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## **Populist Paradise: Characterizing the Emerging Duterte Dynasty in the Philippines**

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*Populist Paradise: Characterizing the Emerging  
Duterte Dynasty in the Philippines*

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## **Introduction**

“Change is coming”, Rodrigo Roa Duterte valiantly declared on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, exactly thirty years after the EDSA People Power Revolution toppled the Marcos dictatorship, after successfully defeating his political opposition in the 2016 presidential elections (Curato, 2017; Po, 2016, n.p.). Riding on a populist wave, the election of Duterte came as a surprise to the ruling political elite dominated by clans and families (Curato, 2016). Commonly referred to as political dynasties, they have come to represent one of Philippine politics most pervasive features (McCoy, 2002; Pano, 2016; Coronel, 2007). Whilst political dynasties have perpetuated themselves across the Philippines since its inception, existing scholarship have conflicting theoretical explanations and frameworks, which all equally aim to explain political dynasties as a phenomenon, as well as what means they use to acquire and accumulate power (Kerkvliet, 1995; Quimpo, 2005). This research contends that the recent rise of the Duterte dynasty presents an empirical puzzle, which existing theoretical approaches are unable to holistically explain.

Political dynasties as one of Philippine politics most distinctive features have enabled state and provincial public office to be captured by elite actors who aim to perpetuate their politico-economic power over time (Arcilla, 2006; Simbulan, 1965; Tadem & Tadem, 2016, McCoy, 2002). Whilst dynastic politics is not solely reserved to any specific region or political system, the case of the Philippines presents an instance where 70.4% of legislative positions have been filled by dynastic politicians, are inhibitive to effective democratic governance (Teehankee, 2018; Mendoza, Beja, Venida & Yap, 2016; Tusalem & Aguirre, 2013). Whereas in other countries democratization and economic liberalization brought an end to dynastic rule, in the Philippines and across much of Southeast Asia, political dynasties have managed to adapt and overcome the ever-shifting socio-political and economic climates, producing a variety of differing typologies (Purdey, 2016).

Situating the emerging Duterte dynasty amongst other contemporary political dynasties in the Philippines, highlights a plethora of deviations from traditional established dynastic politics in terms of their methods for the acquisition and accumulation of power. Hence, in light of this empirical anomaly, this research aims to examine the Duterte dynasty through a comparative case study on the sub-national level, by contrasting established and emerging dynasties in the Philippines. Whilst the existing literature may account for the emergence and persistence of the majority of political dynasties, such as patron-client relations, elite democracy or oligarchic patrimonialism, this research argues that the Duterte dynasty presents a case which contemporary scholarship is unable to explain through existing

frameworks. Hence, this thesis aims to expand on the current scholarship to account for Duterte's populist, semi-authoritarian, style of politics, by asking the following research question: "To what extent does the emerging Duterte dynasty represent a deviation from established political dynasties in the Philippines?"

The study of political dynasties in the Philippines remains a highly relevant topic, as it has come to be perceived as an empirical outlier. Additionally, the social relevance of dynastic politics is directly concomitant with corruption or poverty, subsequently inhibiting socio-economic and political development (Tusalem & Aguirre, 2013; Mendoza et al., 2016). Through examining the Duterte dynasty this research aims to highlight how political dynasties have adapted to ever-changing socio-political landscapes. Hence, this thesis presents the hypothesis that the Duterte dynasty may provide the impetus for a paradigmatic shift within dynastic politics in the Philippines, which subsequently enable the transformation of the Philippine political system as a whole through the erosion of traditional established means to power.

## **Literature Review**

### *Political Families and Political Dynasties*

The political family as a unit has been described by Day (1996) to exhibit strategic agency, which distinguishes them as political actors from social actors. By ascribing the family with strategic agency, they are considered unitary political actors, sharing at its minimum the objective of maintaining political power (Day, 1996). Such familial agency can be conceptualized as the active relations of domination and power, as opposed to simply institutionalizing the family as a political unit (Purdey, 2016; Day, 1996). However, it is through these relations of power that the political family becomes institutionalized within the political system of a country (Purdey, 2016; McCoy, 2002). Whilst strategic agency is a requirement for families to become political actors, a plethora of definitions exist which differ in how this strategic agency is exercised. Most definitions of political families, rather than explicitly stating that strategic agency is inherent, implicitly assume such, choosing to differentiate between qualitative or quantitative characteristics.

The political dynasty can be understood as a form of political family with certain characteristics which range from the extension over a temporal space to quantitative requirements of holding certain office (Kenawas, 2015). Whilst the term dynasty is typically used to ascribe a temporal nature to a political family, Hess (1966), argues that dynasties can exist without its perpetuation over time. By defining political dynasties as having at least four

or more members of a family, carrying the same surname, being elected to positions within the federal government, Hess (1966) uses a quantifiable criterion. Such definition is limited in its scope, solely focused on national governmental institutions, as opposed to the plethora of local instances where dynasties may thrive. Furthermore, Aspinall & As'ad (2016) argue that the dynastic characteristics emerge only through a political family perpetuating their power over time.

The perpetuation of power over time is reflected in most definitions of political dynasties, with Thompson (2012) arguing that a political dynasty involves the direct or indirect transition of power specifically through family members. Asako, Iida, Matsubayashi & Ueda (2012) expand on this premise, stating that political dynasties conform to a group of politicians who inherited their current public office through a member in their family. However, political dynasties need not be familial. In the Philippines political families often include large kinship groups, also known as a political clan (Tadem & Tadem, 2016; McCoy, 2002). The political clan is a loose network of interlocking familial and non-familial relationships, which often branch out to include individuals who may be highly integrated within the family structure, without being a direct relative (Labonne & Querubin, 2017). Hence, definitions which explicitly state that family relatives are the sole means through a political family may perpetuate itself as a dynasty, may not be the most applicable in certain socio-political contexts (Kenawas, 2015).

