The aim of this article is to explain the relationship between populism and human rights. Many scholars argue that there is a contradiction between populism and human rights. The Philippines is an example of a number of cases. The emergence of a populist leader, Rodrigo Duterte, devastated the human rights situation in the Philippines. Since being elected president in 2016, Duterte has committed a number of human rights violations, including the murder of drug dealers and addicts, media blocking, and attacking human rights defenders and so many others. Using Bilkova's as well as Braun's work on populism and human rights, this article seeks to find factors that contribute to making populism contradict human rights in the Philippines. This article found that public trust in leadership, the discursive construction of national threats, the lack of internal and external threats, and economic stability contribute to human rights abuses in the country.

Key words: Populism, Human Rights, The Philippines, Duterte

Introduction
Populism and human rights are a contradiction. Many scholars argue that once populist leaders come to power, human rights are under threat. In world report 2017, Human Rights Watch documented many populist leaders endangering human rights and encouraging abuse. China's Xi Jinping for example has pursued the toughest crackdown on critical voices in two decades. Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India tried to shut down critical civic groups as he closed his eyes to intimidation and hate crimes by Hindu nationalist groups against religious and ethnic minorities. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey took advantage of a coup attempt to crush opposition voices. President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines has openly called for summary executions of drug dealers.
suspected drug dealers and users — and even of human rights activists who defend them. 3 This unexpected series of developments adds greater urgency to the study of populism and its effect on human rights. 4 And the Philippines as a case study has attracted much attention.

The international community is highlighting the Philippines because Duterte has led to serious human rights. 5 OHCHR reports that since the launch of the Double Barrel Government Campaign, from 1 July 2016 to 31 January 2019, thousands of people — and possibly more than 25,000 — have been killed in police and vigilante operations. 6 Between 1 June 2016 and 21 April 2020, the Human Rights Commission of the country documented the killing of 73 children in the context of the campaign against illegal drugs — 62 males and 11 females — although these figures are not exhaustive. The youngest victim was five months old. 7 According to OHCHR, there were at least 248 human rights defenders, legal professionals, journalists and trade unionists killed in connection with their work in the Philippines between 2015 and 2019. 8 In addition, Duterte shut down mass media such as Rappler, which had been critical of the Duterte administration. 9

Duterte's crimes against humanity have reached an alarming level. In a speech address to the High-Level Segment of HRC44 in Geneva, Michelle Bachelet stated that Duterte's national security policies have threatened human rights. 10 The UN Human Rights Office has therefore stressed the need for independent, impartial and credible investigations into violations and for a system to compile and publish consistent, disaggregated data on all allegations of extrajudicial killings.

This article seeks to understand the relationship between populism and human rights in the case of the Philippines. To what extent populist leaders have a chance to exercise human rights, and what factors provide opportunities for these populist leaders. As a result, early prevention can be used when a similar situation occurs.

**Defining Populism**

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3HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (a), 2017, p. 3.
Populism is a divisive idea in many respects. According to Coupal, it is difficult to set a precise definition for this term. While it is hard to define populism, it is easy to explain and characterize: you know it when you see it. Paul Taggart stresses that populism has an intrinsic quality of the chameleon, which means that it often takes on the hue of the world in which it exists. As a consequence, while populism has been used almost exclusively in the past to describe developing countries ruled by charismatic leaders, the term has been gradually extended to Western European policies.

According to Bart Bonikowski and Noam Gidron, there are three main approaches in the study of populism: as a political strategy, a political ideology, and as a discursive style. As a political strategy, this approach focuses on the attributes of political leaders and stresses the unmediated relationship between leaders and their supporters. Alan Knight defines populism as a political style. While, Kurt Weyland emphasizes populism as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers. Kenneth Robert similarly refers to populism as the top-down political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge elite groups on behalf of an ill-defined pueblo, or ‘the people.’ And Paul Kenny who specifically observes the emergence of populism in Southeast Asia defines populism as a charismatic mobilization of a mass movement in pursuit of political power.

