms.³

These incidents epitomized the systematic violence that made the 1949 presidential elections, in the words of foreign and Filipino observers, "a national disgrace" and "the most fraudulent and violent in democratic history" (Liang 1971, 311). From the outset, the campaign was a tight contest between the wartime president Jose P. Laurel, who still commanded a strong following, and the incumbent Elpidio Quirino, whose unpopularity and unlikely election was captured in a cartoon from the *Philippines Free Press* (September 17, 1949, 1).

In eight key provinces across the country, armed goons harassed the opposition's political rallies. So intense was the intimidation in two

3. Rafael Lacson v. Hon. Luis R. Torres, Philippine Supreme Court, G.R. L-5543, Annex B; *Philippines Free Press*, July 12, 1952.



Figure 2. "Peaceful election!" Source: *Philippines Free Press*, November 12, 1949.

provinces, Lanao and Lacson's Negros Occidental, that the Commission on Elections recommended, in the weeks before election day, suspension of voting and imposition of Constabulary control—suggestions the president ignored. Among the 3.7 million votes cast nationwide, some 41 percent of Quirino's 485,000-vote margin of victory came from Negros Occidental (200,000) and another 28 percent from Lanao (140,000). Though Quirino won only 51 percent of the ballots cast nationwide, Lacson delivered an incredible 92 percent of his province's vote for the president, thus producing the winning majority. In its subsequent investigation, the House Electoral Tribunal found evidence of systematic terrorism in Negros Occidental and voided the results in two of its congressional districts (*Philippines Free Press*, January 27, 1951; Abueva 1971, 140–42; Agpalo 1992, 245–47; Landé 1965, 66; Sidel 1999, 109).

After single-handedly assuring Quirino's election, Governor Lacson could have asked the president for almost anything, whether timber concessions, lucrative import concessions, or a radio broadcast license.

But instead, the governor demanded and the president conceded him a veto over Constabulary assignments to Negros Occidental, retaining those officers who supported him and transferring any who did not. With the state's monopoly on violence thus neutralized by this seemingly modest concession, Governor Lacson unleashed an unchecked violence against his local rivals (Landé 1965, 66; Elpidio Quirino Papers).

Through such blatant politicization, the local Constabulary command soon backed Governor Lacson's bid to take control over otherwise autonomous municipal police (Negros Occidental Provincial Board 1950a, 1950c). In its formal "Plan to Check the Spread of Subversive Activities," the Constabulary detachment in Negros required that "the supervision of all police agencies will be undertaken by the Provincial Governor with the [Constabulary] Provincial Commander assisting him" and authorized the formation of neighborhood vigilantes under local police chiefs "directly responsible to the Provincial Governor."⁴ Under such pressure, the Provincial Board voted to merge all municipal police into a unified provincial command under Lacson's direct authority (Negros Occidental Provincial Board 1950c).

With both the Constabulary and the municipal police neutralized, Governor Lacson used his private army to attack his local political enemies, the Yulo-Araneta group. Aside from its personal and purely factional aspects, this rivalry was, in large part, a continuation of the prewar planter miller conflict—with Lacson, himself a sugar farmer, leading the Negros planters against the Araneta milling interests. Through his alliance with President Manuel Roxas (1946–1948), Negros financier J. Amado Araneta had maneuvered the postwar reconstruction of the sugar industry to take control, directly or indirectly, of six of the province's ten sugar mills—unprecedented power over the local economy. Increased concentration of mill ownership intensified the planter-miller conflict and provided Governor Lacson a broad base of support among sugar farmers for a "reign of terror" against his factional rivals, which included machine-gunning the house of a municipal mayor.⁵

4. *People v. Lacson*, Criminal Case 3220, Bacolod, Negros Occidental, Lieutenant Colonel Nicolas Jabutina.

5. Interview with Inocencio Ferrer (Negros Occidental second district congressman, 1957–1965), buried alive by Governor Lacson's Special Police, Manila, December 10, 1974; interview with Marino Rubin (mayor of Pontevedra, 1947–1951) whose house was machine-gunned by the SP, Pontevedra, August 2, 1975.

To break the Yulo-Araneta faction's mass base among the province's working class, Lacson formed a tactical alliance with the region's militant union, the Federacion Obrera de Filipinas (FOF), first using it to challenge the Yulo-Araneta faction's company unions and then, when that work was done, banning it from the province (Tejida 1975; Nacion 1975; Valera 1975).⁶ With his monopoly on violence now complete, the governor grew even more violent. In February 1950, his Special Police arrested prominent opposition politician Inocencio Ferrer, beat him badly, and buried his still breathing body in a shallow grave on Lacson's own plantation.⁷

At the start of the 1951 local and legislative elections, Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay dispatched over a thousand troops, two hundred Marines and nine hundred Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) cadets, to prevent another round of violence in Negros Occidental (*El Civismo*, October 7, 1951; November 11, 1951). Despite their presence, investigators later found fifty-one instances of intimidation by the SP—including beatings, random gunfire, and, most disturbingly, the murder of Moises Padilla, candidate for mayor in the town of Magallon.⁸ Taking Padilla's candidacy as a personal affront, Governor Lacson insisted that the Constabulary absent itself from Magallon during the elections, and the provincial commander, Captain Marcial Enriquez, complied. Two days before the voting, Lacson denounced Padilla as a communist at a public rally in Magallon and on election day, November 13, ordered his arrest. For the next three days, the SP tortured him publicly on the plazas of four nearby municipalities. On November 16, the SP shot him fourteen times before dumping his body in a shed near the town of La Castellana, making no attempt to conceal the crime.⁹

But this time the governor had gone too far. The next day, Defense Secretary Magsaysay flew to Negros accompanied by the publisher of the *Manila Times*, Joaquin Rocas, and his star reporter, Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. Arriving at Magallon after dark, Magsaysay climbed the stairs to a wake where Padilla's body lay face down to expose the

6. Interviews with Guillermo Tejida, Central La Carlota, June 27/28, 1975; Crisanto Nacion (president, FOF, Central La Carlota), Bo. Crossing, La Carlota City, July 26, 1975; and Loreto Valera (factory manager, Central La Carlota), La Carlota City, October 23, 1975.