This research argues, in accordance with the majority of existing scholarship, that the temporal nature of political families is what constitutes a political dynasty. Furthermore, this research does not consider political dynasties as solely being limited to family relatives, rather it adopts the conception of larger interlocking network structures, such as kinship groups, to account for the variation across different regions of the world. Whilst these definitions of political dynasties are adequate, they each on their own are not able to present a holistic depiction of such in certain regions of the world.

### *Political Dynasties in the Philippines*

The political dynasty as a political unit can be traced back to the *principalia* class, which represent the landed oligarchy reigning over much of the provincial Philippines under Spanish colonial rule (Kaman, 2017; Simbulan, 1965). The centralization of political power in the capital Manila facilitated the rise of a dominant elite within the provinces, which established the foundations of the patronage system (Arcilla, 2006)). Patronage was further enabled through Spanish governmental structures, which utilized the provincial elite as power

brokers, enabling the colonial government to retain control over rural populations (Simbulan, 1965). The transition to American imperialism institutionalized the patronage system, with newly created bureaucratic and political positions being filled with the landed oligarchy or other elite factions, as financial and property requirements excluded the population from political participation (Arcilla, 2006). Such led to the creation of a national political elite vis-à-vis a provincial elite, allowing for the perpetuation of political dynasties on both the national and provincial level, leading to the institutionalization of political fiefdoms, as policies of decentralization came into effect (Ram, 2018; Krinks, 2002). Both local and national politicians secured their constituencies by placing family members in political positions, grooming their heirs to take over their family businesses and political seats, even reaching so far to achieve national authoritarian rule in form of the Marcos dictatorship (McCoy, 2002). The Philippine state before Marcos can be characterized as relatively weak and decentralized leading to the predominance of patron-clientelism, predominantly exhibited through kinship networks, reflective of an agrarian feudal society (McCoy, 2002). Over time the traditional landed oligarchy diversified into non-agricultural economic interests, highlighting the adaptability of political dynasties (Teehankee, 2001).

The return of democracy after Marcos allowed for the integration of more social classes into the ruling elite, enabled through more opportunities for political participation (Sidel, 1997; Teehankee, 2001). Urbanization and a decreasing rural population fundamentally changed the class composition, with urban centers being dominated by industrialists and entrepreneurs, which have continuously eroded the dominance of the landed oligarchy (Angeles, 1999). Both democratization and economic liberalization facilitated the transition away from the traditional established political dynasties and enabled the emergence of a new class of political actors, which subsequently established dynasties of their own (Teehankee, 2001).

However, democratization and economic liberalization cannot account for the emergence of all political actors in the Philippines. (Kerkvliet, 1995; Angeles, 1999). Such include for example the enclaves of provincial warlordism, as well as the emergence of local strongmen and bosses, characterized through the use of violence and coercion (Sidel, 1999; Sidel, 2004). In light of these empirical and academic ambiguities, three main theoretical frameworks have developed which include the traditional patron-client relations, which builds on the institutional approach of the weak state situated in a strong elite society, as well as the bossism framework, centered around violence and coercion (Kerkvliet, 1995).

### *Modes for the Acquisition and Accumulation of Power*

Over the tenure political dynasties have held over Philippine politics, a plethora of theoretical approaches and frameworks have been developed to account for the deviant methodologies utilized by the political elite (Kerkvliet, 1995; Quimpo, 2005). The literature on Philippine political dynasties can be categorized in institutional explanations, such as elite democracy, weak state – strong society, contested democracy or cacique democracy, and patron-client frameworks, such as booty capitalism, patrimonial oligarchy, clientelism or electoral clientelism (Hutchcroft, 1998; Sidel, 1999; Franco, 2001; Weekley, 2001; Landé, 1965). Additionally, theories such as foreign dependency and bossism, deviate from the aforementioned theoretical frameworks (Kerkvliet, 1995). Over time, some theories have fallen out of favor, whilst others have gained prominence, reflective of the ever-changing political landscape (Quimpo, 2005).

### *Elite Democracy*

In explaining the persistence of political dynasties in the Philippines institutional explanations share the common assumption made by Migdal (1988), which characterized the Philippines as a weak state with a strong society. These theoretical approaches argue that state institutions were captured by the elite shortly after their inception. McCoy (2002) argued that the emergence of a dominant political elite, prior to the establishment of modern state institutions resulted in their capture and subsequent institutional entrenchment of political dynasties. Institutional entrenchment can be characterized as an instance where the political and institutional arrangements are altered in favor of the political elite by the political elite, most commonly exemplified through policies which facilitated the perpetuation and perseverance of economic and political power. Such is representative of Simbulan's (1965) depiction of the Philippines as an elite democracy, which later was emulated by Anderson's (1988) cacique democracy to describe the post-Marcos regimes. After their institutional entrenchment, the political elite were further institutionalized through uncompetitive elections, akin to Weekley's (2001) contested democracy framework, where large resource advantages allowed for domination over other political candidates. Contested democracy is emblematic of elite democracy, however, with popular empowerment of democracy, a mixture of both top-down and bottom-up rule (Weekley, 2001).