As a political ideology, populism emphasizes the content of ideology. An influential definition of populism as an ideology was suggested by Cas Mudde. According to Mudde, populism is not merely as a political style. It should be understood as an ideological feature. Accordingly, populism is understood as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people. According to Bart and Gidron, ideology here means an

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11 R. DORNBUSCH, S. EDWARD, 1991, p.8; P.D.Kenny, p.8
12 Y. COUPAL, Macroeconomics of Populism in Venezuela, p. 5-6
13 B. BONIKOWSKI, N. GIDRON, 2016, p.8
15 K.M. ROBERTS, 2007, p. 5
17 C. MUDDE, 2007, p.23.
interconnected set of ideas that derive meaning from their relationship to one another. In the case of populism, these ideas revolve around the Manichean contrast between the corrupt elite and the morally pure people. By characterizing this ideology as “thin-centered,” scholars stress that populism is not a complete worldview that offers consistent answers to a wide range of important political questions; instead, populism attaches itself to other full-fledged ideologies such as socialism or nationalism.\textsuperscript{18}

As a discursive style, populism is predicated on the fundamental conflict between the corrupt elite and the people. Populism as a discourse is best thought of as a rhetorical style of different ideological persuasions used by political actors. This approach views populism as an attribute of the message and not the speaker. This makes it possible under different conditions for political leaders to use different degrees of populism. Some political actors may, of course, be more populist than others, but this can only be established by examining the variation in discursive styles within the actors. This perspective opens the possibility of examining the contextual determinants and variations of populist rhetoric through historical periods and geographical regions.\textsuperscript{19} The work of Laclau has been particularly influential in shaping the discursive approach. Laclau recognizes that populism involves the division of the social scene into two camps. This division presupposes the presence of some privileged signifiers which condense in themselves the signification of a whole antagonistic camp (the 'regime', the 'oligarchy', the 'dominant groups', and so on, for the enemy; the 'people', the 'nation', the 'silent majority', and so on, for the oppressed underdog - these signifiers acquire this articulating role according to a contextual history).\textsuperscript{20} For Laclau, the symbolic distinction that constitutes populist discourse between 'us' and 'them' is an instance of relational 'empty signifiers' that, depending on the social context, can take on varied content. Via a process of "identification" (i.e. classification), these categories obtain their significance, whereby particular social classes are perceived as "the people" (us) and opposed to hierarchical "others" (them).\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Defining Human Rights}

\textsuperscript{18} B. BONIKOWSKI, N. GIDRON, 2016, p.9
\textsuperscript{19} IBIDEM, p.9
\textsuperscript{20} E. LACLAU, 2005, p.84-87.
\textsuperscript{21} OP.CIT, p. 10.
According to English philosopher, John Locke, people have natural rights to life, liberty and property. No one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions: for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent.\textsuperscript{22} United Nations defines Human rights as rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from torture and slavery, freedom of speech and thought, the right to work and education, and much more. Everybody is entitled, without prejudice, to these rights.\textsuperscript{23}

The United Nations has defined a broad range of internationally accepted rights, including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. In 1976, the International Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Covenant came into effect. The human rights that the Covenant aims to promote and secure include: the right to work in equal and favourable conditions; the right to social security, to an acceptable standard of life and to the highest level of physical and mental well-being that can be attained; the right to education and to benefit from cultural freedom and scientific progress.

