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Introduction: Change and Continuity Narratives in the Philippines from Duterte to Marcos Jr.

Aries A. Arugay, Jean Encinas-Franco, and Justin Keith A. Baquisal

Since 2016, the Philippines underwent profound policy changes under the leadership of firebrand and populist leader Rodrigo Duterte. Within the span of six years, these sea changes had widespread ramifications for the country's democratic regime as well as economic and social conditions that include a bloody war on drugs, a massive terrorist attack in Mindanao, a pivot away from orthodox foreign policies, a gripping global pandemic, and economic hardship, among others. Side by side with these changes are the reinforcement of strongman rule, militarized governance, and dynastic dominance in the political sphere of Asia's oldest democracy. This chapter introduces this edited volume by discussing the three

narratives that currently describe the state of Philippine state and society since Duterte took power: games, changes, and fears. Games represent the continuity of elite competition and collusion at the expense of the public welfare and the difficulty to assert the republic's national interest given the superpower rivalry between the United States and China. On the other hand, the changes brought about by Duterte's populist playbook have further weakened institutions and perniciously polarized society. This in turn generated multiple fears of Duterte's legacies of autocratic politics, militarization, social violence, and economic uncertainty given the advent of the Marcos Jr. administration.

Keywords: Duterte; democracy; Marcos Jr.; political change; Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, the Philippines underwent profound policy and political changes under the leadership of firebrand and populist leader Rodrigo Duterte. These include major modifications in the country's foreign policy through a more accommodationist stance towards China while undermining the military alliance with the United States. Beyond this foreign policy shift, Duterte has also instigated major assaults on the Philippines' liberal and democratic institutions and the public sphere. His populist rhetoric mobilized a broad political coalition that directly attacked the opposition, independent media, and civil society. The country's major media network was deprived of a franchise to operate, a Supreme Court Chief Justice was removed from office, Duterte's political opponents were incarcerated, and political dissidents and critics were labelled as communists and terrorists. By all metrics of democratic quality, the Philippine democratic regime underwent further erosion under the Duterte administration.¹

Without the benefit of hindsight, the rise of Duterte was welcomed by the country's elites and masses. Similar with other populist strongmen such as Hugo Chávez, Thaksin Shinawatra, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Victor Orban, Donald Trump, among others, Duterte's capture of presidential power at the outset was a welcome change given the

excesses and limitations of the Philippine liberal-democratic regime brought by the inspirational people power revolution of 1986.² There was no umbrella coalition of political forces that could have effectively prevented Duterte's electoral victory. On the contrary, the Duterte era in Philippine politics ushered a swift and rapid concentration of power within the presidency unmatched since the martial law period. With supermajority support in the legislature, Duterte was able to pass draconian policies, pounce the opposition, and had the fortunate timing of appointing critical positions in the judiciary and independent constitutional bodies that were supposed to safeguard democracy and the rule of law.³ The results of the 2019 midterm elections for national and local political positions revealed Duterte's domineering position in the political arena as the opposition failed to secure a seat in the twenty-four-member Senate, an institution historically known as a check to presidential power.⁴

As the country entered a critical juncture with the May 2022 national elections, the legacies of the Duterte administration underwent an informal referendum from the Filipino electorate. The national campaign centred on whether Duterte's mode of governance and political style should be continued or not. Among the major presidential candidates, the tandem of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the son and namesake of the country's late dictator, and Sara Duterte, President Duterte's scion, committed to continuing the changes Duterte has started. On the other hand, leading opposition candidate and Vice President Leni Robredo promised to recalibrate Philippine democracy to its more liberal-democratic version by reversing the country's democratic regression. In the end, the elections delivered a majority mandate to Marcos Jr. as president and Sara Duterte as vice president, an electoral outcome unseen since Marcos Sr. got re-elected in the 1969 presidential elections. History for the Philippines has indeed come full circle.

This edited volume is situated within this peculiar context. It analyses the policy legacies of the entire Duterte administration (2016–22) to the country's society and politics on relevant themes such as economic policy, party politics, foreign policy, civil-military relations, civil society, social media, national security, and others. Second, it discusses the implications of the 2022 Philippine elections and the victory of the Marcos-Duterte alliance to the country's democracy

and provides an evidence-based examination of the new government's policies and agenda. This project both looks back by examining the Duterte administration and looks forward by providing some insights into the continuities and changes in the country during the early part of Marcos Jr. administration.

The introductory chapter of this volume sets the tone for the interrelated narratives depicting the state of Philippine politics and society since Duterte took power in 2016. The *game* narrative represents the continuity of both elite competition and/or collusion that has defined the country's contemporary political landscape. The games played by dynastic and oligarchic elites have reinforced their dominance, narrowing the space for alternative leadership, opposition figures, and even civil society. They can be seen in the three electoral cycles (2016, 2019, and 2022) where the Duterte and Marcos dynasties captured state power with overwhelming mandates. On the one hand, it demonstrated the resilience of electoral democracy (see Table 1.1) in the Philippines. Unlike other Southeast Asian countries, elections remain the sole legitimate means of conferring legitimacy to political leaders in the country. However, political science scholarship also cautioned that excessive reliance on elections (irrespective of their quality and integrity) and majoritarianism can also erode other important elements of a democratic regime such as human rights, rule of law, and pluralism.⁵ Marcos Jr. represents the third progeny of a former president to become the country's highest political leader in the Philippines with Sara Duterte posing perhaps to be the fourth. To a certain extent, the country's democratic regime might as well be a "hereditary republic".