Additionally, Hutchcroft's (1998) depiction of the Philippine state as a patrimonial oligarchy, managed through booty capitalism, reflects the institutional entrenchment of the political elite through their economic preeminence. Booty capitalism, when a powerful



oligarchy extracts privileges from an incoherent bureaucracy, best explains the role of landed political families, who have expanded their economic base by taking advantage of weak state regulation (Hutchcroft, 1991; Hutchcroft, 1998). However, whilst this approach certainly may explain the predominance of the landed oligarchy in capturing political institutions during the early formation of the Philippine state, it is unable to account for the emerging political actors utilizing diverging means for the accumulation of power (Sidel, 1999).

### *Patron-Client Relations*

Popular amongst the scholarship on Philippine political dynasties, patron-clientelism, is able to account for the persistence of political dynasties at both the national and provincial level (Kerkvliet, 1995; Quimpo, 2005). Characterized by Landé (1965) & Hollsteiner (1963) as dyadic ties of reciprocity between the political elite and its electoral constituents, they operate through the establishment of kinship groups and the mobilization of wealth and state resources, enabled through their political machines. Here, politics are less organized through interest groups, rather through networks, and personal ties, forming vertical chains of patronage, which cut across classes, religions, and regions (Krinks, 2002). They typically come in conjunction with dire socio-economic conditions, such as large inequality or physical and economic insecurity, motivating the clients in seeking for financial or economic aid, which the political elite are readily capable to provide, creating a self-perpetuating dynastic cycle (Simbulan, 1965).

Scholars, such as Nowak & Snyder (1970), have developed more specific frameworks on clientelism, viewing such as a system of non-ideological exchange, perceiving the political machine as a specialized form of clientelistic politics, which have adapted to urban growth and increased social differentiation. Expanding on clientelistic practices, Franco (2001) contends Philippine dynastic politics is best explained through electoral clientelism, arguing that elections in the Philippines have always been less than democratic. Electoral clientelism represents an electorally competitive regime in a sub-democratic system characterized through the pervasiveness of local authoritarian enclaves, which create asymmetrical bargaining relations that enforce the subordination of clients (Franco, 2001). However, the fundamental assumptions of dyadic ties between a patron and a client, remain the same across all theories.

A contemporary exemplification of patron-clientelism is reflected in political parties being characterized as the political machines of the elite (Teehankee, 2012; Machado, 1974). Philippine political parties, as opposed to representing the interests of their electorate,

legitimize and advance elite interests (Teehankee, 2012). Their weakness is exhibited in their ideological positions, whose personalistic nature is subject to leadership change (Simbulan, 1965; Coronel, 2007). Hence, parties are used as springboards to launch the political careers of the politico-economic elite, enabled by the distribution of patronage (Kerkvliet, 1995). However, the patron-client framework has come under criticism for generalizing and simplifying the means by which the political elite in the Philippines operate, being unable to explain the role of violence, coercion, intimidation, monetary inducements, and the considerable autonomy elite have to manipulate formal democratic procedures to their liking (Sidel, 1997; Sidel, 1999). Moreover, they further are unable to explain the emergence of new dynasties, which are not rooted in the traditional land-owning elite, and who do not have access to vast monetary funds or well-oiled political machines.

### *Contribution to Literature*

The aforementioned theoretical approaches aimed at explaining the methods the political elite of the Philippines utilize to acquire and accumulate power. However, the election of Duterte puts into question these traditional explanations which predominantly explained either the landed oligarchy, or provincial instances of bossism. This research contends that no theoretical approach, let it be bossism, patron-clientelism or penal populism, alone can explain Duterte's rise to power. Rather, by examining the features of Duterte's politics, this research aims to expand on the bossism framework, developed by Sidel, as a foundation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Established and Emerging Political Dynasties*

A conception which is more suited in providing a contemporary account of political families and the dynasties they perpetuate is presented by Purdey (2016), who fundamentally differentiates between political dynasties as 'established' or 'emerging'. She refers to political dynasties as the "the ability of a family to inherit and to accumulate power and wealth from one generation to the next and frequently functions across a variety of political systems across time" (p. 2). Such definition includes the temporal nature of political dynasties, as well as their horizontal expansion of power over time. Such gives the premise for conceptualizing dynasties as either emerging or established, as such ascribes certain dynasties with specific features which provide for an examination of the relationship between tradition on the one hand, as represented through dynastic politics, and modernity on

the other, as represented through democratic politics (Purdey, 2016). Such conceptualization is useful for interrogating to what extent the proliferation of democratic institutions has influenced the preeminence of political dynasties in different political systems.

By developing a historical framework, Purdey's (2016) definition allows for a more appropriate inquisition into the emergence of certain political dynasties, as well as situating them vis-à-vis their established counterparts. An examination of the literature has highlighted that emerging and established political dynasties will use different means to acquire and accumulate power and wealth, which makes this definition ideal for the purposes of this research. By adopting such framework, Purdey (2016) avoids making the distinction between national and local political families, as is often the case with geographic and administratively comparative frameworks. Conclusively, Purdey's (2016) conceptualization of political dynasties as established or emerging highlights how dynasties are able to adapt to everchanging political landscapes, accounting for their persistence throughout history, as well as explaining the emergence of new political actors.