7. Lacson v. Torres, G.R. L-5543, Annex B; interview with Inocencio Ferrer, August 2, 1975.

8. Lacson v. Torres, G.R. L-5543, Annex A.

9. People v. Lacson, Criminal Case 3220.



Figure 3. The body of Moises Padilla, November 1951

congealed blood, bullet holes, and wounds of torture. One photo of the clothed body showed the left hand upturned toward the camera to reveal a raised wound in the palm, akin to Christ's stigmata from the nails that held him to the cross. When local doctors refused to do an autopsy, Magsaysay flew the body back to Manila for a military funeral with full honors. At each step in this political calvary, publisher Roces clicked his camera and reporter Aquino jotted down quotes—producing a sensational story for the front page of the *Manila Times* that stirred public condemnation. Despite the outpouring of anger, President Quirino seemed reluctant to suspend Governor Lacson. “Mr. President,” Magsaysay advised, “the people are so outraged by the death of Moises Padilla that they are ready to stone Malacañang Palace.” After an embarrassing delay, government prosecutors filed murder charges against Lacson, and the president finally suspended him (*Philippines Free Press*, August 28, 1954; Abueva 1971, 201–3; Quirino 1958, 79–80; Merritt 1953, 33–34; Joaquin 1986, 221–23).

At Lacson's trial, a close associate of the martyred Moises Padilla testified to the central role that Captain Enriquez had played in the governor's reign of terror. Asked why he did not complain to the Constabulary, the witness replied, “The law was being handled and



Figure 4. "Equal justice." Source: *Philippines Free Press*, October 4, 1952.

exercised by the SPs in their hands alone." Asked if the Constabulary had refused to enforce the law, the witnesses stated: "Yes, in all instances, the Provincial Commander never pays attention . . . [to] any complaint of aggrieved persons . . . during the time of Captain Enriquez."¹⁰

Realization that the president had compromised the Constabulary, a force synonymous with the state's integrity, dismayed the Filipino public. Two years later in the 1953 presidential elections, Magsaysay, now running as the opposition candidate, brought campaign rallies in towns across the Philippines to an emotional peak by stretching out his arms as if bearing an invisible corpse and saying, "I held in my arms the bleeding symbol of democracy: the body of Moises Padilla" (Abueva 1971, 202–3, 254–55; Quirino 1958, 116; Merritt 1953, 34; Joaquin 1986, 224). After Magsaysay's triumph in the November balloting, the courts suddenly accelerated the Lacson case. In August

10. *People v. Lacson*, Criminal Case 3220, testimony of Narciso Dalumpines, November 26, 1951.

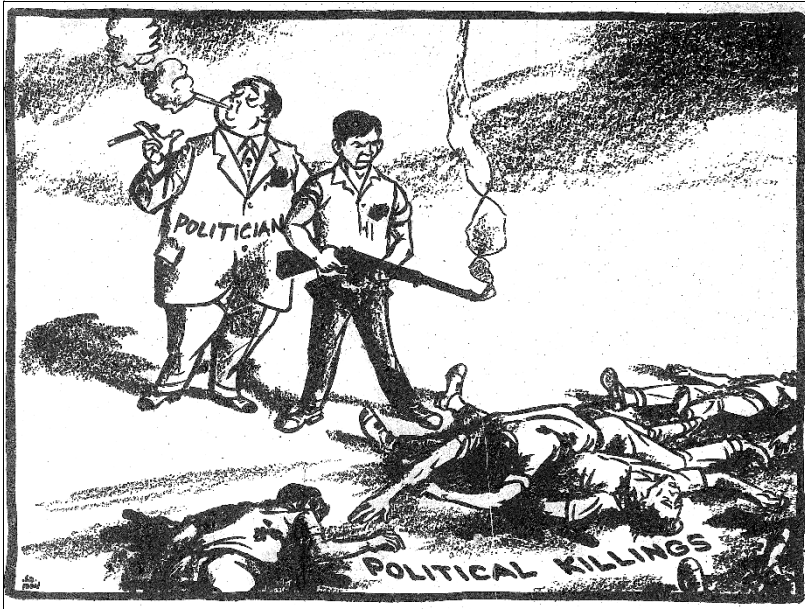


Figure 5. "Election violence." Source: *Philippines Free Press*, October 10, 1959.

1954, the governor was sentenced to death for the murder of Moises Padilla, a penalty later reduced to life imprisonment (*Philippines Free Press*, August 28, 1954).¹¹

Despite some significant reforms under Magsaysay, the politicization of the Constabulary that had fostered these provincial warlords continued and the potential for political violence thus remained. Indeed, during the 1960s, many provinces would again witness the fusion of public office with private militia, indicating that the tension between central authority and provincial violence had persisted as a defining attribute of Philippine politics.

MARCOS REGIME

After a twenty-year career as a conventional party politician, President Ferdinand Marcos combined national resources and provincial violence to accomplish something unprecedented in the history of the Philippine

11. In the mid-1960s, Lacson was released from prison and returned home to Negros where he retired into obscurity.



Figure 6. "Portraits of senator and congressman as warlords." Source: *Philippines Free Press*, November 14, 1970.

Republic: reelection. During the 1969 campaign, Marcos stumped vigorously, reaching even remote villages to personally place a check for PHP 2,000 in the hands of each barrio captain, obligating them, within the country's political culture, to use every possible means to deliver a winning margin. This strategy cost the Marcos campaign an estimated USD 50 million, far more than the USD 34 million Richard Nixon had spent to win the US presidency just a year earlier (Bonner 1987, 76–77). In the aftermath of this costly flood of cash, the Philippine peso lost half its value, government services were slashed, and the economy contracted (Thompson 1995, 34–35; Noble 1986, 79–80).

The 1969 campaign also produced incidents of political terror of the sort not seen since the 1951 elections. With the Constabulary now under the command of Marcos loyalist Vicente Raval, the PC Special Forces orchestrated violence in four swing provinces that left forty-six dead (Thompson 1995, 35–37, 192–93; Wolters 1983, 166–67; de Quiros 1997, 46, 66–67; Seagrave 1988, 218–19). In its ruling on

these violations, the Supreme Court was particularly critical of what it called the “rape of democracy in Batanes,” a remote island where the Special Forces allowed motorcycle-riding goons, dubbed the “Suzuki boys,” to coerce a winning margin in the congressional race for a close Marcos ally (de Quiros 1997, 66–67). Bolstered by force and fraud, Marcos scored a crushing victory of the kind not seen since Quezon’s 1941 landslide—specifically, winning 74 percent of the presidential vote, eighty-six of one hundred House seats, and eleven of twelve Senate seats being contested (Seagrave 1988, 218).