Apart from the games at the domestic level, this narrative can also be extended in the foreign policy front as the country is caught in the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region. This superpower contest has far-reaching repercussions on small powers like the Philippines. Foreign policy "pendulum swings" have occurred within a short period of time with President Duterte's pivot to China and Marcos Jr.'s embrace of the United States. How the country traverses this international game is both a function of domestic politics within its elites, bureaucracy, and even the public. But

the US-China rivalry will also have consequences for the Philippines as it deals with several political, security, and economic challenges.⁶

The second narrative of *change* is the outcome of Duterte's campaign promise that has captivated the Filipino public. However, many did not anticipate how rapid and deep these changes are. His populist playbook has further weakened institutions and perniciously polarized society. Duterte's legacies were quite clear. By engaging in a multifront war against illegal drug addicts, terrorists, communists, and civil society, the country saw a return to violence. Duterte also deeply entrenched the military in policymaking and implementation with a heavily militarized cabinet that securitized issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic response.⁷ The disinformation that propped his legitimacy but also undermined social cohesion and collective memory was rigorously implemented by outsourced agents of fake news. These changes are now heavily woven into the nation's socio-political fabric as Duterte maintained high popularity ratings unseen in post-martial law Philippines.⁸

Finally, the narrative of *fear* resonates deeply given the political succession occasioned by the 2022 national elections with the restoration of the Marcos dynasty at the zenith of power. The sources of the fears stem from the fact that Marcos Jr. campaign platform revolved around reinforcing Duterte's policies. The appointments of Duterte allies and supporters further solidify his alliance with Sara Duterte, the inheritor of Duterte's strongman legacies. But fear also represents strategic, economic, and political uncertainty emanating from the country's weak economy, polarized society, and weakened institutions.⁹ Will the Filipino majority that provided a very strong mandate to the Marcos-Duterte government prove themselves correct in entrusting the custodianship of the nation to the two most powerful political dynasties in the country? Or will the Philippines enter another vicious downward political and economic spiral and deprive itself again of realizing its supposed potential and free itself from being known as "Asia's greatest underachiever"?¹⁰ The burden ultimately lies in the shoulders of the formidable Marcos-Duterte coalition to deliver on their promises for a better future for the Philippines.

GAMES: THE ENDURING DYNAMICS OF PHILIPPINE POLITICS

Since the fall of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, there is a major political consensus that democracy is the “only game in town”. Apart from this two-decade authoritarian interlude, the Philippines stayed with popular elections as the only means to confer procedural legitimacy to any government. Despite having more than a century of democratic elections, much is to be desired in terms of their freedom, fairness, competitiveness, and integrity. Comparatively, neighbouring countries like Indonesia with barely three decades of election experience, have better electoral integrity than the Philippines.¹¹ Even with the deficient nature of its elections, there is overwhelming voter turnout of its ballot exercises that could be the envy of mature democracies around the world. Of all eligible voters, 83 per cent participated in the 2022 national elections, a record-breaking turnout from the 2016 elections which had 82 per cent.¹²

In the Philippines, while electoral politics is a game skilfully mastered by the country’s political class, it still has to be conducted within a competitive and minimally democratic framework. The 2016 national elections that catapulted Rodrigo Duterte to the presidency was a shock to the country’s trajectory towards a more liberal-democratic regime. While emanating from a local political dynasty, Duterte’s image, idiosyncrasies, and political style veered from the usual stereotype of the Philippine chief executive, characteristics that attracted the electorate enough to make him the first president to come from Mindanao.¹³ In many ways, it was a rebuke of an unresponsive and insensitive government that did not allow democracy to work for the ordinary Filipino.

Despite not getting a majority, Duterte secured a convincing victory with an estimated 16.6 million of the 44 million votes cast for president (see Table 1.1). With only an almost moribund party and support from a handful of local oligarchs, he propped a presidential bid against candidates with extensive national political experience, solid political pedigree, and the state machinery from the outgoing administration. His tough image, no-nonsense posturing, and sheer political will seemed sufficient for Filipinos desperate for leadership with a vision.¹⁴ And in Philippine politics, timing is everything.

TABLE 1.1
Vote Share of Leading Presidential Candidates in the 2016 and 2022
Presidential Elections

2016 Elections		2022 Elections	
Presidential Candidate	Vote Share	Presidential Candidate	Vote Share
DUTERTE, Rodrigo	39%	MARCOS, Ferdinand Jr.	58%
ROXAS, Mar	23%	ROBREDO, Leni	28%
POE, Grace	21%	PACQUIAO, Manny	7%
BINAY, Jejomar	13%	DOMAGOSO, Isko Moreno	4%
SANTIAGO, Miriam	3%	Others	3%

The conventional wisdom on Philippine politics is that “outsiders” like Duterte have fewer barriers to entry given the lack of strong representative institutions that filter political competition and ensure leadership recruitment conducive for policy continuity and stability. Political parties, particularly, are neither credible nor cohesive enough, to organize politics, offer meaningful political alternatives, and temper radical dispositions. Instead, this extremist brand of politics is immediately thrown into the populace for their consideration. Moreover, programmatic vision and shared principles are not the glue that holds political elites together. They are instead attracted to patronage and particularistic factors that usually end up with corruption and abuse of authority. These insights on electoral politics were first established almost six decades ago and reinforced by new research of political scientists.¹⁵ The enduring qualities of the game played by Filipino political elites are equally fascinating from a scholarly perspective and disturbing for a supposedly experienced democratic country.