The study of political dynasties in the Philippines is highly suited to Purdey's (2016) framework. A clear temporal juncture between both typologies can be drawn in the reestablishment of democracy in 1987; after the People Power Revolution facilitated the demise of the authoritarian Marcos regime (Teehankee, 2001). Teehankee (2001) argues that the authoritarian Marcos era has engendered a new class of political actors, which stand in contrast to some political dynasties which have been active since the conception of the Philippine state. Hence, dynasties which existed prior to the Philippine dictatorial excursion can be characterized as the established landed oligarchy, who operated mostly through traditional means of patron-clientelism, whose economic power base and wealth were grounded in vast land holdings and plantation agriculture (Arcilla, 2006; Angeles, 1999). The emergence of new political actors, mostly from middle-class professions or political entrepreneurs, entered politics post-Marcos, of which many have gone onto establish political dynasties of their own (Teehankee, 2001). These new social forces predominantly are linked to the modern sectors of the economy whose adaptation to different socio-economic and political contexts have seen the rise of a multitude of strategies by which such dynasties were able to perpetuate themselves across time and space (Teehankee, 2001).

### *Bossism*

John Sidel (1997) noted that existing theoretical conceptions of the political elite in the Philippines did not account for a pervasive institutionalization of political violence,

coercion and intimidation. Whilst, patron-client relations are often fundamental in perpetuating a dynasty in certain provinces, Sidel (1997) contends that the central role which patron-clientelism is depicted to have is largely overstated, subsequently simplifying the Philippine political system into personalized, reciprocal and affect-laden characteristics. The inability of patron-client relations to account for coercive and violent means to power, have given the rise the theoretical conception that is bossism (Sidel, 1997; Sidel, 1999). This approach argues that patron-client relations never provided the ‘social cement’ underpinning Philippine socio-political life and has been relatively ignorant in acknowledging the persistence of coercive mechanisms, as well as the monopolization of electoral politics and general social relations (Sidel, 1997, p. 949). It argues against Midgal’s (1988) depiction of a weak state confronting a strong society, in which the landholding oligarchy acquired power through patronage. Contrastingly, this approach repudiates such by questioning whether land ownership played a role in the creation of an economic base, highlighting that the landed elites often acquired their vast landholding following their election to public office, as opposed to predating such (Sidel, 2004). Hence, the bossism, characterized through coercive means to power, is able to account for the emergence of local strongmen, whose economic power base rarely exceeds the confines of their political base (Sidel, 1997). It propagates the assumption that industrialization and urbanization have facilitated a modernization of the Philippine political system, which allowed for the emergence of professional politicians, continuously eroding the influence of the established landowning political elite (Teehankee, 2001; Sidel, 1999). Additionally, it rectifies the misconception that Philippine politics has always been characterized by clientelist practices, by highlighting the pervasiveness of warlordism in the Philippine provinces.

The bossism approach is rooted in local bossism and strongmen, who come to dominate a certain geographic unit through the monopolization the local economy, in what can be considered subnational authoritarianism (Sidel, 2014a). Whilst this framework is able to account for the emergence of local strongmen, who coercively acquire an economic and political monopoly in their constituency, it does not necessitate the use of violence (Sidel, 2014a). Rather, it argues that it facilitates the creation of a ‘locked-in’ electorate (Sidel, 2014, p. 165). It is further able to explain the variation in dynastic legacies, where politicians may be unable to perpetuate their dynasties in what is considered single-generation authoritarian rule, contrasting the traditional emulation of a dynastic presence of patron-client relations (Sidel, 1997). The entrenchment of local political dynasties is enabled through monopolistic control of what Sidel (1997) terms “the commanding heights of the local economy” (p. 952).

However, subnational authoritarianism and the bossism framework do not discount the role of patronage between the political elite, where local bosses can become dependent on superordinate powerbrokers who provide economic capital and political security in highly contested political offices (Sidel, 1997; Kerkvliet, 2002).

## **Research Design**

### *Method of Analysis*

This research draws from Purdey's (2016) characterization of political dynasties, as either established or emerging, utilizing such as a foundation for a comparative case study on the subnational level to examine how the Duterte dynasty presents a fundamental deviation from the traditional, established elite. By emulating Sidel's (2014a) approach to comparing subnational authoritarianism in the Philippines, this research similarly will compare and contrast two political dynasties (Snyder, 2001). Using political dynasties as the unit of analysis, the Aquino dynasty, considered part of the traditional landed oligarchy, and the Duterte dynasty, representative of emerging dynasties, are compared. Utilizing a qualitative methodology this research aims at providing empirical depth, as well as being able to provide explanations to puzzles which statistical research methods are unable to acquire. Since this research contends that the phenomenon of the Duterte's rise to power provides a divergent empirical outlier, explanatory research will be conducted, aimed at expanding existing theories. Furthermore, this research does not specifically aim to provide general causation, extrapolatable to the entire case of the Philippines. Rather, singular causation, as the focus of this research, aims to specifically explain what makes the Duterte dynasty different to both established and emerging dynasties in the Philippines. The use of a case study in comparative politics has been highly influential in providing exploratory research to cases which exemplify deviant or extreme characteristics, such as the Duterte dynasty.

### *Case and Data Selection*

As previously stated, this research aims to examine the phenomenon of the Duterte dynasty through a juxtaposition with a traditional established dynasty in the Philippines. For this purpose, the Aquino dynasty has been chosen as representative of the landed oligarchy, which have been present in the Philippines since its institutional inception (McCoy, 2002; Teehankee, 2001). The Aquinos are a highly prominent political family whose agricultural enterprise facilitated its economic power base enabling their transition into politics during the 1950's (Vibal, 2020). Teehankee's (2001) characterization of traditional established dynasties

is rooted in the landowning system which concentrated economic and political power, and enabled their diversification across multiple, non-agricultural, sectors of the economy, such as banking (Hutchcroft, 1998). Such is applicable to the Aquinos, whose Hacienda Luisita still remains one of the largest sugarcane plantations in the Philippines (Vibal, 2020). The monopolization of political and economic power in Tarlac province enabled their rise to power first within provincial office, and later in the national legislatures (Vibal, 2020).