In 1976, the Universal Civil and Political Rights Covenant and the First Optional Protocol came into effect. In 1989, the Second Optional Protocol was introduced. The Covenant deals with such rights as freedom of movement; equality before the law; the right to a fair trial and presumption of innocence; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of opinion and expression; peaceful assembly; freedom of association; participation in public affairs and elections; and protection of minority rights. It prohibits arbitrary deprivation of life; torture, cruel or degrading treatment or punishment; slavery and forced labour; arbitrary arrest or detention; arbitrary interference with privacy; war propaganda; discrimination; and advocacy of racial or religious hatred.\textsuperscript{24}

**Relationship Between Populism and Human Rights**

Populism and human rights are like double-edged swords. Populism itself contains elements that are supportive of human rights and those that are less, or not at all, so. Because of the simultaneous presence of these two categories of elements, populists have an uneasy and

\textsuperscript{22} J. LOCKE, C. B. MACPHERSON, 1980, p.8-9.
\textsuperscript{24} IBIDEM.
somewhat ambivalent relationship to human rights. On the one hand, populist leaders emerge to voice to those who feel marginalized by the political status quo. On the other hand, they ignore the populist challengers.

Experiences in many countries show that the emergence of populism will have a negative impact on human rights. In Latin America such as Peru under Alberto Fujimori, Venezuela under Hugo Chavez, and, to a lesser degree, Bolivia under Evo Morales and Ecuador under Lucio Gutierrez and Rafael Correa, fragile democracies slid into competitive authoritarianism, or electoral regimes in which widespread incumbent abuse skewed the playing field against opponents. Trump and various politicians in Europe seek power through appeals to racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and nativism. They all claim that the public accepts violations of human rights as supposedly necessary to secure jobs, avoid cultural change, or prevent terrorist attacks. In fact, disregard for human rights offers the likeliest route to tyranny. In Russia, Vladimir Putin responded to popular discontent in 2011 with a repressive agenda, including draconian restrictions on free speech and assembly, unprecedented sanctions for online dissent, and laws severely restricting independent groups.

China’s leader, Xi Jinping, concerned about the slowdown in economic growth, has embarked on the most intense crackdown on dissent since the Tiananmen era. Hong Kong’s human rights record took a dark turn. Hong Kong courts disqualified four pro-democracy lawmakers in July and jailed three prominent pro-democracy student leaders - Alex Chow, Nathan Law and Joshua Wong - in August 2017 for their roles in a protest at the Civic Square in front of the Central Government Complex in Tamar, Admiralty, on 26 and 27 September 2014. Wong, Law and Chow were handed sentences of six to eight months by the Court of Appeal for their role in 2014's massive Umbrella Movement protests, which called for fully free leadership elections and were an unprecedented challenge to Beijing.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India tried to shut down critical civic groups as he closed his eyes to intimidation and hate crimes by Hindu nationalist groups against religious and ethnic

25 V. BILKOVA, 2019, p.153
26 S. LEVITSKY, J. LOXTON, 2013, p. 107
28 IBIDEM
minorities.\textsuperscript{30} A striking finding of the Hate Crime watch shows that as many as 90\% of religious hate crimes (especially to Muslims) since 2009 have occurred after Modi led the BJP to power at the Centre in 2014.\textsuperscript{31}

According to Bilkova, there are three main arguments that populist use to criticize the concept of human rights. The arguments can be invoked separately but they can also be combined. The first is the security argument. It builds on security concerns, especially those related to terrorism and, more recently, to migration. It alleges that human rights as currently understood prevent states from countering modern security threats and from ensuring an adequate protection of the people. The second is the legitimacy argument. It contends that the human rights project has stopped serving its original purpose, that of guaranteeing the well-being of the people. It has been hijacked to serve particular groups and promote particular agendas. The third is the democracy argument. It postulates that the concept of human rights is at odds with the principle of democracy, because it favours the interests of minorities over those of the majority.\textsuperscript{32}

In addition, in his research on Peru under Fujimori and Venezuela under Chavez, Joseph Braun shows that populism appears to be adversarial to basic civil and political human rights by its very nature. This enmity is amplified when the populist regime exhausts the resources for generous social programs. Furthermore, the combination of a populist regime with a real security threat is found to be a particularly dire situation for human rights. Fujimori committed drastic human rights violations due to the economic crisis. As the money for his social programs dried-up, Fujimori’s support among the lower classes dwindled. His regime finally had to resort to election-rigging to essentially falsify a populist mandate.\textsuperscript{33} The situation was exacerbated by intensifying public protests demanding Fujimori’s removal as President. In Venezuela, meanwhile, Braun felt that populism was less harmful to human rights because he benefited from the oil boom when Chavez came to power in 1998. Chaves is able to fulfill his social program with the petrodollars of his country. This has helped Chavez to retain widespread support without having