Some expected that Duterte and his campaign for change would entail revising the rules of the political game of Philippine democracy. After all, similar initiatives from other populist leaders were successful in redistributing power through, for example, constitutional change.¹⁶ Instead of disrupting the political status quo, Duterte did the opposite by reinforcing dynastic politics. Similar to previous presidents, he started

to build his own powerful political dynasty and even revived the political careers of other dynasties by including them in his coalition. Perhaps unintentionally, the populist leader who promised change is ironically the president who became the catalyst for the “cartelization” of dynasties in the Philippines.

The outcome of the 2019 midterm elections, with the embarrassing defeat of the political opposition in the Senate elections in particular, clearly showed the enduring dynastic character of Philippine politics. Not only was it a convincing referendum on the legitimacy of Duterte’s government, but it also showed the political power of his daughter, Sara Duterte. Her alliance with the Marcos dynasty as well as former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo became the dominating force in the Philippine political arena.¹⁷

The Duterte father-daughter combo also contributed a huge deal in paving the road for the restoration of the Marcos dynasty through a mix of deliberate actions. Rodrigo Duterte conditioned the mind of his coalition as well as the Filipino public that the Marcos dictatorship was a glorious era in Philippine history. Duterte’s strongman proclivities made this type of leadership palatable to a supposedly pro-democracy public. By presidential fiat, he allowed the burial of Marcos Sr. in the National Heroes Cemetery that symbolically redeemed the dictator’s sins against the republic.¹⁸ In the end, Duterte boosted the political stock of the Marcoses and made it easy for them to recapture state power.

The 2022 election cycle, however, revealed the hubris of some dynastic elites in believing that they have full control over political succession. Rodrigo Duterte’s original plan was for Sara to succeed him. Through a combination of internal dynamics within the Duterte dynasty and the successful pact-making between Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte to promiscuously share power, the 2022 elections seemed to have been a foregone conclusion even before its campaign period even started. By deciding to settle as vice-presidential candidate, the other Duterte agreed to form a “dynasty cartel” and handed the presidency back to the Marcoses on a silver platter.¹⁹ For the first time since democracy was restored in 1986, the winning president and vice president secured a majority mandate from the Filipino electorate (see Table 1.1). After more than 120 years of existence and almost twenty-

five years of contemporary democratic experience, the country has a Marcos again as its president. Politics may change but dynasties are forever in the Philippines.

CHANGES: THE DANGEROUS LEGACIES OF RODRIGO DUTERTE

For better or worse, presidents after the 1986 Philippine “People Power” revolution tried and failed to meaningfully transform the trajectory of Philippine politics. General-turned-president Fidel Ramos (1992–97) failed to secure charter change to prolong his term. The populist Joseph Estrada (1997–2001) was ousted in another EDSA people power uprising. The Machiavellian Gloria Arroyo (2001–10) held on to power for nine years—the longest of any post-democratization presidency—but never enjoyed popular support, which sidetracked her agenda to that of political survival. Benigno Aquino III (2010–16), whose liberal-reformist agenda was a breath of fresh air after the “lost decade of democracy” under Arroyo, saw his legacy demolished like a sandcastle on the beach—swept aside by the tidal wave of support for the tough-talking, openly illiberal, and human rights-hating Rodrigo Duterte in 2016. The liberal opposition did not win a single Senate seat in 2019. Filipinos voted in 2022—for the first time in thirty years—for a continuity ticket under the tandem of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte as president and vice president, respectively.

In hindsight, there is now little doubt that the Duterte presidency was an “electoral earthquake” and that the last six years had been a series of aftershocks shaping the state of Philippine democracy, its foreign policy, and its domestic politics.²⁰ That Duterte was a maverick was obvious from the start. As a candidate, he promised this presidency will be “bloody because we’ll order the killing of all criminals, drug-users, and drug lords” in what could be characterized as an “order over law” approach.²¹ He also called then US President Barack Obama a “son of a whore”, going off in lengthy diatribes against US colonial mentality while praising China and Russia, which are historically distrusted by Manila’s bureaucrats and political elite.

What is more consequential, however, is that Duterte managed to make his brand “stick”: he “ended his six-year presidential term in June 2022 with the highest late-term approval rating among Philippine

presidents in recent history” and uncertainties surrounding US-Philippine relations have never been exorcised despite the changing of the guard.²² Democratic civil-military relations also continue to deteriorate, with many retired security officials being appointed in key positions and “confidential and intelligence funds” becoming more commonplace in the executive branch’s budget allocations. Indeed, as Deinla and Dressel argue, the Duterte administration was a “rapture” in Philippine politics.²³ We posit that while much of this is due to Duterte’s *sui generis* policy agenda, Philippine politics was transformed because Duterte created structural conditions that allowed his legacies to be resilient and gain longevity. Of note here are his attacks on media institutions, empowerment of alternative and openly partisan media (a process dubbed as the “Fox News-ification of Philippine media”), co-optation of favourable civil society groups, and the politicization of the security establishment.²⁴

From Careening to Democratic Backsliding

There is broad consensus that the Duterte presidency was a period of democratic backsliding for the Philippines, particularly on civil-political liberties and limits of executive power. Various indices from Freedom House to Varieties of Democracy saw the Philippines under Duterte decline on the liberal aspects of liberal democracy.²⁵ Notably, there were significant declines in the country’s human rights observance, freedom of the press and expression, rule of law, and the efficacy of its guardrails against executive concentration of power. All these aspects of democracy were steadily and gradually eroded over time. Duterte, however, was not the first Philippine post-democratization president to attack the press or to try to break free from institutional checks and balances. What made him a critical juncture in Philippine post-1986 history was that he was the first to systematically attack liberalism as a political credo and his shift in priorities:

The novelty of Duterte is not so much in his illiberal approach to politics but his exclusive focus on the goal of state-building fundamentals (e.g., public order, infrastructure, and services) over a values-based agenda (e.g. human rights and anti-corruption) that previous administrations have not openly challenged. As the Philippines enters its critical period

of economic take-off, the reality is that it is beginning to confront more questions of “stateness”—levels of street crime, the presence of vital infrastructure, and issues of social services—which precisely reinforce the logic of Duterte—over high-brow, values-based reformism.²⁶

But as Ding and Slater argue, democracy is not an institutional monolith: some aspects are more prone to backsliding than others.²⁷ When comparing the Duterte administration in historical perspective, Baquisal and Arugay argue, “Varieties of Democracy data show that the Philippines is not autocratizing or backsliding if based on the Electoral Democracy Index, but it has shown a severe erosion of civil rights using the Liberal Democracy Index, indicating that democracies components erode asymmetrically. Electoral quality has remained the same under Duterte, whilst civil society and rights-based indicators of democratic quality have severely worsened.” The same holds true for Freedom House. The Philippines’ political rights and electoral democracy scores under Duterte were not significantly different under Arroyo—a presidency that presided over the so-called “lost decade of democracy” where indicators merely stagnated or “careened”. The Philippines’ scores on the Liberal Democracy Index, however, significantly differed between the two, making Duterte *sui generis* in terms of new lows for liberalism in the Philippines (see Table 1.2). In the same vein, Duterte’s economic development planning and migration policies were not as singularly revolutionary as his pet policies on law and order, foreign policy, and defence. Democracy in the Philippines took a beating under Duterte, but it is worth explaining how, in what form, and to what extent.

In many ways, Duterte’s popular appeal sharpened conceptual tensions between two pillars of democracy: vertical accountability—those relating to direct popular mandate—and horizontal accountability or the restraints on concentrations of power, particularly in the executive. But with such significant attacks on liberal components of democracy in the Philippines, more scholars have now labelled the Philippines as “backsliding” rather than merely “careening” or muddling through an electoral democracy wrought with many defects. This volume also highlights the indirect ways in which electoral competitiveness may even erode residually from attacks on civil liberties, such as from the drug war and the militarization of the civilian government.

TABLE 1.2
Philippine Democracy Scores through the Years

	Freedom House		Varieties of Democracy	
	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Electoral Democracy Index	Liberal Democracy Index
2004			0.497	0.36
2005			0.476	0.355
2006			0.475	0.352
2007			0.473	0.357
2008			0.472	0.358
2009			0.473	0.359
2010			0.531	0.413
2011			0.558	0.439
2012			0.558	0.439
2013			0.554	0.435
2014	26	37	0.552	0.433
2015	26	37	0.553	0.432
2016	27	38	0.518	0.368
2017	27	36	0.506	0.346
2018	27	35	0.483	0.317
2019	26	35	0.454	0.297
2020	25	34	0.425	0.284
2021	25	31	0.436	0.28
2022	25	30	0.431	0.283
Change (2015 vs 2022)	-1	-7	-0.122	-0.149
Change (2004 vs 2022)			-0.066	-0.077

Source: Compiled by the authors.

At the same time, Duterte's "authoritarian allure" should be contextualized in terms of the substance of his policies: his infrastructure spending spree known as "Build, Build, Build", his War on Drugs, and what surveys show to be a consistent historical demand for strong executive leadership in a country often characterized in the literature as having a weak state and a strong society.²⁸ More than any lofty ideal, Duterte's unsuccessful pitch to amend the Philippine constitution to transition from a unitary to a federal form of government was also anchored in the concrete idea of fiscal and political decentralization to fund basic services. This volume evaluates changes brought about by Duterte's style of governance and the substance of his policy agenda that deviated from the status quo.

Structural and Policy Changes

Much has been said of "Dutertismo"—the melange of leadership style and policies that made Duterte the maverick that he is—as a form of "performative populism". While true, there also needs to be a deeper understanding of the substance of his political agenda. Duterte's "authoritarian project" is a *programmatic* agenda; one that will reverberate beyond his presidency.²⁹ It goes beyond individual misogynistic statements and inflammatory rhetoric. For example, the legacy of the drug war has reinforced longstanding cultures of impunity and vertical violence between the Philippine state and its citizens, but also took them to new heights unprecedented in recent decades.³⁰

Chief among the Duterte presidency's legacy is the securitization of governance in the Philippines. This took a myriad of forms under his tenure, including the appointment of retired security sector personnel in civilian leadership posts and the penchant for coercion-heavy rule even when it was inappropriate, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.³¹ In making the security sector so critical to the country's governance, Duterte's legacy stands to undo decades of efforts since 1986 to put the military back in the barracks.³² Presently, the military continues to be a key backer of the Duterte family and an institution torn in its loyalties between the allied but ultimately rival Duterte and Marcos families, not to mention to the Constitution and the people. Only time will tell whether political elites can maintain civilian supremacy over

the military and police forces; after all, the Philippine military is now consistently one of the most trusted government agencies, while the Supreme Court and the legislature continue to be perceived negatively.³³

Despite Duterte being the most popularly supported president in the Philippines post-democratization history, the irony was that he increasingly relied on non-elected elements to form his elite coalition. This led to another major change in Philippine politics: the diversification of elite composition. Many ascendant elites—be they in the opposition and the ruling Marcos-Duterte dynastic cartel—did not come from the ranks of oligarchs and entrenched political families. Duterte loyalists such as his former aide and his former police chief topped the 2019 senatorial elections, besting even traditional political dynasties. While the Liberal Party lost again in the 2022 elections, it undoubtedly found a rationale for a rejuvenation and return to the grassroots. The electoral campaign of development lawyer-turned-politician Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo proved that the popular yearning for liberalism was down but not out, raking in 30 per cent of the popular vote on election day despite starting only at 7 per cent preference in the pre-election polls.