In the aftermath of these elections, a family dynasty in Ilocos Sur pursued a political vendetta against local enemies, producing an incident iconic for both its brutality and its executive complicity. Since this troubled province was adjacent to Marcos’s own Ilocos Norte and its local warlord was his political ally, the president’s victory may have encouraged these events. As Marcos rose through the Senate to the presidency, his close friend Representative Floro Crisologo had tightened his grip over Ilocos Sur—building a private army of three hundred men, a monopoly on the province’s electoral offices, and a vice grip on its main cash crop, tobacco. To ensure payment of an informal tax to his political machine, Crisologo’s private army maintained a “tobacco blockade” on the national highway, stopping every southbound truck to check for receipts. The Constabulary could have easily swept away the Crisologo roadblock were it not for the reputed intervention of General Fabian Crisologo Ver, chief of presidential security and the congressman’s relative (Mijares 1976, 151; Luis “Chavit” Singson, interview by the author, June 1974).

In mid-September 1969, the Crisologo goons gunned down a former Bantay municipal mayor, and a month later prosecutors indicted the congressman’s son, Vincent Crisologo, chief of the family’s private militia, for ordering the crime (*Daily Mirror*, October 15, 1969). In the elections’ aftermath, political reprisals continued in the town of Bantay as the Crisologos retaliated against two villages, Ora Este and Ora Centro, for supporting the opposition’s candidates. In May 1970, Vicente Crisologo led a hundred armed men into these villages and burned both to the ground, killing an elderly woman who was caught in the flames. During the attack, residents pleaded with the provincial PC commander, but he “ignored ... appeals to stop the arson.” In its front-page coverage, the Manila press carried moving photos of survivors sorting through the ashes of their devastated homes

(*Manila Times*, June 3, 1970; *Daily Mirror*, June 7, 1972; Robson 2002, 8–12).

Outraged by such a blatant display of warlord power, forty-two civic, religious, and youth organizations formed Operation Bantay to demand an impartial investigation (*Manila Times*, June 13, 1970). Despite his alliance with Congressman Crisologo, President Marcos ordered charges filed against his son Vincent for arson (*Manila Times*, June 3, 1970). Such unrestrained brutality by a private militia, apparently operating with the president's tacit approval, challenged the republic's legitimacy among both student activists and Manila's middle class.

Only five months after the Bantay burning, Ilocos Sur offered a revealing coda to this political violence. Reportedly angry over his unsatisfactory share of the spoils from the president's victory, Representative Crisologo stormed into the palace where he "berated both Marcos and Ver for grabbing the lion's share of the proceeds of the tobacco monopoly" and "threatened to expose the entire operation." Just a few weeks later, in October 1970, as Crisologo knelt during Sunday Mass at Vigan's baroque cathedral, two unidentified men emerged from a confessional booth, shot him point-blank in the back of the head, and then disappeared out of the cathedral door (Mijares 1976, 151; *Manila Times*, October 19, 1970).

In September 1972, as this hard-won second term came to an end, Marcos used a mix of US support, central power, and provincial controls to suspend Congress and declare martial law. The military quickly disbanded 145 private armies, two for each of the country's sixty-seven provinces, and confiscated 523,616 firearms, one for every fifteen adult males, leaving the president with a momentary monopoly on violence (Marcos 1977, 222). Three months later, on January 15, 1973, a Constabulary firing squad executed Chinese drug dealer Lim Seng, with photos splashed across front pages and footage shown on television and movie theaters (de Quiros 1997, 437–38; Ocampo 2016). Indicating Marcos's simultaneous appeal to the moral crisis over drug abuse and his use of the Manila Chinese as a unifying populist enemy, Lim Seng was the first and last person publicly executed during the fourteen years of martial rule.

On the external side of the political equation, Marcos used the issue of military bases to win support for his authoritarian regime from three successive US administrations. When President Jimmy Carter took office in 1977, however, his emphasis on human rights roiled an

already fraught bilateral relationship. Complicating matters further, Marcos pressed so hard for increased US payments that George Kennan, a senior strategist, advised “immediate, complete, resolute and wordless withdrawal” (Bonner 1987, 205–11). While his daughter Imee publicly denounced the bases as “clear evidence of our being American stooges” and his wife Imelda visited the Soviet Union to seek an alternative to US aid, Marcos played the statesman and broke the impasse, after three years of negotiations, by agreeing to annual US compensation of USD 500 million (Berry 1989, 163–217, 236–37; Paez 1985, 71–73). “We had to choose between using our bilateral relationship for human rights objectives,” US negotiator Richard Holbrooke told Congress, “and using it first for putting our military facilities on a stable basis” (Bonner 1987, 23).

President Reagan’s administration embraced the dictator, inviting him to Washington for a formal state visit in September 1982. Even as the regime plunged into crisis after the 1983 assassination of ex-senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr., Washington refused to contemplate alternatives. US military aid to the Philippines doubled to USD 70 million in 1985, a signal seen in Manila as support for the regime’s limitless lien on power. Most importantly, through the World Bank and private banks, the United States led the First World in granting Marcos loans that eventually totaled USD 26 billion. The largesse extended the life of the regime by providing it with a steady inflow of cash to offset the funds wasted by its erratic plunder of the nation’s economy.

With Washington generally silent about his regime’s excesses, Marcos could pursue two mutually reinforcing strategies to transform his dictatorship into a dynasty—the destruction of any potential opposition and the construction of a ruling coalition. At the outset of martial law in 1972, for example, political power in Iloilo City, then the nation’s fourth largest, was divided among three contenders: Vice President Fernando Lopez, Congressman Fermin Caram Jr., and Mayor Rodolfo Ganson. Through deft maneuvers reminiscent of Quezon, Marcos was skillful in the use of dictatorial powers to force the submission of these volatile provincial elites.

Originally Marcos’s key patrons in his successful 1965 and 1969 presidential campaigns, the wealthy Lopez brothers had a falling out with Marcos in 1970–1971 and began using their media empire in an attempt to break the president. After declaring martial law, however, Marcos used his extraordinary powers to break the Lopez family. As a

self-appointed dictator, Marcos had no need for a vice president and effectively abolished the office, stripping Fernando Lopez of his authority. To preempt any counter moves, Marcos arrested the heir apparent to the family's corporate crown, Eugenio Lopez Jr., on capital charges of plotting to assassinate the president. The martial law regime then stripped the Lopez companies of their media licenses and allocated their facilities to Marcos relatives and cronies. Marcos classmate Roberto Benedicto occupied the Alto Broadcasting Station - Central Broadcasting Network (ABS-CBN), and Imelda's brother Benjamin "Kokoy" Romualdez expropriated the presses of the *Manila Chronicle* to publish his own *Times Journal*.