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (b), 2019, p.23
\item \textsuperscript{31} R. AYYUB, what a Rising Tide of Violence Against Muslims in India Says About Modi's Second Term, 2019, https://time.com/5617161/india-religious-hate-crimes-modi/
\item \textsuperscript{32} V.BILKOVA, 2019, p. 155
\item \textsuperscript{33} J.P. BRAUN, 2011, p.38.
\end{itemize}
to remove domestic opposition entirely.\textsuperscript{34} In addition, Chaves has a charisma that hypnotizes Venezuela and thus provides Chavez's policies with disproportionate support.\textsuperscript{35}

**The rise of Duterte**

Weyland describes populism as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers. Mudde emphasizes a thin-centered ideology that essentially considers that society is divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and insists that politics should be an expression of the people's general will. And Laclau stresses the essential nature of populism, namely an "empty signifier," which provides a means by which anyone can identify with the people as a whole.

Rodrigo Duterte, 71 years old, was elected as the 16th President of the Philippines on May 10, 2016, succeeding Benigno Aquino III. According to Teehankee and Thompson, Duterte phenomenon is not a revolt of the poor. It is middle-class driven. It is angry protest most acute among the modestly successful, including call center workers, Uber drivers, and overseas Filipino workers. In projecting his populist persona, Duterte identified the “them” he was against as the drug traffickers, corrupt or inept officials, oligarchs, his rival and critics in the Dilawan camp (that is, party supporters of Roxas and Aquino) and in the media, and even the Catholic Church. Surprisingly his strategy appealed to a large of voters who were already frustrated with or angered by the elite. Drawn to Duterte’s charisma, the frustrated voters, who are mostly from the middle and upper classes, constituted Duterte’s “we, the people” in his campaign against “them”.\textsuperscript{36}

Electoral polling data from the 2016 election suggest that Duterte won votes across socio-economic classes. Younger, wealthier and more educated sections of the population were Duterte's strongest base of support. Teehankee and Thompson believe the phenomenon of Duterte is not a revolt of the poor. It's driven by the middle class. It is angry protest most acute among the modestly successful, including call center workers, Uber drivers, and overseas Filipino workers'. Furthermore, Coronel notes that the 'new middle classes' are his 'hardcore supporters,' including

\textsuperscript{34} IBIDEM
\textsuperscript{35} I.M.J. SIANIPAR, Kebangkitan Populisme di Amerika Latin (The Rise of Populism in Latin America), 2012, p. 65
\textsuperscript{36} J.J. CAPUNO,2020, p.4.
Filipino nannies, nurses, seamen and construction workers working overseas, and the digital underclass working in the booming call centers in Manila and other cities.\(^{37}\)

Although Duterte might appear to be unsophisticated and crude, he is politically savvy and attuned to the attitudes and concerns of average Filipinos. As a successful, no-nonsense mayor of Davao who prioritized law and order over legal protections for suspected criminals, he ran on his reputation. Duterte's campaign's central theme was that his effective leadership will produce dramatic change. He heaped criticism on the Manila-based elite during his campaign, vowed to carry out a national war on illegal drugs and violence. During his campaign, he heaped criticism on the Manila-based elite, vowed to undertake a nationwide assault on illegal drugs and criminality, and promised to change the government to a federal system. His victory over Mar Roxas, who placed a distant second, signaled that the promise of change was more compelling than continuity.\(^{38}\)

Within 6 months of his taking office, Duterte vowed to eliminate the drug issue and he followed through with a quick and ruthless campaign to order executions for those accused of drug involvement and who do not surrender peacefully. His narrative to justify the drug war was based on allegations that the Philippines is infested with illicit drugs and that so many communities are rampant with addiction, causing violence, disruption and a diminished quality of life. In the Philippines, he claimed that there were around three to four million drug criminals.