This edited volume discusses emerging political actors who were the main characters in the struggle for democracy under Duterte. The chapters cover actions by security personnel-turned-politicians, social media influencers, state functionaries, and the democratic pushback from community organizers, liberal-reformists, and advocates holding the line against outright authoritarian takeover. Philippine politics today continues to experience a polarizing struggle between two extreme political persuasions, but the players of the game are more diverse than ever.

Another notable change brought about by Duterte was his widely unpopular rapprochement with China and virulent anti-Americanism. Duterte’s presidency was a diplomatic coup handed to China. At many times in his presidency, Duterte threatened to review the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, cancel the Visiting Forces Agreement, and pledged to join China and Russia “against the world”. However, Duterte was less successful in this endeavour, with much of his foreign policy being undone by his successor Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the first year of his presidency.³⁴ The public’s distrust of China and the bureaucracy’s

historic working-level ties to the United States proved to be robust ballasts against a strategic reorientation of the Philippines. Duterte's China policy proves that populism has its limits and the people's support is not unconditional.

But to be fair, the "China question" was something that was bound to be confronted by any Philippine president given the middle kingdom's growing economic clout. Even before Duterte, China was on track to be the Philippines' largest trading partner.³⁵ The problem, however, was that Duterte's answer was to use "independent foreign policy" as a rhetorical cover for what was essentially a move into China's strategic orbit. This cost Duterte political capital and became a defining political divide between him and the Marcoses. Yet, there is reason to believe that US-Philippine relations will never be the same again. Duterte's anti-Americanism became a lightning rod for historic grievances from strange bedfellows composed of the radical Left, Duterte's supporters keen on justifying his policy, and business interests who perceive the future economic gravity of the country to lean towards Beijing rather than Washington.³⁶ Some politicians—driven by China's growing investments in their provinces—have imbibed Duterte's talking points. In this context, the Philippines has become an important case study for how great power competition today permeates developing countries' national and subnational politics from aid support, defence and security, economics, and even elections.

From Disinformation to Influence Operations

Another important development under Duterte was a two-pronged assault on the information and civic education ecosystem: the proliferation of disinformation-driven polarizing rhetoric in politics and the assault on traditional media. Disinformation, or the use of false, incomplete, or misleading information, has been closely linked to Duterte's electoral campaign in 2016 and his popularity-retention strategy while in office. Numerous studies show that disinformation networks in the Philippines propagated pro-Duterte content and attacked opposition figures.³⁷ In this sense, disinformation is as much a coercive tool for Duterte, in that it makes civic space toxic for pluralism of thought, as is merely a vote-getting tool.

Critically, Duterte made good on his promise to curtail what he portrayed as oligarch-controlled traditional media. In 2020, his allies in Congress voted to not renew the franchise of ABS-CBN, one of the country's largest television networks which was last shut down when Ferdinand Marcos Sr. declared martial law in 1972.³⁸ The Philippines has long been at an impasse: it is historically one of the deadliest places for journalists in the world, but it also has an active media role in "fiscalizing" politicians. Duterte's unprecedented move against ABS-CBN sent a chilling effect down the spine of media networks to tone down criticism of the government or be forced to close shop.

But Duterte did not stop at just neutralizing traditional media. His political machinery also expanded to co-opt social media content creators. Beginning in mid-2019, many of the pro-Duterte Facebook pages and YouTube channels rebranded their usernames claiming to be "news", "live", and "TV" channels, "signalling an intent to eventually replace traditional media as sources of information".³⁹ For this reason, fact-checking has increasingly been salient under Duterte to keep up with the swell of disinformation that has carved out a critical place in political discourse.

Finally, Duterte's pivotal legacy has also been the politicization of the information ecosystem, which is not all about disinformation. Rather, there has been a growth in the lucrative industry of political punditry catering *specifically* to Duterte's supporters. Much of this is due to monetization of content on social media and Filipinos' own world-leading usage of social media when measured by the number of hours spent per day.⁴⁰ Many of his supporters gained a livelihood from being pro-administration commentators and were critical in Duterte's strategy of perpetual campaigning of agitation against the opposition, including disclosures of unsubstantiated coup-plotting matrices and McCarthyist witch hunts against opposition figures by linking them to the opposition. Prominent social media talking heads such as Mocha Uson and Lorraine Badoy were appointed to high government posts. This transition from mere disinformation to broader political influence operations—the collection of information and their dissemination in pursuit of a competitive advantage—became the norm under Duterte and has transformed civic education in the Philippines.⁴¹ Partisan political punditry, once made profitable, locks a country in a cycle of pernicious polarization.

Like any Machiavellian leader, Duterte's governance style—which had often been described as an “authoritarian project”, “executive imperialism”, or Dutertismo's “illiberalism”—was a product of both *virtu* (virtue) and *fortuna* (fortune), namely Duterte's own policies and the socio-political and historical milieu that he inherited and benefitted from without much effort. Coming in after years of “People Power fatigue” and resurgent authoritarian nostalgia, Duterte benefitted from the alignment of political stars.⁴² Philippine politics is unlikely to be the same in the foreseeable future again.

FEARS: PORTENT OF THINGS TO COME OR DISCONTINUITIES?