From exile in the United States, the family's leader, Eugenio Lopez Sr., resisted the sale of his leading asset, the Manila Electric Company (MERALCO), until he could no longer withstand Marcos's multifaceted pressures. By slashing an electricity rate increase from 36.5 percent to 20.9 percent, Marcos reduced the company's profits and hence its value. After a mysterious explosion erupted in one of MERALCO's substations, the Marcos press charged that Lopez himself was responsible for the sabotage. With a tacit assurance that his son would be released from death row in a military stockade, Eugenio Sr. signed over a USD 300 million corporation to a Marcos-controlled foundation for a nominal payment of USD 1,500. But once the papers were signed, Marcos broke his promise and refused to release the hostage (Mijares 1976, 184-81, 191-92, 197-204).

Marcos used similar tactics to crush Iloilo City congressman Fermin Caram Jr., a lawyer whose main asset was the country's third domestic airline, Filipinas Orient, first licensed to fly in 1964 over the opposition of the flag carrier, Philippine Airlines (PAL).¹² Although Caram himself was a Marcos ally, he or his wife had somehow offended the First Lady. In a move that was supposed to rationalize the airline industry as part of his martial law reforms, Marcos granted Philippine Airlines a domestic monopoly and abolished Filipinas Orient. After PAL expropriated Filipinas Orient's aircraft, the government charged Caram with plundering the firm and won a court order freezing all his assets.

Mayor Rodolfo Ganzon, Iloilo City's "hero of the masses," was a more elusive target. As former jeepney driver and professional machine politician, Ganzon's only capital was his charisma. In the months

12. Philippine Air Lines Inc. v. Civil Aeronautics Board, and Filipinas Orient Airways, Philippine Supreme Court G.R. No. L-24219, June 13, 1968, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://www.asianlii.org/ph/cases/PHSC/1968/338.html>.

before the declaration of martial law, Iloilo City was the scene of a spectacular gunbattle for control of the docks between two rival clans of waterfront toughs who were allied with Caram and Ganzon. In March 1972, Mayor Ganzon's car was ambushed and riddled with bullets on Iloilo's main street, killing four of his bodyguards (Leichter 1975, 55-59). After the declaration of martial law, Marcos's military intervened in this waterfront war and arbitrarily charged Ganzon with murder. Convicted of a capital crime by a regional military tribunal, Ganzon was allowed to appeal to the commander-in-chief, President Marcos, who proved remarkably slow in deciding the case. Over the next few years, Ganzon was allowed to leave the military stockade periodically to circulate among his followers, urging their support for the president.

Apart from thus breaking established provincial elites, Marcos also worked to change the composition of the country's regional and national leadership. He damned the provincial politicians as "warlords" and used his martial law powers to strip them of their arms and offices. He denounced Manila's wealthy families as "old society oligarchs" whose privileges and power stood as a barrier to economic progress. At the very outset of martial law, Marcos destroyed the fortunes of the prominent entrepreneurs, like the Lopez and Jacinto families, thereby silencing "Manila's 400" and facilitating plunder of their corporations one by one over the next decade. Assets confiscated from erring old society oligarchs were quietly transferred to a new economic elite of family, relations, and Palace retainers. By the end of the decade, *Fortune* magazine would describe the new Philippine economy as "crony capitalism" (Kraar 1981).

A 1980 study of 453 Philippine corporations by Fr. John F. Doherty, SJ, found that the Marcos reforms had produced an enormous concentration of wealth. Since over 98 percent of all sectors had "four or fewer companies controlling 35 percent of total sales," profits were excessive. For example, the coconut industry, dominated by crony Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, had a profit ratio of 111 percent. Significantly, these 453 companies were controlled by only eighty-one individuals who could be divided into three groups: previous unknowns close to the First Family who "had expanded their corporate empires at a fantastic rate"; a pre-martial law elite closely allied to the regime; and another pre-martial elite who had to "endure periodic harassments" and were forced to "keep the semblance of loyalty" (Doherty 1982, 12-33).

The impact of crony capitalism upon the Philippines should not be underestimated. Through manipulation of finance and regulatory agencies, Marcos transferred control of the country's major primary industries to individual cronies—coconuts to Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile; sugar to Roberto S. Benedicto; and bananas, among others, to Antonio Floirendo Sr. Many used this largesse to build up fragile conglomerates involving control over banking, primary industry (agribusiness, logging, and mining), manufacturing, transport, and service industries, notably tourist hotels. Whenever possible, crony capitalists reinforced their economic power with control over the government agency charged with regulating their industry. Several also acquired political dominion over the provinces where their industry operated, producing a high concentration of power. There were, therefore, two countervailing thrusts to the Marcos centralizing reforms—a relentless repression of local power holders and a simultaneous devolution of regional control to regime allies who often controlled armed militia.

The former ambassador to Japan Roberto S. Benedicto is an apt example of a crony capitalist. A close Marcos friend from their law school days at the University of the Philippines in the late 1930s, Benedicto became the regime's plenipotentiary for sugar, then the country's leading export industry. By the late 1970s, Benedicto had enormous power over the industry through a combination of private and public agencies. As owner of two major private banks, he dominated nongovernment sugar finance. As chairman of two government regulatory agencies—the National Sugar Trading Association and the Philippine Sugar Commission—he controlled all sugar marketing, all research, most bulk warehousing, and the operations of several large sugar mills (*Sugarland* 1977, no. 1, 26–27; *Sugarland* 1977, no. 3, 15; *Sugar News*, August 1974, 271; *Sugar News*, April 1976, 124; *Sugar News*, July 1977, 163; *Sugar News*, September 1977, 248). In addition to his nominal ownership of the nation's largest television network and a leading Manila newspaper, Benedicto became the palace's plenipotentiary for the sugar region, Negros and Panay islands, where he appointed mayors and parliamentarians—who were in turn allied with resurgent warlords invested with command of anti-communist militia. During the first decade of martial law, Marcos's cronies thus integrated national economic assets with regional political power, eliminating most legal opposition to his regime in the provinces.

Shaken by major political and economic crises between 1981 and 1984, the Marcos coalition quickly lost its dominion over the provinces as once powerful cronies began losing the fortunes they needed to finance electoral mobilization. In May 1984, opposition candidates captured one-third of the seats in Marcos's new parliament. After all his candidates lost in the Western Visayas, Benedicto was ousted from the ruling circle. Instead of the broad coalition of the dictatorship's early years, Marcos now depended upon the First Family, particularly First Lady Imelda; a reduced coterie of cronies, most importantly Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.; and his Armed Forces chief of staff, General Fabian Ver.