Duterte promised to eradicate the drug problem within 6 months of his taking office and he followed through with a swift and brutal campaign of ordering executions for those suspected of drug involvement and who do not peaceably surrender. His narrative to justify the drug war was based upon claims that the Philippines is infested with illegal narcotics and that addiction is running rampant in too many neighborhoods causing crime, disruption and a lowered quality of life. He estimated about three to four million drug criminals in the Philippines. This estimation is over two million higher than the 2012 report by the Dangerous Drug Board (DDB) of the Philippines. Although no Philippine organization, public or private, can reach Duterte's estimated number or provide proof of the veracity of his statements, despite this fact, his message seems to resonate with many Filipinos and seems to fuel his continued popularity.\(^{39}\) More than 16 million

\(^{37}\) C.G. RAMOS, 2020, p.490
\(^{38}\) D.G. TIMBERMAN, 2019, p.3.
\(^{39}\) S.R. MAXWELL, 2018, p.2.
Filipinos (about 39 percent of eligible voters) who voted for him to take office on 9 May 2016 were obviously attracted by his platform (see table 1). The size of his winning plurality and margin of victory compare favourably with the last five presidential elections (see figure 1).

Table 1: Presidential polls and election result (in %)

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<tr>
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<th>Duterte</th>
<th>Roxas</th>
<th>Poe</th>
<th>Binay</th>
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<td>Sept 2015 PA</td>
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<td>April 2016 PA</td>
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<td>May 2016 SWS</td>
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<td>9 May election*</td>
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Figure 1: Duterte win compared to the other post-Edsa precidencies

Source: (COOK. M, SALAZAR. L, 2016), p.3.

Human Rights Violation under Duterte

The Philippines has a longstanding history of abuses of human rights. The national martial law imposed under President Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986) from September 1972 to January
1981 resulted in a surge of severe violations committed by the military. During the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship, over 3,000 such killings were reported. Under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001–2010), human rights abuses continued throughout the country, with hundreds of leftist activists killed by the military in targeted counterinsurgency operations against the New People's Army (NPA). While the number of serious violations of human rights declined during President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III's administration (2010–2016), killings of prominent human rights defenders continued.

Since President Duterte took office on June 30, 2016, civil society has been operating in an increasingly hostile environment. President Duterte has publicly expressed his blatant disregard for human rights on several occasions in relation to his 'war on drugs' and has repeatedly threatened to kill human rights activists. On August 5, 2016, Duterte said, “I don’t care about human rights, believe me.” On November 28, 2016, Duterte threatened to kill human rights activists critical of his ‘war on drugs.’ On December 7, 2016, Duterte continued his invectives and threatened lawyers defending drug suspects. On May 19, 2017, Duterte menaced to human rights activists, “I’ll kill you along with drug addicts, I’ll decapitate you.” The Duterte administration has intentionally demonised human rights defenders to the public. This has led to a distortion of the public image of human rights and its advocates.

The "war on drugs" by Duterte has already claimed over 7,000 lives as of April 2017 and shows no sign of slowing down. Human Rights Watch and international news outlets reported the same number, while Amnesty International estimates that around 9,000 were killed by both police and vigilantes. Johnson and Fernquest noted that in the first year of Duterte’s war on drugs, the frequency of extra-judicial killing in Duterte’s war on drugs is far higher than the frequency of extrajudicial killing under the martial law imposed by Marcos in the 1970s (see table 2).

