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FILIPINO VOTING BEHAVIOR AND THE DEGRADATION  
OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS: THE PHILIPPINES UNDER  
RODRIGO DUTERTE AND FERDINAND MARCOS JR.

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## **Abstract**

Although the Philippines is praised for its outstanding performance in promoting and protecting gender equality, the country still has areas for continued development (Anonuevo, 2000). This study will investigate the relationship between Filipino voting behavior and the degradation of women's rights in the Philippines under two prominent populist leaders, Rodrigo Duterte and Marcos Jr. To understand this association comprehensively, there will be an exploration whether the Philippines can be categorized as an illiberal democracy. It will then delve into the Philippines' human rights situation by describing the State's commitment to safeguarding human rights while simultaneously highlighting the gruesome reality. Furthermore, it will explore anti-genderism in the Philippines by scrutinizing the gender situation in the country. Eventually, there will be an analysis of Filipino voting behavior and its connection to women's rights; the 2016 and 2022 presidential elections will be used as case studies. Generally, this study aims to comprehend the dynamics between voting behavior, illiberal democracy, and the degradation of women's rights in the Philippines. Its objective is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the obstacles faced by Filipino women in the country's political landscape and to provide insights for legislators and advocates motivated to address these issues.

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## **Abbreviations**

**AES:** Automated Election System

**AICHR:** ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights

**ASEAN:** Association of Southeast Asian Nations

**BEI:** Board of Election Inspectors

**BWS:** Battered Woman Syndrome

**CAT:** UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel and Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

**CEDAW:** Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

**CHR:** Commission on Human Rights

**CHRP:** Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines

**COMELEC:** Commission on Elections

**CPI:** Corruption Perceptions Index

**CPJ:** Committee to Protect Journalists

**CRC:** Convention on the Rights of the Child

**DEA:** US Drug Enforcement Administration

**DILG:** Department of the Interior and Local Government

**DLSU:** De La Salle University

**DOST:** Department of Science and Technology

**DSWD:** Department of Social Welfare and Development

**EAP:** East Asia and Pacific

**EBJS:** Engendering the Barangay Justice System

**EDSA:** People Power Revolution of 1986

**EU:** European Union

**FBI:** US Federal Bureau of Investigation

**FPW:** Framework Plan for Women

**HFI:** Human Freedom Index

**HRC:** Human Rights Council

**HRVVMC:** Human Rights Violations Victims' Memorial Commission

**ICAD:** Inter-Agency Committee on Anti-Illegal Drugs

**ICC:** International Criminal Court

**ICCPR:** International Convention on Civil and Political Rights

**ICESCR:** International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

**KBP:** Kapisanan ng mga Broadcasters sa Pilipinas

**MBC:** Municipal Board of Canvassers

**MCOC:** Municipal Certificate of Canvass

**MCW:** Magna Carta of Women

**ME:** Middle East

**MNLF:** Moro National Liberation Front

**NBC:** National Board of Canvassers

**NHRI:** National Human Rights Institution

**NPA:** New People's Army

**NUJP:** National Union of Journalists of the Philippines

**OAV:** Overseas Absentee Voting

**OFW:** Overseas Filipino Worker

**PBC:** Provincial Board of Canvassers

**PCOC:** Provincial COC

**PCOS:** Precinct Count Optical Scanner

**PIN:** Personal Identification Number

**PLM:** Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila

**PPE:** Philosophy, Politics and Economics

**PPGD:** Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development

**SONA:** State of the Nation Address

**UDHR:** Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**UNODC:** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**UP:** University of the Philippines

**UPR:** Universal Periodic Review

**US:** United States

**USAID:** United States Agency for International Development

**VAW:** Violence Against Women

**VAWP:** Violence Against Women in Politics

**WJP:** World Justice Project

**WLB:** Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau



## I. Introduction

The Republic of the Philippines has undergone notable political transformations, from a period authoritarianism to an illiberal democracy. This evolution has been disrupted by several changes in leadership, ideologies, and policies that have left inalterable dents on the nation's political-economic and social landscapes. According to Deles (2019), “the attacks faced by Filipino women today are different: they are vulgar, carried out publicly and without restraint and outside of any personal relationship with the targets.” Deles’ reference to “today” is particularly about the time of former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte. The latter is known for his “War on Drugs” or “Shoot-To-Kill” orders as well as his ruthless and undiplomatic behavior (Eugenio, 2023). Duterte insults and shames women and even ordered his soldiers “to shoot women rebels in the vagina to make them worthless” (Deles, 2019). However, Duterte is not the only leader who alarmed human rights defenders.