The Aquinos have been fundamental in shaping the Philippine political system and could be considered to have enabled the persistence of dynasties across the Philippines, as Corazon Aquino reconstructed the elite democracy, dominated by the landed political elite (Krinks, 2002). Whilst the post-authoritarian political system constructed by the Aquinos retained a vast proportion of traditional pre-Marcos dynasties, the emergence of new political actors has significantly presented a divergence away from landowning oligarchs to professional politicians, whose rise to power has not been contingent on patron-client relations enabled through a landed economic base (Teehankee, 2001).

The Duterte dynasty conforms to the emerging dynasties within the post-Marcos era of renewed democracy, representing the new social forces. The constituency of Davao City in southern Mindanao was given to Vincente Duterte by Alejandro Almendras, passing on his political legacy to his son, Rodrigo Roa Duterte (Ram, 2018; Kaman, 2017). His strongman approach, in line with Sidel's (1999) account of bossism, enabled the monopolization of economic and political power, through alternate means, which traditional patron-client frameworks are unable to explain. Teehankee (2001) states that as societies undergo internal differentiation, their respective elite will become more specialized. Such account is reflective of emerging political dynasties who have utilized more divergent modes of accumulating power (Purdey, 2016). Duterte presents a highly contentious case, because whilst he could be best explained through Sidel's (1997) bossism framework, prior to his election in 2016, this research contends that populism is unaccounted for in the literature on Philippine bosses. Duterte deviance can further be highlighted by his economic base, prior to his presidency, not extending past Davao, with his continuous reelection to mayorship being better explained through coercive means of controlling the electorate, as opposed to traditional machine politics (Kaman, 2017). Even prior to his presidential bid, the means by which Duterte consolidated power in Davao can be characterized as deviant compared other political dynasties in the Philippines, a feature which popularized and aided his presidential campaign (Casiple, 2016; Kaman, 2017).

This research hypothesizes that the Duterte dynasty presents a fundamental deviation from traditional Philippine politics, which is akin to Sidel's (1999) bossism framework. The political deviance of Duterte, his style of politics and his modes of acquiring, accumulating and consolidating power, is contrasted with the traditional landed oligarchic elite, as represented by the Aquino dynasty. This research contends that both dynasties are comparable due to them having championed presidential office holders, as well as Duterte succeeding Aquino's presidential term. The data utilized in this research includes, but is not limited to, speeches, political manifestos, as well as reports by investigative journalism platforms and non-governmental human rights organizations.

## **Data Analysis**

### *The Provincial Strongman vs. the Landed Oligarch*

Prior to Duterte's election to the presidency, the previous incumbent, Benigno Aquino III, warned the Philippine populous that: "dictatorship has many faces" and that "some other personality would like to bring it back – to deny the right process and to put in the hands of just one person the responsibility of saying what should or should not be done and who is innocent or who is guilty" (Dizon, 2018, n.p.). This reference to dictatorial rule of the Marcos era highlighted how the ruling elite viewed the rise of Duterte (Curato, 2016). Duterte has often been characterized as a vote against "imperial Manila" and a vote against the existing ruling elite, amongst them the outgoing Aquino administration (Sinpeng, Gueorguiev & Arugay, 2020; Mendoza & Ocampo, 2017). Why was Duterte not perceived as part of the elite which dominated over the electorate, like the Aquinos? Whilst Duterte had considerable backing and a solid electoral base in his home provinces, compared to his political opponents he lacked an economic and political foundation, deficient of traditional political machines.

In comparing their economic base, the differences between established dynasties and emerging dynasties become highlighted. Established dynasties, typically drawing their economic resources from export-agriculture and vast land holdings, later diversified into other sectors of the economy, such as banking (Teehankee, 2001). The Aquinos fit this prototypical description with Hacienda Luistra, their original plantation in Tarlac province, enabling their pursuit for regional political dominance, which later facilitated the rise of two presidents and other national-level officials (Vibal, 2020). This research contends that established political dynasties have typically tended to rely on traditional networks of patronage and clientelism rooted within the economic preeminence they had in their respective provinces.

On the contrary, the economic power base of the Duterte dynasty initially did not extend much past the limits of Davao city, as he did not come to rely on patron-client relations in the traditional sense (Kaman, 2017). Whilst he arguably did monopolize economic and coercive power, as a facet of his subnational authoritarian enclave, such did not provide the basis for his continuous reelections, and the dynasty's grip on the city. Rather, the monopolization of economic resources, in conjunction with coercive measures, as well as a pervasive cult of personality, equally contributed to Duterte's incumbencies (Kaman, 2017). A mixture of populism and intimidation, but also the fulfilment of promises, such as the enforcement of law and order, created a subservient electorate enabling the perpetuation of the Duterte dynasty without challenge.

In comparing how the provincial strongman prevailed over the landed oligarch, it is imperative to examine the aspect of visibility within the socio-cultural context of the Philippines. In a system where corruption is pervasive, the electorate constantly observes negative press of renewed political scandals, with good aspects of governance, such as achieving high levels of economic growth, less visibly communicated most of Aquino's achievements went unnoticed. Presenting himself as the one who would bring law and order to the legislative halls of the Philippines, by emulating his achievements in Davao by projecting visible change. Alas, *Dutertismo* would deliver in all these aspects.