The 1984 elections thus marked a turning point in Marcos's relations with the provinces. Marcos's popular support had largely eroded, leaving a mass base comprising his native Ilocos region, the indigenous cult *Iglesia ni Cristo*, a demoralized *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* (KBL) party machine, and rearmed regional warlords—including Armando Gustilo (Negros Occidental), Ramon Durano (Cebu), and Ali Dimaporo (Lanao) (McCoy 1987, 9–33).

Shaken by major political and economic crises of the early 1980s, a Marcos regime once proud of its “constitutional authoritarianism” staged a spectacle of extralegal violence. In the last years of martial law, Marcos unleashed his internal security forces to subdue the population with terror, producing about 77 percent or 2,520 of the 3,257 extrajudicial killings under martial law. These “salvagings” dumped the victim's remains, scarred by stigmata of torture, in public places so passers-by could read a transcript of terror in the wounds. In the capital, with only four thousand police for six million residents, the metro government deputized hundreds of “secret marshals” to shoot petty criminals on sight, producing over thirty fatalities during the program's first month, May 1985. In the countryside, the Constabulary tried to check communist insurgency by arming 110,000 local militia as of 1982, flooding Mindanao with Civilian Home Defense Forces (CHDF) that soon degenerated into what their chief later called “private armies . . . for the personal aggrandizement of the local warlord” (quoted in McCoy 2009, 405n38; for a detailed discussion see McCoy 2009, 397–416).

To control the five provinces of the Western Visayas region, for example, crony Benedicto had, during his ascendancy, worked through intermediaries like the north Negros warlord Armando Gustilo. As a reward for his dominion over the seven towns along the island's north

coast, Gustilo was allowed to revive his private army as an official CHDF unit. When Benedicto fell from favor after his humiliation in the May 1984 elections, Marcos became increasingly dependent upon Gustilo to control Negros Occidental and was forced, over a two-year period, to grant him a *de facto* immunity from outside interference. As shown at Escalante in September 1985 when they massacred twenty-eight demonstrators without provocation, Gustilo's three hundred militia, many of them CHDF, used their formidable arsenal to terrorize the civilian population without Constabulary interference. As the February 1986 elections approached, Gustilo dictated the terms of his support to the president—specifically, exoneration for the Escalante massacre; new automatic weapons for his militia; and, in the final preelection session of the parliament, a legislation making his north Negros fiefdom a separate province. Moreover, Gustilo challenged Benedicto's control over the sugar industry, using his new influence to capture key regulatory agencies. Thus, Marcos had come full circle, beginning as a centralizer and ending dependent upon resurgent provincial warlords the equal of those he had destroyed at the outset of martial law.

Yet such performative violence was capricious and highly contextualized, proving effective at the start of martial law when people had yearned for order and ineffective at its close when Filipinos wanted to recover their freedom. By the time the critical presidential elections arrived in February 1986, Marcos lacked sufficient provincial support to win by a convincing majority. Moreover, the Cold War was waning and Washington's interests were quietly shifting to support emerging democracies worldwide, creating an opening for antiauthoritarian movements around the globe. Reversing the dynamic that had driven his political ascent, a combination of Marcos's attenuated local controls and Washington's fading support would prove a fatal combination for the regime, which famously collapsed in February 1986.

DAVAO CITY AND DUTERTE

Like his predecessors Quezon and Marcos, Rodrigo Duterte gained his extraordinary power through the juxtaposition of international patronage and local power. Yet unlike any of his predecessors, Duterte pursued his entire political career in local government—in his case,

Davao City, which was a site of exceptional violence that left a lasting imprint on his political persona.

Davao's descent into extreme violence began in the early 1980s when the communist New People's Army (NPA) made it the site of a new urban guerrilla warfare strategy. Starting in the late 1970s, the NPA experienced a sustained expansion that, by 1985, had built a national army of fifteen thousand regulars with a mass base of one million and armed presence in sixty-three out of seventy-three provinces. In 1977, there were only seventy NPA encounters with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP); but in 1984, there were some 3,500, with 75 percent of those initiated by the guerrillas who were, in the view of the US Defense Department, just three or four years away from winning a "strategic stalemate" from government forces (US House of Representatives 1985, 557-77, 593-637). Moving beyond its fifty-eight rural "fronts," or local operation commands, the NPA established a laboratory for urban guerrilla warfare in Davao City on southern Mindanao Island. As NPA "sparrow units," or liquidation squads, moved into this city of one million, Davao's murder rate doubled to eight hundred in 1984, including 150 police. The rebel presence in the city was so strong that they considered it "a liberated zone" and their control over its sprawling Agdao district so complete it was known as "Nicaragdao" (*Asiaweek*, September 13, 1985, 6-18; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 1988, 23-25).

While the NPA was spreading into the suburbs of Davao City in 1983-1984, military intelligence units seeded deep penetration agents (DPAs), or "zombies," inside anticipated recruitment zones. Since NPA strength in Davao grew rapidly from an estimated 1,000 in 1983 to 2,680 in 1984 (*Asiaweek*, September 13, 1985, 6), the screening of recruits became perfunctory and the local NPA began to suspect that military agents were penetrating their ranks. Whether the infiltration constituted a real threat or was inflated by military disinformation, the NPA overreacted and slaughtered hundreds of its own members. Indeed, one informed Western military observer stated that, according to his contacts in the AFP, there had been few if any DPAs in Mindanao—just clever disinformation to prompt internal liquidations.¹³ By the time the Communist Party could restrain the cycle of accusations, trials, and executions that had spun out of control, the Davao front had collapsed. Many genuine cadre sought refuge from the slaughter

13. Interview with a Western military attaché, Manila, January 9, 1988.

14. Interview with Luis Jalandoni (foreign representative of the National Democratic Front), telephone interview from Sydney to Utrecht, May 30, 1987.

with local military units.¹⁴ “By April 1986,” reported one group of foreign observers, “Davao was a counter-revolution waiting to happen” (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 1988, 25).

Once the Marcos regime fell in February of that year, the AFP, encouraged by both US advisors and Filipino elites, announced a rhetorical reemphasis on counterinsurgency. Denied support from general headquarters in the capital, local military commanders, largely in the Visayas and Mindanao, devised their own ad hoc tactics that drew upon AFP counterguerrilla doctrines dating back to the anti-Huk campaign of the 1950s.