Table 2. Drug-related killings reported in the first year of the Philippine war on drugs
According to World Report 2019 of Human Rights Watch, Duterte administration’s “war on drugs” expanded into areas outside the capital, Metro Manila, including to the provinces of Bulacan, Laguna, Cavite, and the cities of Cebu and General Santos. The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) stated that 4,948 suspected drug users and dealers died during police operations from July 1, 2016 to September 30, 2018. But this does not include the thousands of others killed by unidentified gunmen. Duterte has vowed to continue his anti-drug campaign until his term ends in 2022. Duterte has also vowed to protect police officers and agents carrying out the “drug war” from prosecution.\textsuperscript{46}

In January 2018, Duterte attacked media freedom by threatening the closure of Rappler.com, an online news outlet critical of the "war on drugs." In November, the Department of Justice indicted Rappler and its editor and founder, Maria Ressa, for tax evasion. This was followed by months of attacks and harassment by the Duterte Government and its supporters against Rappler. The killings of journalists continued in 2018, with six unidentified gunmen killed in different parts of the country.

In March 2019, current High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet, in her first annual update to the 40th session of the Human Rights Council, expressed deep concern over the scale of killings noting that several sources now estimate that up to 27,000 people may have been killed. She also flagged, inter alia, the lack of investigations and accountability at national level, and noted that Special Rapporteurs of this Council have been subjected to threats; and opposition politicians, human rights defenders and journalists have been threatened, attacked and jailed.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (b), 2019.
\textsuperscript{47} AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2019, p. 2
In June 2020, in address to Member States of United Nations in Geneva on the opening day of the Council’s 44th session, Michelle Bachelet reiterated concerns over human rights violations in the Philippines. The findings of the OHCHR report are very serious. More than 248 human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and trade unionists were killed between 2015 and 2019. This includes a large number of environmental and indigenous peoples’ rights defenders. Human rights defenders are routinely smeared as terrorists, enemies of the State and even viruses akin to COVID-19.  

OHCHR also documented that the campaign against illegal drugs has been linked to the deaths of 73 children. The youngest victim was five months old. The operation was being carried out “without due regard for the rule of law, due process and the human rights of people who may be using or selling drugs. The killings have been widespread and systematic – and they are ongoing.” The High Commissioner also highlighted “near-impunity” for perpetrators of illegal killings during police operations. the report details how the Philippines Police Internal Affairs Service (IAS) automatically investigates any deaths that occur during police operations, and yet of more than 4,580 investigations, “the Government has cited only one case – that of 17-year-old Kian delos Santos – where three police officers were convicted of a drug campaign-related killing”.

How Duterte legitimizes his human rights abuses?

According to Bilkova, populist leaders use three arguments to criticize human rights, namely the security argument, the legitimacy argument and the democracy argument. In the case of the Philippines, a discourse that succeeded in influencing Filipinos facilitated Duterte’s human rights violations, namely the issue of narcotics is a national threat. Maxwell’s research shows that 86.6% Filipinos view drug problem is a national threat and serious crisis. (see figure 2).

According to the 2017 Pew Research Center survey, Duterte and his policies are widely popular nationally, despite international concerns leveled by various governments regarding Duterte’s controversial clashes with drug cartels and potential human rights violations. Fully 86% have a

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50 IBIDEM.
51 S.R. MAXWELL, 2018, p.6-7.
favorable view of Duterte himself, 78% support his handling of the illegal-drugs issues and 62% say that the Philippine government is making progress in its anti-drug campaign.\(^{52}\) (see figure 3 and 4). Meanwhile, a survey by Pulse Asia in September 2017, not much different from Pew Research Center, reveals that 88% of Filipinos support the administration’s campaign against illegal drugs, even though 73% believe that extrajudicial killings occur in its conduct.\(^{53}\)

**Figure 2: Perceived severity of drug problem: own town and entire Philippines**

![Figure 2: Perceived severity of drug problem: own town and entire Philippines](image)


**Figure 3: Rodrigo Duterte and his war on drugs receive positive reviews from Filipinos**

![Figure 3: Rodrigo Duterte and his war on drugs receive positive reviews from Filipinos](image)

Source: (POUSHTER. J, BISHOP. C, 2017), p. 4

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\(^{52}\) J. POUSHTER, C. BISHOP, 2017, p. 136.