The advent of the Duterte administration ushered in a “politics of fear” not felt since Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s dictatorship. The war on drugs, the militarized COVID-19 response and resulting economic downturn, along with his pivot to China did not make a dent on his popularity. His occasional threat to declare martial law or a revolutionary government makes it clear that he has no qualms about democratic norms.⁴³ Yet, his approval and trust ratings at the end of his term was the highest among post-1986 presidents. The most potent indicator of this popularity is his daughter's victory as vice president in the 2022 elections. Its concomitant large support base among Filipinos provides reason that it can reverberate in the next administrations.

As the lynchpin of his administration, Duterte's violent drug war established his notoriety to his domestic critics and before the international community, including the United Nations. While the extra-judicial killings have been feared by those who became police targets, high public approval for the war on drugs further emboldened the administration, three years after Duterte assumed office.⁴⁴ The opposition's massive loss in the 2019 senatorial elections likewise suggests its weakness and the administration's victory in owning and winning the narrative against the drug war. Without a viable opposition, however, it will be difficult to address perennial problems of corruption, warlordism, and state capture that have characterized Philippine politics.

In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, Duterte did not completely depart from his drug war strategy. By employing a

militarized response to the pandemic, the prolonged lockdowns were justified, including an emergency power law that was deemed to have encroached on legislative power. By blaming the *pasaway* (hardheaded) citizens and threatening to shoot them, Duterte employed a war-like stance in addressing the pandemic, thereby further amplifying his authoritarian tendencies.⁴⁵ The aftermath of the pandemic yielded one of the country's biggest economic setbacks since 1946,⁴⁶ aided in no small part to excessive lockdowns resulting in business closures and job losses. While economic recovery seems to be promising at the beginning of 2023, massive inflation is feared to further bring down poverty levels.⁴⁷ If this is the case, then the much-vaunted goal to reach middle-income status, as stated in the current and previous development plans, may remain elusive.

Meanwhile, Duterte's penchant for silencing his critics by violent threats engendered a culture of fear and became his currency for stifling any means of dissent and seeking accountability on his administration's actions. But its impact has been far-reaching. For instance, the closure of the country's biggest network discussed above has transformed Filipinos viewing and information-seeking behaviour. More importantly, Philippine media's political economy structure has also been transformed by the shutdown. With the rise of unaccountable vloggers and a demoralized traditional media, one of the country's pillars of democracy may be facing a decline just like its counterparts in the rest of the world. This situation is unfortunate, as the country's democratization history would attest, the media plays an important role as an accountability mechanism, especially at crucial moments.

Duterte is not just notorious for his threats and violent rhetoric but also for his misogynist remarks against his critics. The hypermasculine, sexist, and misogynist rhetoric that marked his administration not only made headlines worldwide but have also earned him the moniker, "Trump of the East".⁴⁸ But one big casualty of his rhetoric is women's political participation. As Asia's first democracy, the Philippines boasts of having granted women the right to vote as early as 1937 and has been a forerunner in legislating gender equality laws since 1987. Nonetheless, in both 2019 and 2022 elections, only 20 per cent of candidates are women. If misogyny gets to be a norm in targeting political opponents, then women and sexual minorities may be further discouraged to join the political fray.

Aside from domestic issues, Duterte's pivot to China was a defining characteristic of his term. A small-town mayor, with an obvious lack of foreign policy experience, dared to turn back against the Philippine-US alliance. This significant shift was met with much alarm and criticisms, foremost of which are countries threatened by China's increased activities in the West Philippine Sea. At the same time, his decision to ignore the 2016 Arbitral Award was consistent with his disrespect of the rule of law. However, though this pivot was not necessarily supported by the military who is wary of Chinese encroachment on Philippine territory, others argue that Duterte's move was meant to court China's Belt and Road Initiative that can benefit much-needed Philippine infrastructure projects.⁴⁹ Though Marcos Jr. revitalized the country's military alliance with the United States, Russia's war in Ukraine has raised the spectre of China reclaiming Taiwan, thereby potentially ushering in a war practically at the country's doorstep.

Arguably, Duterte's political style and legacy helped fuel the Marcoses' restoration project. When Duterte assumed power, many were surprised that thirty years after the much-celebrated democratic restoration in 1986, someone with authoritarian tendencies like Marcos Sr. was elected. It was then unsurprising that the Marcos Jr.–Sara Duterte's tandem won in 2022, as both the legacies of their fathers reinforced their electoral narrative. While it is too early to tell how the political arena will play out in the next few years, some of the fears identified in the discussion above may or may not be realized, depending on the extent to which vertical accountability initiatives can be successfully launched, and the realization of the tandem's promise to uplift the lives of Filipinos.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Following the introductory chapter that discusses the three main narratives that defined the country during the entirety of the Duterte administration (2016–22) into the early years of the Marcos Jr. government, the subsequent chapters probe into the specific policy legacies and other political dynamics within the country that shape the political, economic, and social conditions of the Philippines. The chapter authors are scholars and/or practitioners who come from different

disciplinary backgrounds including political science, international relations, sociology, communication, economics, law, public policy, and development studies. The tie that binds all the contributors is the fact that they are Filipino specialists and are all based in Philippine academic institutions and research organizations.

Each chapter focuses on a particular policy area and examines the major contemporary developments as well as the policy changes and transformation that occurred since 2016. Unlike previously published scholarship on the same topic, this collection of chapters had the benefit of assessing the Duterte administration in its entirety. Moreover, the chapters also interrogate the future prospects of the country within each respective policy theme and identify main reform proposals and policy actions needed to generate better outcomes for the Philippine state and its society.