Starting in July 1986, the Davao Metropolitan District Command chief, PC Colonel Francisco Calida, recruited NPA returnees and local criminals to transform a small group called *Alsa Masa* into mass vigilante organization. With financial support from the city’s business community led by presidential adviser Jesus “Chito” Ayala and firearms from the military, these vigilantes, who soon numbered in the thousands, coerced countless residents in outlying slums to affiliate, and conducted numerous extrajudicial killings of suspected communists. Lending a lurid quality to this violence, their spokesman Juan “Jun” Pala Jr. broadcast anti-communist rants almost daily on local radio, saying, “Just one order to our anti-Communist forces, your head will be cut off. Damn you, your brains will be scattered in the streets” (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 1988, 23–38). When I visited Davao in 1987 to interview Jun Pala and investigate his death squad, this remote southern city had an air of utter hopelessness.

It was in this fraught conjuncture of national regime change and localized violence that Rodrigo Duterte, the son of a local elite family, launched his political career, first as appointive vice mayor of Davao City in 1986 and then in 1988 as the elected mayor, the first of seven terms that would keep him in office, on and off, for another twenty-one years until 2016. His first campaign in 1988 was hotly contested and Duterte won with only 25.7 percent of vote, barely beating his rivals, including the president’s anointed favorite Zafiro Respicio with 24 percent and the vigilante radio host Jun Pala who captured 18.3 percent. The city that Duterte inherited was then in remarkably poor shape—a million poor squeezed into squatter slums, capital flight, rampant kidnapping, and endemic violence between the NPA sparrow units and the *Alsa Masa* death squad. With rival assassins roaming the streets doing one-bullet kills in broad daylight, the city had an aura of

utter desolation (Gutierrez, Torrente, and Narca 1992, 146; Mydans 1987; Curato 2017b, 9-10).

As the nation's economy slowly recovered from the drag of Marcos's mismanagement, Mayor Duterte proved an apt local booster whose tax breaks and pro-business policy produced growth for Davao City that reached 9.4 percent in 2014, the highest for any Philippine region. Violence also played a central role in his campaign to restore order to this sprawling city whose population was growing toward two million. After he announced a crackdown on petty crime in the mid-1990s, there were 1,424 documented killings in the city from 1998 to 2015, most attributed to the Davao Death Squad (DDS), which reportedly operated under his patronage. Taking a leaf from Jun Pala's playbook, Mayor Duterte used his weekly television show to read off the names of reputed malefactors, some of whom became victims of the DDS ("When a Populist Demagogue Takes Power," Chen November 21, 2016; Quimpo 2017, 152-56; Reyes 2016, 114-15, 124). According to the Philippine Senate testimony by a former death squad member, the group numbered five hundred and, apart from liquidating drug dealers, also eliminated the mayor's political rivals, notably the broadcaster Jun Pala who had parlayed his notoriety into a city council seat. For years leading up his assassination in 2003, Pala began his daily radio broadcast by saying, "This is Jun Porras Pala, who remains the voice of democracy in [Mayor Rodrigo] Duterte's reign of terror. *Maayong buntag* [good morning]" (Villamor 2017c; de Jesus 2016; Labiste 2005; Pulumbarit 2016).

Campaigning for president in 2016 on a law-and-order theme, Duterte sparked a surge of populist support that, as Walden Bello put it, was "bubbling up from below" and won by a wide margin of six million votes. "If by chance that God will place me there," he promised at the start of his presidential campaign, "watch out because the 1,000 [people allegedly executed while Duterte was mayor of Davao City] will become 100,000. You will see the fish in Manila Bay getting fat. That is where I will dump you." But there was also historical resonance to this violent rhetoric that lent political depth to his campaign. By praising Marcos, promising to bury his body in the Heroes' Cemetery, and supporting the candidacy of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. as vice president, Duterte identified himself with a lineage of populist strongmen epitomized by the old dictator. Accordingly, on his first day in office, Duterte's handpicked police director, Roland dela Rosa, ordered his force to unleash an aggressive attack on drug trafficking. In the hundred

days that followed, the Philippine National Police and allied vigilantes killed over 1,400 alleged drug users, frequently leaving the bodies on city streets (Chen 2016; Curato 2017b, 6–8; Gonzales 2016; Coronel 2017, 170–73).

During his first six months, before the police murder of a South Korean prompted a brief suspension, the tally for Duterte's drug war reached seven thousand bodies dumped on the streets—sometimes with a crude cardboard sign reading “*Pusher ako*” (I am a pusher). Frequently, the victims' faces were wrapped bizarrely in the brown packaging tape that had been the signature of the DDS, much as Marcos's salvaging victims showed the stigmata of torture. After ordering a resumption of the antidrug campaign in March 2017, Duterte brushed aside complaints about human rights abuse, telling police that if they killed their accusers, “I will pardon you” (Berehulak 2016; Villamor 2017d, 2017a; Human Rights Watch 2017, 3, 4, 15, 17, 55, 61, 90; Mogato 2016; Chen 2016; Reyes 2016, 121). To justify these extreme measures, Duterte issued inflated claims that the country was becoming a “narco-state” with 3.7 million drug addicts. Although official figures showed only 1.8 million users for a modest drug abuse rate of 1.69 percent (compared to a global average of 5.2 percent), Filipino voters still identified illegal drugs, along with poor wages, as their top concerns (Curato 2017b, 21; Quimpo 2017, 148–51).

Human Rights Watch declared this drug war a “calamity,” but even after six months and thousands of killings, a resounding 85 percent of Filipinos surveyed were still “satisfied” with the policy. Urban sociologist Nicole Curato finds an explanation for this contradiction in the elusive duality of Duterte's rhetoric. By demonizing the drug menace, both users and pushers, he employed what Curato called a “populist logic of painting a ‘dangerous other’” who are “considered enemies that should be eradicated.” Indeed, in a speech just five days before his inauguration, Duterte said, “The problem is once you're addicted to shabu, rehabilitation is no longer a viable option. If I couldn't convince you to stop, I'll have you killed.” Simultaneously, however, he offered people hope for “the future as something that is within realm of their control” by quickly fostering a semblance of social order (Curato 2016, 100–107; Macaserto 2016). “An ordinary worker . . . goes home every night and for the first time when he passes through the narrow streets of his . . . shanty,” Curato explains, “he does not see any more drunkards or people smoking on

the streets or children just left there, abandoned. He sees clean streets, peaceful at night” (Villamor 2017e; Chen 2016; Reyes 2016). For citizens troubled by petty criminals and addicts, Duterte’s tough talk, Curato argues, offers a “promise of justice” and “stability in an otherwise fragile context” (Curato 2016, 101–2). If we move beyond the rational realm of policy to the emotions of performative politics, each bullet-ridden body left sprawled on a city street seemed a fulfillment of the president’s promises of order and progress.