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

As an argument for legitimacy, Duterte tried to show the public that the elites who opposed him were corrupt. In 2017, a leading critic of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, Senator Leila de Lima, has been arrested on drug trafficking charges. De Lima is accused of receiving money from detained drug lords. De Lima faces three drug-related charges, including one that states she received money from drug dealers in the country's prisons of approximately 5 million Philippine

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54 IBIDEM, p.136.
pesos ($99,850 / 94,380 euros) between 2010-2016.\textsuperscript{55} De Lima’s arrest has reinforced public confidence and also fear of Duterte. But, Duterte claims that he represents the majority, not the few. Duterte has also frequently criticized human rights defenders and the concept of human rights, stating that "your concern is human rights, mine is human life".\textsuperscript{56} On August 16, 2017, Duterte alleged that human rights organizations criticized the ‘war on drugs’ to protect drug criminals. “When it comes to criminals, you [human rights organizations] will proclaim, ‘human rights violations’ [to protect them].” On March 26, 2018, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque stated that the government did not discount the possibility that some human rights groups had become unwitting tools of drug lords to hinder the strides made by the administration. The statement was issued after Foreign Affairs Secretary, Alan Peter Cayetano claimed on March 25, 2018, that some human rights groups were being unwittingly used by drug lords to destabilize the government and discredit its ‘war on drugs’.\textsuperscript{57}

With little resistance to his rule, Duterte's violence against human rights has increased. Duterte has targeted his domestic enemies with overheated rhetoric. Since February 2017, Senator Leila de Lima has been jailed on politically motivated drug charges filed against her in apparent retaliation for leading a Senate inquiry into the “drug war” killings. Duterte responded with a personal attack, accusing her of “sexual escapades” with her driver who had collected payoffs linked to illegal drugs while his allies removed her as head of the senate investigative committee with the lower house setting up several investigations of de Lima instead.\textsuperscript{58} In September, Duterte ordered the arrest of a colleague of de Lima’s, Senator Antonio Trillanes IV, by revoking his amnesty, forcing him to remain at the Senate premises for weeks. In October, a Manila court dismissed the government’s petition to issue the arrest warrant against Trillanes. Trillanes has been Duterte’s most vocal critic since de Lima, accusing the president and his family of corruption.\textsuperscript{59} The most dramatic event was the Supreme Court’s removal of its own chief justice, Maria Lourdes Sereno, following a petition by the government. The case was extraordinary because the ouster had sidestepped the constitutional remedy of impeachment, the traditional way of removing high officers of the state, including the chief justice. Sereno was an outspoken critic of President

\textsuperscript{56} G.K. CABICO, 2019.
\textsuperscript{58} HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (b), 2019, p. 468.
\textsuperscript{59} IBIDEM
Duterte’s war on illegal drugs. The Supreme Court’s actions and inactions in these salient cases suggest a judiciary largely unwilling to rule against the president. In choosing self-restraint, the Supreme Court has left Philippine democracy to backslide. In the De Lima, Trillanes, and Sereno cases, the court effectively narrowed political competition. It allowed the administration to arrest or oust opposition figures from both the legislative and judicial branches.\(^{60}\)

Another factor that is influential in determining popular support for the violation of human rights by Duterte is the economy stability. Based on Pew research survey in 2017, 80% of Filipinos are satisfied with Duterte's handling of the economy. During the duterte administration, the Philippines economic growth reached above 6%. In 2017, GDP reached a point of 7.4%. Even though it experienced a decline in the following year, until 2019, the Philippine economic growth was still at a level of above 6%. In the third quarter of 2019, economic growth was at 6.2% (see Figure. 5). Economic stability provides Duterte with an opportunity to finance social programs such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) - the Conditional Cash Transfer Program, health insurance, education security and even the Philippine Police's salary increases.