In Chapter 2, Jan Carlo Punongbayan examines the state of the Philippine economy under Duterte and his legacies for the Marcos Jr. administration. By and large, the Duterte administration continued the macroeconomic policies of the Aquino (2010–16) administration, enshrining the promise of policy continuity in Duterte’s ten-point economic agenda. Punongbayan argues that the administration yielded mixed economic results, notably skyrocketing inflation—which was a non-issue under Aquino given consistently low rates in previous years—and presiding over a 50 per cent increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio before and after his presidency—from 40 per cent in 2016 to 60 per cent in 2022. Part of this can be attributed to Duterte’s tax-and-spend economic priorities. Duterte deviated from Aquino’s development strategy by pouring huge sums of money and debt into infrastructure spending but still fell below his own spending-to-GDP targets. That said, the Duterte administration presided over a period of expansion for the Filipino middle class and continued economic growth until 2020 which translated to unemployment and underemployment statistics reaching fourteen-year lows before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite his initial anti-elite rhetoric, the populist president has shown “a level of comfort to preserve the status quo he promised to meaningfully change”. By tinkering with some welfare programmes like free tertiary education, limited universal healthcare, pension increases defying expert advice, and increasing salaries for military and uniformed

personnel, his presidency avoided going deep into contentious social redistribution. For all his tough talk, Duterte presided over cosmetic changes in matters of social redistribution but did so in ways that still create serious fiscal problems for future presidential administrations. However, Punongbayan writes that the COVID-19 pandemic not only threw a wrench in Duterte's plans but also exposed the unsustainable aspects inherent in his economic policy to begin with. Agriculture, education, and reproductive health policies fell by the wayside while foreign direct investments decreased.

Chapter 3 focuses on the most pressing strategic issue of the country—the South China Sea (SCS). Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby puts Duterte's pivot to China under the microscope to uncover one of its most critical consequences: the inability of the Philippine government to assert its territorial and maritime interests in the West Philippine Sea, a portion of the SCS belonging to the country by international law. This chapter argues that ironically, Duterte's strongman rhetoric was selective at best—brutish against the United States and yet defeatist and accommodationist towards China. Using discourse analysis, her chapter posits that the Duterte administration's disinformation strategy helped justify the inability of the country to leverage the favourable 2016 Arbitral Award in its dealings with China. This chapter not only provides a compelling account of Duterte's pivot to China but also shows that state-sponsored disinformation can be used to frame dangerous and myopic adventures in foreign policy.

National security policy and civil-military relations are the themes pursued by Julio S. Amador III and Deryk Matthew Baladjay in Chapter 4. Both security practitioners analysed the factors that drove Duterte's prioritization of national security, specifically its domestic dimensions. They pointed out his heavy reliance on retired generals *de facto* militarized his cabinet and therefore his government's national security policy. This was seen in his war fighting mode against what was identified as enemies of the state. Duterte's violent war on drugs, against terrorism, and *vis-a-vis* the communist insurgency entailed a heavy-handed approach that wreaked tremendous collateral damage and arguably, negative outcomes despite their popularity to the general public. They provide a glimpse of hope since early indications reveal that Marcos Jr.—by focusing more on external defense, demilitarizing security

policy, and ending draconian measures that curtail civil liberties—may not necessarily follow the security policies of his predecessor.

Duterte also tried to tinker with the country's constitution and specifically, its political set-up, albeit a marked failure of his administration. His much-vaunted campaign promised to institute federalism-generated media mileage but fizzled out. It is this attempt that Maria Ela L. Atienza carefully examined in Chapter 5. Among others, she argues that the bid to change the charter failed due to several factors. She reasons that Duterte's lack of direction as to its specificities, his administration's top-down approach to the process, and economic problems at the national and regional levels may be exacerbated by a poorly conceptualized federalism arrangement. Ultimately, due to the country's weak political parties, Duterte's party mates and "supermajority" in both Houses of Congress did support his proposal. According to Atienza, this challenges the dominant view of Duterte's supposed strong leadership. Meanwhile, in contrast to Duterte, Marcos Jr. hardly focused on charter change as an electoral issue. Curiously, however, the House of Representatives, headed by his cousin, Speaker Martin Romualdez, endorsed constitutional change, focusing on economic provisions. Nonetheless, while a higher percentage (41 per cent) of Filipinos agree to charter change according to recent surveys, Atienza contended that a public information campaign is still crucial. During Marcos Jr.'s first year in office, attempts at charter change as noted by Atienza, suffer from similar constraints as those of Duterte's, foremost of which is the dismal post-pandemic economic picture.

In Chapter 6, Bianca Ysabelle E. Franco examines the micropolitics of Duterte's ultimate legacy—his bloody war on drugs. While extant accounts focus on the structural, policy, and institutional dimensions of this state-sponsored violence, this collection of in-depth and personal accounts allowed Franco to weave the narratives of the war's victims through the relatives and loved ones they left behind. Apart from the war's fatalities and the fear it conjured, this systematic purge of mostly the poor and marginalized members of Philippine society left widows and orphans who likewise became victims of stigma and other forms of social isolation and political exclusion. Franco reminds that the collateral damage of Duterte's drug war reflects the lingering reality

that violence remains imprinted in the country's political culture and is less likely to be discontinued under the Marcos Jr. administration.