Just as he has used the spectacle of violence to consolidate his domestic base, so Duterte has proven equally skilled in playing upon great power rivalries to strengthen his international position. In the midst of rising tensions over the South China Sea between Beijing and Washington, Duterte improved his country’s bargaining position by moving away from the close strategic alliance with America toward a more neutral position.

At the ASEAN conference in Laos in September 2016, Duterte reacted profanely to President Obama’s oblique criticism of the thousands of extrajudicial killings under his ongoing drug war, saying, “Who does he think he is? I am no American puppet. I am the president of a sovereign country and I am not answerable to anyone except the Filipino people. *‘Putang ina mo’* [Your mother’s a whore], I will swear at you.” That outburst led Obama to cancel their bilateral meeting, opening a breach between the leaders that resisted repair (McKenzie and Liptak 2016).

In challenging Obama, Duterte was playing upon an underlying Filipino ambiguity toward America. Filipinos have an abiding affection for the United States, with 92 percent expressing approval in the 2015 Pew poll—by far the highest of any country in the world, including America itself (Pew Research Center 2016). But Filipino admiration coexists with layers of antagonism, even resentment, arising from this century-long alliance. The relentless US colonial pacification during the Philippine-American War (1899–1902) killed two hundred thousand in a population of just seven million, leaving a “postmemory”—that is, a “trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge”—marked by strong nationalism inflected with resentments ready to surface at any slight (Wolf 1961, 360; Hirsch 2008, 103–28). As America’s bastion in the Western Pacific on the eve of World War II, the Philippines became a twice-fought battleground, suffering the utter devastation of its capital Manila and a million deaths in a population of just sixteen million (Rottman 2002, 318; Steinberg 1967, 113–

14). During the forty years of the Cold War, the presence of the massive US bases at Subic Bay and Clark Field produced recurring incidents with poor Filipinos, shootings and sexual assaults, that highlighted the country's compromised sovereignty, leading the Philippine Senate to reject a renewal of the bases agreement in 1991 (Bengzon and Rodrigo 1997, 19–21).

A month after this diplomatic contretemps in Laos, as US and Philippine marines landed on a rain-swept Luzon beach in one of the twenty-eight joint military maneuvers held every year, Duterte stated: "This year would be the last. For as long as I am there, do not treat us like a doormat because you'll be sorry for it. I will not speak with you. I can always go to China." Within days, Philippine defense secretary Delfin Lorenzana announced that joint naval exercises in the South China Sea were henceforth suspended. Ever optimistic, the US State Department noted that there still was no formal abrogation of mutual defense agreements and, critically, no suspension of American access to five Philippine bases proximate to the South China Sea (Associated Press 2016).

In October 2016, Duterte used his state visit to Beijing for a rapprochement with China. "Your honors, in this venue, I announce my separation from the United States . . . both in military, but economics also," he announced to a burst of applause from an audience of officials in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, the symbolic seat of China's ruling Communist Party. Evoking the populist tropes of inclusion and exclusion at the Philippine-Chinese trade forum that same day, October 20, Duterte opened his speech by asking, "What is really wrong with an American character?" Americans are, he continued, "loud, sometimes rowdy, and they have this volume of their voice . . . not adjusted to civility.... They are the more forward commanding voice befitting obedience." Evoking some deep Filipino racist tropes, Duterte then mocked the flat, nasal American accent and rued the time he was questioned at Los Angeles Airport by a "Black" officer with "black" uniform, "black shoes," and "black" gun. Moving from rhetoric to substance, Duterte quietly capitulated to Beijing's relentless pressure for bilateral talks to settle the South China Sea dispute, virtually abrogating Manila's recent slam-dunk win on that issue before an international court (Demick and Wilkinson 2016; DU30 News 2016).

China reciprocated. Between Beijing's usual rituals of smiling girls with flowers and marching soldiers with bayonets, President Xi Jinping

proclaimed: “China and the Philippines are neighbors across the sea and the two peoples are blood brothers.” Sealing that bond with cash, Beijing signed deals giving Manila USD 22.5 billion in trade and low-interest loans (Demick and Wilkinson October 20, 2016).

After US elections in November 2016, Duterte tilted back a bit toward Washington, quickly congratulating president-elect Donald Trump on his victory. Struggling to contain North Korea’s nuclear threat, President Trump reciprocated, telephoning Duterte in April 2017 to praise his “unbelievable job on the drug problem” and dismiss Obama’s concerns about the thousands killed. As talk turned to Kim Jong-un’s missile tests, however, the transcript reveals Trump flexing his nuclear muscles in a vain effort to shake Duterte’s reliance on China (Paddock 2016; Department of Foreign Affairs 2017; *The Intercept* 2017). Despite Trump’s aggressive courtship, Duterte still downscaled joint military maneuvers sharply that May, cutting the forces mobilized by half (VOA News 2017). His fulsome love-song serenade of Trump during a November 2017 state visit to Manila notwithstanding, Duterte did not change his apparent decision that China’s economic power, not America’s military might, was the key to his country’s security (Timm 2017).

By his unprecedented affront to one US president and his sedulous courtship of another, Duterte gained freedom of maneuver to maximize concessions from rival superpowers. Without strong popular support from his populist rhetoric and the intimidating spectacle of this extraordinary violence, his de facto abrogation of the country’s maritime claims and defiance of a close ally would have risked a political backlash, a military coup, or both. For the time being, however, his deft juxtaposition of international maneuvering and local bloodletting has made him a latter-day Philippine strongman, with no apparent check on his power (Bello 2017, 81-87).

CONCLUSION

As these historical cases indicate, application of the term populism to the Philippines seems flat, lacking in analytic resonance, without adaptation for local context. By balancing great power patronage with performative violence, executed in ways that seemed to promise order and progress, both Marcos and Duterte gained, for a time, strong control over their disparate polity.

Yet for Marcos and his successors, this recurring balance would prove a delicate one. As his power weakened in the last years of martial rule, Marcos's attempt at control by violence stripped of any promise for a better future backfired, coinciding with a shift in Washington's priorities that accelerated his decline. In like manner, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo tried to placate Washington by becoming a resolute ally in the Global War on Terror while using paramilitary death squads to cripple left-wing activism by over a thousand extrajudicial killings. But these deaths were simple assassinations, devoid of any populist promise that would appeal to the masses, bringing both UN condemnation and rising domestic opposition that crippled her authority.