#### *Dutertismo: Populist Bossism*

*Dutertismo*, a characterization by David (2016), is a term often ascribed to Duterte's populist brand, distinguishing him from previous populist presidents like Joseph Estrada and Fidel Ramos (Contreras, 2020; Casiple, 2016; Capuno, 2020; Rivera & Atienza, 2020; Thompson, 2016). By treating populism as a political style, rather than conceptualizing such as an ideological or political theory, Duterte's rise to power is fundamentally different from other populist candidates, such as Mar Roxas or Grace Poe (Curato, 2017; Rivera & Atienza, 2020). However, whilst Duterte may have utilized populist rhetoric and methods, this research contends that he is first and foremost a political actor which falls under Sidel's (1997) bossism framework. Existing approaches emphasize the populist aspect of Duterte, explaining his brutishness as a consequence of his populist style. Which, whilst not wrong, does not entirely encapsulate how Duterte's populist style is grounded in the political repertoire of a provincial strongman. This research asserts that purely populist explanations are unable to account for how his political background influenced his populist style, his rhetoric and subsequently how he managed to form a genuine relationship with the electorate.



Rather, by primarily characterizing Duterte on the lines of Sidel's (1997) bossism framework, in this case a national-level boss, such as Marco's, and amalgamate such with an intended, perceiving and calculated populist style.

In this instance populism is considered a "repertoire of performance", which enabled Duterte to forge a genuine relationship between him and the electorate (Curato, 2017, p. 146). His populist style, most dominantly characterized through his vulgar, tough-talking language, garnered the attention of the nation, allowing him to create a sense of urgency (Thompson, 2016). It further may have facilitated the legitimization of authoritarian practices and reinforced and anti-democratic rhetoric, which however stands in contrast to his citizen-engaging style of politics. Dutertismo is characterized as "pure theatre", which stimulates the nation through the creation of a crisis (Curato, 2017, p. 147). The narrative of "If only to save this Republic, I can run for President" echoed his beliefs that the Philippines was succumbing to drug users and criminality, warning his supporters of an imminent disaster (Curato, 2017). The coarsening of political discourse and increased vulgarity, further supplemented perceptions of seriousness. Such enabled Duterte to form a genuine connection with the electorate, one which Sidel's (1997) bossist examination of provincial politics does not typically account for. Sidel (1997) argues that the relationship between the boss and the electorate is usually one of consternation and trepidation, not of endearment and affection. Whilst typical bossism does not discount popularity within their constituencies, Duterte diverges from such depiction, most recently achieving a 91% approval rating (Heydarian, 2020; Curato, 2021). This research proposes a revised characterization of Duterte, which subsequently will be referred to as populist bossism.

Whilst Dutertismo is pure theatre it promises a clear message, providing a sense of certainty (Curato, 2017). Local strongmen running for national office is nothing new in the context of the Philippines, however Duterte provides a departure from previous strongmen iterations of presidential candidates. Whilst running on the same hard line as Duterte, they never managed to facilitate a genuine relationship with the electorate. Furthermore, Duterte had a proven model, called Exhibit A: Davao City, which he aimed to project nationally (Curato, 2021). However, the methodologies local bosses utilize to curb civil unrest or to coerce individuals differ from the means of established national political families, who mostly have relied on patron-clientelism, enabled through their political machines, as seen in the case of Aquino. However, Dutertismo inhibited the functioning of traditional machine politics, best exemplified by Mar Roxas; the candidate with the largest political machine, backed by the previous president, and with the most money spent on his campaign. Roxas

received only 23.4% of the votes, compared to Duterte's 39% (Casiple, 2017). More perplexingly, his running mate, Leni Robredo, only managed to clinch the Vice-Presidency by 0.64% over, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the son of the dictator (Teehankee & Thompson, 2016).

“Change is coming”, Duterte proclaimed, engraining the fundamental flaws the current system was facing, simultaneously setting him apart from the existing ruling elite (Po, 2016, n.p.). Aiming to diverge from previous incumbents through purposefully projecting the visibility of his policies, by focusing on the highly contentious issue of drug abuse in the Philippines, indicating a failure of law and order, Duterte's imagined crisis increasingly resonated with the electorate, specifically the middle classes (Curato, 2017). However, policies of visibility translated into overflowing prisons, increasing death tolls and international condemnation. In his first month Duterte had enabled over 900 drug-related killings, 700 anti-illegal drug operations, and a further 700 arrests (ABS-CBN Investigative and Research Group, 2016). In 2020 Human Rights Watch (2020) estimated the number of extrajudicial killings at 8,000. The extra-judicial killings are akin to the “Davao Death Squad”, both of which are purposed to instill fear, to coerce and to intimidate (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Yet they are representative of substantive change, if only perceived as such.

Perceptions are vital in Philippine politics to maintain voter support. Whilst Aquino's anti-corruption platform in 2010 was hailed by his supporters, they were fundamentally distant to voters (Thompson, 2016). Additionally, whilst Aquino implemented substantive reforms and investments in human capital, e.g., the shift to the K-12 school system, such did not address everyday problems citizens were facing (Geronimo, 2016). Hence, the electorate felt largely neglected. The Aquino administration failed to live up to the promise of reducing poverty through fighting corruption, rather his administration was consistently overshadowed by various political scandals (Thompson, 2016). Contrastingly, the visibility to Duterte's extra-judicial war on drugs has made news headlines across the world, branding him the “Trump of the East” (Rauhala, 2016).