**Figure 5: Quarterly growth rate of real gross domestic product and gross national income, 2015 Q1–2019 Q3.**

![Graphic representation of quarterly growth rate of real gross domestic product and gross national income, 2015 Q1–2019 Q3.](image)

Source of raw data: Philippine Statistics Authority

Figure 6: Sectoral Distribution of Public Spending in the Philippines, 2008–2017

Source: (RAMOS. C. G 2020), p. 496.

Figure 6 shows a sharp increase in the financing of social services for Filipinos in 2016 and 2017, reaching over 1 trillion pesos (a significant shift in the focus on the social sector). In the health sector, there was a substantial rise, which amounted to about 20% of the cost of social expenditure. A substantial amount of funding for education services, namely about 50%, was also allocated by Duterte. Filipino students received educational assistance up to university level in the Duterte period. The less fortunate people, meanwhile, get cash transfers through the 4P scheme.

The most important change has occurred in the Philippine National Police (PNP) salary. In 2018, Duterte has fulfilled his campaign promise to increase the salaries of cops and soldiers when he signed into law the Congress Joint Resolution modifying the Base Pay Schedule for Military and Uniformed Personnel (MUP) on January 9 at Malacañang Palace after it was passed by the House of Representatives as House Joint Resolution 18 on Dec. 11, 2017 and adopted by the Senate as an amendment to Senate Joint Resolution 11 on Dec. 13, 2017. Congress Joint Resolution (JR) no. 1, s. 2018 doubles the base pay of a Police Officer (PO) I in the Philippine National Police (PNP) or a Private in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and equivalent ranks in the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), Philippine Public Safety College (PPSC), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA). A PO I and those with equivalent rank will enjoy a

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61 C.G. RAMOS, 2020, p. 496.
100% increase, resulting to a monthly base pay of P29,668 (616.840 USD). Overall, the salary adjustments, which took effect on January 1, 2018, results to a 58.7 percent average increase for all MUP ranks.\(^6\) (See table 3).

Table 3: Modified Base Pay Schedule For Military and Uniformed Personnel Beginning January 1, 2018

![Modified Base Pay Schedule](https://www.dbm.gov.ph/208-2018/423-national-budget-circular-no-574)

The salary of the PNP, according to Duterte, is extremely low. Therefore, the government needs adjustments to be made. This rise in wages was accompanied by a police commitment to rid the Philippines of all forms of criminals, especially the battle against illegal drugs. The relationship between Duterte and the PNP indicates a case of the ally principle. Police have an intrinsic motivation to address the country’s drug problem. Duterte capitalizes on this motivation, often telling them to "clean up the streets." This creates a norm within the PNP where "police officers try so hard to please the President." Due to such high expectations within the PNP, this creates a standard in the PNP. Because of such strong norms within the PNP, officers who disagree with the

President may be afraid to be labeled as an enemy and then lose their jobs or risk being a target themselves.\textsuperscript{64} (BAGUIOS. A; KONG. R; PHILLIPS. L; MAHON. A, 2019)

\textbf{Conclusion}

Observing the relationship between populism and human rights in the Philippines reinforces the assumption that populism is a threat to human rights. The case of the Philippines reveals a number of variables that give populist leaders great opportunities to violate human rights. First, public trust in leadership. 86.6 percent of the Filipinos view Duterte as positive. Second, the discursive construction of national threats. Duterte was able to make a statement that the narcotics problem was a national disaster, so 86\% supported his policy of extrajudicial killing. Third, the lack of internal and external threats contributes to the violation of human rights in the Philippines. Duterte's shrewdness in silencing his political opponents and engaging the police and the military to support his policies has smoothed out the policy of narcotics warfare.

Finally, economic stability enhances public confidence in Duterte and benefits Duterte from financing social programs such as 4P, health grant and education grant, and even doubles the salaries of the Philippine police. This article identified an important variable that can be considered in the understanding of the relationship between populism and human rights, namely economic stability, which shows a strong correlation in the promotion of human rights violations in the Philippines. Financial stability also has a strong influence in silencing and even co-opting political opponents to support authoritarian populism.

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