While Duterte's antidrug campaign and its killings continued beyond its first six months, the *New York Times* reported that "fear and distrust . . . gripped many neighborhoods of Manila" as residents grew "wary of talking to each other, unsure who among them are the police informers." With local officials compiling "watch lists of drug users" from anonymous informants including police and surrendered suspects, 73 percent of those surveyed in March 2017 were "worried" that they or someone they knew would be killed. For the first time, there was slippage in popular support for the drug war as its net approval declined to 66 percent. Simultaneously, a network of Catholic Church safehouses sprang up for those fleeing this crude surveillance. "With just a name and a photo, they'll kill you," Rosario Perez, the mother of two sons who had gone into hiding, told the *New York Times* (Almendral 2017; SWS 2017).

Shifting to the international level, Duterte's emergence as the latest in the lineage of Filipino strongmen reveals two long-term global trends—one political and the other geopolitical. When examined in a geopolitical context, the rise of Duterte and, by inference, that of his populist counterparts around the globe is a manifestation of an epochal change: the unraveling of the world order that the United States has maintained for the past seventy years.

In the decades following World War II, the United States exercised its global hegemony through a network of presidents and prime ministers that served as Washington's loyal "subordinate elites." As the Third World decolonized during these same years, political power moved upward from countless colonial districts, where local elites, like tribal chiefs or maharajas, had long served as instruments of imperial rule, to the executive mansions of a hundred emerging nations. During the Cold War, obeisance was the order of the day, and

those leaders who harbored nationalist or anti-American sentiments often became the target of CIA-sponsored coups, electoral manipulation, or, when required, assassination plots (Reilly 2009, 344–59).

But now as bipolar power becomes multipolar and developing nations develop, America's hegemony has proved, like Britain's before it, to be a "self-liquidating concern," allowing once subordinate elites like Duterte to become unimaginably insubordinate and weakening one of Washington's key means of control on the Pacific littoral and beyond (Brendon 2010, xviii–xx, 660–62). Thus, Duterte, unlike Marcos, could defy US human rights policy with impunity to litter city streets with corpses that offer mute testimony to his power and promise of order.

More immediately, this study of Filipino strongmen past and present reveals two overlooked aspects of this ill-defined phenomenon of global populism: the role of performative violence in projecting domestic strength and a complementary need for diplomatic success to demonstrate international influence. By seeing how skillfully they balance these critical poles of power, we can speculate about the political fate of populist strongmen in disparate corners of the globe.

In Russia's case, Putin's projection of strength by the murder of his domestic opponents is matched by unchecked aggression in Georgia and Ukraine—a successful balancing act likely to extend his hold on power for the foreseeable future (*The Economist* 2016). In Turkey, Erdogan's wholesale repression of ethnic and political enemies has complicated his bid for entry into the European Union and his alliance with the United States against Islamic fundamentalism—diplomatic barriers that could ultimately slow down his bid for unchecked domestic power (Aydintasbas 2016; Kingsley 2017). In Indonesia, ex-general Prabowo Subianto failed in the critical first step of building a domestic base because his call for order resonated discordantly with a public who could recall his earlier bid for power through an eerie violence that had once roiled Jakarta with hundreds of rapes, fires, and deaths (Bachelard 2014; Croft-Cusworth 2014). In Thailand, Prime Minister Thaksin's play for exceptional authority through violence and populist development collided with two rival power centers, the monarchy and the military, prompting a coup in 2006 that ended his term after just five years and sent him into an endless exile (Walker 2006). In America, President Trump's populist fusion of military violence against Islamic enemies abroad and rhetorical virulence

against a racial other at home runs the risk of military reverse and mass opposition that could limit his bid for exceptional executive powers.

In the Philippines, President Duterte's great power diplomacy has the potential to weaken his domestic authority. Although a simple clash of executive egos sparked the diplomatic rupture between Duterte and Obama, the geopolitical consequences are potentially profound. Along the four thousand miles of the Pacific littoral, the Philippines alone sits astride the South China Sea, providing the optimal strategic position to check China's claim to those international waters. President Duterte lacks the authority, and probably even the ambition, to completely abrogate the strong ties to America built so painstakingly and painfully over the past century.

Just six months after his dramatic tilt toward Beijing, Duterte made a sharp correction in an apparent bid to placate a restive military not shy about intervening in the political arena. In March 2017, his defense minister Delfin Lorenzana, a career officer who had played a key role in developing the current military alliance with America, sounded the alarm about Chinese naval explorations on Benham Rise, a resource-rich area inside Philippine waters (Department of National Defense, n.d.; Magosing 2017). When Duterte insisted he had granted Beijing permission, both his defense and foreign secretaries objected openly, prompting one legislator to file an impeachment petition (Viray 2017; Cepeda 2017; Heydarian 2017). Seeking to still the damaging controversy, Duterte soon surprised critics by ordering his military to strengthen their forces on islands in the South China Sea claimed by the Philippines. "Duterte has faced massive backlash over his appeasement-sounding remarks over Benham Rise and Scarborough Shoal," explained one Filipino analyst (Villamor 2017b). Further weakening the Philippine position and augmenting the aura of crisis from Manila's perspective, the Trump administration reduced and then, for months at a time, curtailed all US naval patrols within twelve miles of Chinese-occupied islands in the South China Sea, including the politically sensitive Scarborough Shoal (Cooper 2017).

But should Manila's balancing act fail to rebuild working relations with Washington in ways that will defend its maritime zone, then a six-year hiatus in the alliance would allow China to consolidate its military position in the region's waters and make its *de facto* claim to the Philippines' exclusive zone in the South China Sea an undeniable reality. If public opinion tires of his spectacle of violence and its pervasive sense of threat, as it once did of Marcos, then Duterte's *de*

facto abrogation of his country's claims to the South China Sea's rich fishing grounds and oil reserves could risk a popular backlash, a military coup, or both (Heydarian 2017).

By studying the Philippines as a manifestation of this worldwide trend toward populist leadership, we gain a sharper sense of the recurring juxtaposition of skilled diplomacy and local controls required for the emergence of a Filipino strongman. And by tracing the potent symbolism of mangled bodies—outrage over Moises Padilla's corpse, satisfaction at Lim Seng's execution, anger at Marcos's salvagings, and approval of Duterte's many dead—we can grasp something of the shifting significance of raw physical violence within the complex, ever-changing currents of Philippine politics. ❀

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