Dutertismo, fundamentally an illusionary tool, provides evidential progress and change to an electorate who require immediate satisfaction and results. Such contributes to his high popularity and explains why his extra-judicial killings are tolerated by most of the population. The normalization of extra-judicial policies is fundamentally changing the perceptions of Philippine society to be more permissive towards extremist policies, and subsequently more subservient towards strongmen and bosses. Additionally, a pervasive personality cult ensures a consistent following, emboldening Duterte to further test the of

acceptable political discourse. Arguably, Duterte's personality cult is best illustrated within the digital space, where his followers have rampaged through social media platforms, normalizing an online culture of thuggery and intimidation, akin to the means of coercion utilized as a Davao's resident boss (Curato, 2017).

When examining Duterteismo as a political style, by treating it as a "repertoire of performance", or even stating that it is purely theater, this research contends such is fundamentally grounded in Duterte being first and foremost a provincial boss. The means by which pre-presidential Duterte conducted politics are being emulated on the larger scale. Hence, characterizing Duterte along the lines of populist bossism, rather than by characterizing him either entirely as a strongman/boss, or entirely as a populist, accounts for why his populist style is such that it is. It explains the use of coercive means used to instill order and subordination, which traditional patron-client frameworks tend to ignore, emblematic of Sidel's (1997) bossism. A manifestation which best exemplifies both Duterte's calculated populism and bossist roots is found within the use of social media during the elections.

#### *Guns, Goons, Gold and Gigabytes*

"Guns, goons and gold" refers to a characterization of established patronage-based politics. However, this research argues that traditional machine politics, along with patron-client relations, effectively have been undermined by the emergence of Duterte (Kreuzer, 2020, p. 4). As the country with the highest internet usage in the world, the online electoral campaign became a focal point of the election, enabling the inclusion of "Gigabytes" in how Philippine elections have come to be perceived (Kemp, 2021; Sinpeng, Gueorguiev & Arugay, 2020; Curato, 2017, p. 147). Out of all 2016 presidential candidates Duterte had the most Facebook and Twitter followers (Sinpeng, 2016). The digital space surrounding contemporary Philippine politics, is one where any criticism of Duterte, is met with hate speech and death threats.

Duterte dominated his opponents during the online electoral campaign, doing little if anything at all (Sinpeng et al., 2020). Although he acquired the largest following on social media by a sizeable margin, his interaction with followers online remained limited (Sinpeng, 2016). Duterte's online dominance is not best explained through a facet of populism; rather, by viewing his online presence as emblematic of the bossist political repertoire his online overtures essentially become a license to kill, a justification to obstruct journalism, and a means to radicalize a fanatical group of individuals. Duterte's absent populism is highlighted

through posting on average three times less than other populist candidates (Curato, 2017). Yet, this evidently did not matter to his fanatical supporters, trolls and little strongmen, whether they were paid or not (Sinpeng et al., 2020).

The online culture perpetuated by Duterte is not solely a result of bottom-up and voter-driven involvement (Kreuzer, 2020; Sinpeng et al., 2020). Rather, it is also through top-down means, not necessarily through increasing the frequency and content of posts, but through the guidance of a troll army by which Duterte's online campaign managed to disrupt the functioning of traditional Philippine machine politics (Sinpeng et al., 2020). This online culture of intimidating critics, silencing the opposition and discrediting other political candidates, was sustained through the use of keyboard warriors or keyboard trolls, who managed social media groups, reaching up to hundreds of thousands of supporters instantaneously (Contreras, 2020). Duterte himself acknowledged the use of a paid army to supposedly "spread and amplify" ideas (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017, p. 15; Valente, 2017). Whilst such may partially explain with how so little online engagement Duterte's online campaign managed to decisively position him ahead of other candidates, it does not account for the bottom-up support he received. The voter's themselves are the other half of the equation, as their characteristics, sense of group unity and ideological mission all contributed to the momentum of Duterte's campaign.

Unlike regular voters, who predominantly utilize online resources to evaluate candidates and gather information, Duterte supporters already decided to cast their vote for Duterte prior, making their sole purpose to carry his online campaign, to spread his message, and to fight his opponents on his behalf (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017). These voters were found to be more likely to attend rallies, more likely to vote in groups, which is indicative of being adherent to the personality cult (Contreras, 2020). Hence, Duterte's online campaign, is neither top-down, nor bottom-up. Rather, it is an amalgamation using targeted populism to incite his following to conduct his coercive bossist methodologies. All the while, his voters are under the impression they are taking advantage of social media to promote his campaign, whereas usually the electorate is fearful of being taken advantage of social media. In reality, they are being guided to spread a certain message or to fight certain people. Such represents how to harness the power of the people, manipulating them in what is extending coercive bossist mechanisms onto the digital landscape.

### *Emulating Exhibit A: Davao City*

With almost five years having passed since the tumultuous election in 2016, the extent to which Duterte has managed to transform Philippine politics and society still is yet to be determined by his last remaining year in office. However, already now one is able to identify profound shifts within how both emerging and established political dynasties have adapted to this new system of national bossist rule, and have managed to acclimatize, overcome and emulate a populist bossist approach in order to further entrench their political power in certain governmental positions. Examining provincial governmental structures, it is apparent that not only voters took Duterte's extreme populist narrative to heart, but also emerging politicians and established dynasties. Duterte's narrative of transforming Philippine politics and society to emulate his supposed achievements in Davao City, provided a large appeal to voters, who were presented with a working model how Duterte's reign may look like (Ravanilla, Sexton & Haim, 2020). However, it additionally may have inspired other political entrepreneurs to replicate the Davao model. Duterte campaigned on the premise of subduing the perceived lawlessness and chaos through replicating his achievements in Davao on the national level.