Disinformation in social media and the attempts to curb it through fact-checking was the focus of Ma. Diosa Labiste in Chapter 7. As a communication scholar and one of the founders of *tsek.ph*, a multi-sectoral civil society initiative that conducted fact-checking in the 2019 and 2022 elections, Labiste exposes the main contours of disinformation in the Philippines. Her chapter argues that a highly polarized social sphere coupled with state-sponsorship and toleration of fake news made fact-checking extremely challenging. Election-related disinformation focused on revising and white-washing the Marcos dictatorship, the "red-tagging" of prominent individuals and institutions as communist sympathizers, and hate speech towards the opposition. The chapter ends with a gloomy note that Duterte has left a systematized disinformation architecture that aided the electoral victory of the Marcos-Duterte coalition and further deepened political polarization in the country. Fact-checking must be strengthened in the succeeding elections at the very least but policy interventions that seek to improve media literacy and critical thinking among the populace should also be implemented.

In Chapter 8, Cleo Anne A. Calimbahin and Luie Tito F. Guia detail electoral initiatives that have not seen the light of day in the Duterte administration, from the bid to change the constitution, to pushing for overall electoral reforms such as strengthening political parties. In their account, the authors reason that the president was not interested in building political parties but was instead focused on creating parties supporting the administration. However, Calimbahin and Guia argue that the Bangsamoro Organic Law, approved under Duterte, was a step in the right direction and can be a model for future attempts to redesign national-level political institutions. Under the Marcos Jr. administration, the authors express "cautious optimism" given that the current head of the Commission on Elections seems to be open to civil society inputs to enhance the election body's capability in election management. Key amendments to the country's electoral code have also been filed in Congress, albeit moving at a snail's pace. Key recommendations include expanding the proportional representation system and abolishing the split-ticket voting rule for president and the vice-president.

Chapter 9 by Jan Robert R. Go discusses the Philippines' response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study for local governance. In the 2016 campaign trail, Duterte rallied the country to promises of federalism and decentralization. Being the first local mayor-turned-president in recent decades, Duterte was torn from the beginning between his populist-authoritarian reflexes and his vision of local government empowerment. Go writes that it is ironic that Duterte inevitably showed his centralizing tendencies full throttle after 2018 primarily because he governed like a local Philippine mayor who was accustomed to having many organs of the government directly under his command. First, local governments were increasingly subordinated to the national government beginning with the nationwide drug war that started in 2016 when there was immense pressure for local chief executives to comply and deliver body counts. Second, Duterte's immense popularity allowed him to exact compliance from local politicians even on matters that should have been within the purview of local governments according to the 1991 Local Government Code. Go cites the COVID-19 pandemic as a pivotal period that expanded the scope of the national government's emergency powers.

In Chapter 10, Ruth R. Lusterio-Rico underscores the Duterte administration's early promise to protect the environment but did not lead to concrete and beneficial outcomes in the end. The author claims that overall, the president was distracted by his focus on the drug war and did not really make a significant legacy in terms of environmental and climate change issues. Accordingly, the lifting of the mining permit moratorium, the lack of support for a pro-environment minister when the latter was rejected by the Commission on Appointments, coupled with reports of a rise in killings of environment defenders, prove this point. Like Duterte, Marcos Jr. has made token statements that he will address climate change but maintains the same stance on mining. With what seems to be a status quo even with the new administration, the author suggests that environmentalists and civil society organizations' role in exacting accountability on the government must be sustained.

In Chapter 11, Cherry Ann Madriaga evaluates human security and disaster response policies from Duterte to Marcos Jr., particularly the implementation of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act. Climate change, extreme weather events, and natural hazards

continually batter the Philippines across administrations. Duterte is no stranger to the importance of disaster response, having catapulted himself into the national spotlight when he was on ground-zero in Tacloban City after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013—an issue used in the 2016 presidential election to criticize the Aquino administration. Madriaga’s chapter assesses the Duterte administration’s handling of disaster response mechanisms and fund disbursement between 2016 and 2022, and several critical incidents such as the 2020 Taal Volcano eruption and the COVID-19 pandemic. Madriaga concludes that the Duterte administration has done little to move the needle on the consolidation of various government agencies handling disaster response, which often leads to coordination issues, turfing, policy incoherence, and response lags. Despite Duterte’s urging, the Philippine legislature failed to pass a new Department of Disaster Resilience.

Chapter 12 focuses on how sexism and misogyny pervaded Duterte’s politics and policies through disinformation. Jean Encinas-Franco argued that fake news had a multiplier effect in reinforcing gender stereotypes that marginalize Filipino women. Using case studies of female opposition politicians, Leila de Lima and Leonor “Leni” Robredo, who became the object of Duterte’s misogynistic gaze, the chapter identified the nature of a very specific type of disinformation that focuses on gender. Apart from direct assaults on the opposition, Duterte also mobilized agents of disinformation that painted unfair, scathing, and harmful narratives against female political leaders brave enough to criticize the populist president. In her conclusion, Encinas-Franco recommends for critical policy interventions that can protect women and afford equal opportunities in the political arena.

As an important contributor to the country’s socio-economic situation, international migration of Filipinos continues to play a vital role in both the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations. In Chapter 13, Bubbles Beverly Asor and Rizza Kaye Cases highlight that despite the common assumption of a radical shift in migration governance due to the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recession, and other supposed rupture-causing events, migration practices remain tethered to past programmes and policy positions. In giving substance to this argument, the authors explore government initiatives (bans, repatriations, health assessments) at the height of the pandemic, and the establishment of the Department of Migrant Workers—a newly

created government agency that consolidates the migration functions that used to be scattered among other ministries. Among others, Asor and Cases argue that such interventions do not necessarily signify a marked or transformative change in terms of migration governance. Rather, such steps are incremental ones that have acquired the nature of taken-for-granted. Further, the authors point out that such practices will likely continue under the Marcos Jr. administration.

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