Creating law and order as an effective populist phrase, is relatively ambiguous in its policy direction. However, Duterte's anti-drug narrative effectively framed extra-judicial killings to be equivalent to increased order. Yet, the means by which law and order are enabled have been largely left up to actors other than Duterte himself; another means by which a facet of his bossist rule in Davao has been emulated by populism to reach a large audience. As the former mayor of Davao, his denunciation of drugs was well known, going so far as to say: "If it's drugs, you shoot and kill", all whilst a group commonly referred to as the Davao Death Squad facilitated targeted executions of drug users (Gomez, 2020, n.p.). This role has largely been outsourced to the Philippine National Police (PNP), but also vigilantes, inspired by Duterte's call of law and order. However, most of the violence and targeted executions which the world comes to view in the news originate in the National Capital Region (NCR), or Metro Manila (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Yet, despite this, his model of death squads roaming the streets at night have been considered viable and appropriate means by some of Duterte's following within the provincial elite.

Research by Human Rights Watch (2017) suggests that the death squad model has been emulated in provincial capitals, such as General Santos City and Digos City. It is suspected that the increased vigilante killings are enabled through the local government. Furthermore, the concept of a vigilante death squad has been continuously normalized in

regions, such as Cebu City, where similar style killings occurred in the past (Human Rights Watch, 2009). With Duterte's anti-drug narrative, these death squads, what essentially are vigilante groups, become legitimized and praised for their work, as opposed to being prosecuted for it. Additionally, the individuals who conduct these extrajudicial executions, come under the personal patronage of Duterte, who pledged to pardon any police officer accused for unjustly committing murder (Mendez, 2016). Duterte in the process of creating law and order, enforced by his vulgar rhetoric, may have become an ideology personified. An ideology, others may want to emulate in order to replicate his rise to power.

As opposed to ideological transformation, traditional sources, or moreover the lack thereof, have expedited the expansion of bossism (Ravanilla et al., 2020). An empirical analysis on the relationship between the appropriation of pork barrel funds and its influence on the drug war concludes that emerging mayors, saw 40% less pork barrel funds being allocated to them, which facilitated a harder execution of the drug war, leading up to 60% more extra-judicial killings (Ravanilla et al., 2020). Such has demonstrated the trade-off between patronage politics and corruption, which only expedites the pervasive democratic backsliding. In such instance, Duterte is no different than Aquino, who equally utilized the presidential pork barrel to push through his anti-corruption, good governance reform (Tigalao, 2013).

Whilst Sidel (1997) argues that the misappropriation of public works procurement funds falls in lines of the bossism framework, he does not account for a provincial boss effectively controlling the entirety of the pork barrel. The pork barrel has been one of the most effective political tools within Philippine politics, hence why Duterte does not deviate from using this traditional established political machine to further institutionalize his drug-war (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017). As emerging political actors depend on the pork barrel to secure re-election, their greed and vigor to entice Duterte into grating more funds has resulted in an ever-increasing death toll. In the process Philippine society has been acclimatized to Duterte's brutish and vulgar language, his misogynistic and homophobic comments, as well as renewed headlines of increased drug-related violence and killings. With a 91% approval rating, who is there to oppose him anymore? Undeniably popular, yet indisputably coercive and violent, Rodrigo Duterte may have created a strongman's paradise through what this research has adamantly called: populist bossism.

## **Conclusion**

This research set out to explore the phenomenon of Duterte, his rise to power, and how he fundamentally is not holistically explained the majority of existing theoretical approaches, let it be penal populism, patron-client relationships, and to a limited extent Sidel's (1999) account of bossism. This thesis fundamentally argued that Duterte's acquisition and accumulation of power can be characterized through the amalgamation of traditional bossism and populism, to create what I have called populist bossism. In which the coercive features of provincial bossism are cast over the nation encapsulated in a populist narrative. In many ways the Duterte dynasty exhibited similarities to other emerging bossist dynasties and to some extent emulated means of established patronage politics, such as the use of the pork barrel politics. However, Duterte, characterized as a political entrepreneur, may have been a catalyst to a transformational change within the Philippine political system, where power is stripped from the traditional established elite, such as the Aquinos, and transferred to a new class of emerging dynasties, energized in challenging political norms.

This research illustrated how Duterte directly utilized populist mechanisms to promulgate his bossist methods. The perpetuation of the Duterte dynasty, whilst maintain high popularity nation-wide, indicates that the strategies utilized in seizing and entrenching their power are unaccounted for in the present theoretical approaches. Whilst Duterte exhibits individual features suggested by many scholars, he fundamentally exhibits the characteristics proposed and advanced Sidel's (1999) bossism framework. With his daughter Sara Duterte projected run for president following his departure the perpetuation of the Duterte dynasty appears certain. Ultimately, Duterte fulfilled his campaign slogan "Change is coming"; as he undoubtably has changed Philippine politics and society.

With Duterte's presidential term coming to an end in 2022 it remains to be seen what consequences his tenure will have had on Philippine dynastic politics, providing a fundamental limitation to this research. Hence, why this research focused on Duterte's rise to power, as opposed to his presidential term. Additional research into the long-term consequences of Duterte's rule on Philippine politics and society will be required. Furthermore, this research advocates for increased scholarship in understanding Duterte, as well as other emerging political dynasties, through alternative, perspectives.

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