The current President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., or also known as, Bongbong Marcos, remains a concern for the country since he is a son of a former dictator, Marcos Sr. His father imposed Martial Law in the Philippines (Eugenio, 2023), and this hindered the rights of many Filipino citizens. The latter lived in an era of tremendous fear and tension where criticism was intolerable. In fact, Marcos Sr. directly told Cory Aquino, former female chief opposition leader under Martial Law (*Corazon Aquino*, 2023), that “women belong in the bedroom” (Deles, 2019). Hence, misogyny was also at its peak during historical times. Although, Marcos Sr. supporters did not believe in the human rights violations that occurred, Marcos Jr. lacked giving attention to promoting and prioritizing human rights in his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) (Abad, 2022).

Women are pivotal to our society in terms of the private and public spheres. Gran (2019) declares that women can “transform a community from a relatively autonomous society to a participant in the national economy”. Women should not be underestimated and vilified; instead, they should be empowered to advance our present and future generations. Therefore, it is fundamental to analyze Filipino voting behavior to understand why populist leaders are always the chosen ones. By doing so, it is possible to pinpoint why women’s human rights is declining in the Philippines, particularly under Duterte and Marcos Jr.

The existing literature reveals strengths in successfully analyzing the Philippines as an illiberal democracy. Furthermore, it has delved into investigating the State's human rights situation and has explored instances of anti-genderism within the country. In fact, this exploration led to the understanding that the emergence of illiberal democracy has contributed to the erosion of women's rights in the Philippines. While the current literature extensively studies the impact of the Duterte administration on anti-genderism, there is a gap in the research, particularly in terms of an in-depth study of women's rights during the Marcos Jr. administration. It is worth noting that the prevailing literature tends to emphasize human rights violations under both leaders; however, it fails to prioritize the pivotal source of the dilemma: Filipino voting behavior. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis of Filipinos’ voting behavior is important; it is essential to address the core of the human rights problem. This study, therefore, aims to establish a clear intersectionality between Filipino voting behavior and the destruction of women's rights in the Philippines, under the influence of two prominent populist leaders, namely Rodrigo Duterte and Marcos Jr.

The main research question of this study is as follows: “How does Filipino voting behavior influence the degradation of women's rights in the Philippines, with a comparative analysis of the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations, and what role does the rise of illiberal democracy play in

shaping this relationship?” To answer this research question, this study will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter is entitled, “Is the Philippines an Illiberal Democracy?”. It will begin by studying the political atmosphere of the Philippines and its effects on women’s rights. In this chapter, the Philippines’ constitution and form of government as well as the role of the Catholic Church and the importance of the notion of family will be explored comprehensively. Moreover, the concept of illiberal democracy will be scrutinized and how is it relevant in the Philippine context. Proceeding, the second chapter, “Human Rights in the Philippines”, will investigate the Philippines’ commitment to human rights, as enshrined in the 1987 Constitution, and the functionalities of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and non-governmental organization (NGOs). By bringing together the nation’s commitment with the harsh reality of the human rights situation in the Philippines, the chapter will highlight the obstacles faced in promoting and protecting these rights (i.e. extrajudicial killings, repression, of dissent, and constraints on freedom of expression).

In the third chapter named, “Anti-Genderism in the Philippines”, the notion of anti-genderism will be tackled in various aspects (political, economic, and social). The relationship between the Catholic Church and gender rights will also be examined. Simultaneously, gender rights will also be analyzed under the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations. Furthermore, the third chapter will examine these leaders’ policies on the status of women, particularly that of prominent women. Lastly, the fourth chapter entitled, “Filipino Voting Behavior and Women’s Rights”, will shed light on the Philippine electoral system by exploring its historical roots, the voting atmosphere of current times, and the adoption of automated election systems (AES). By covering the 2016 and 2022 presidential elections, this chapter will execute efforts in understanding how Filipino voters choose their leaders (i.e. Do women’s rights play a significant

role in choosing their next president?). Overall, this chapter works to study the link between Filipino voting behavior and women's rights.

This research uses a comprehensive and rigorous approach to analyze the link between Filipino voting behavior and the degradation of women's rights in the Philippines, focusing on the administrations of Rodrigo Duterte and Ferdinand Marcos Jr. It does so by systemically analyzing secondary sources such as academic articles, scholarly papers, policy reports, and reliable news sources. A combination of all of these sources helps to create a strong foundation for this paper, and it offers ample information to comprehend the interaction between voting behavior, political leadership, and women's rights. Moreover, including a comparative study between the administrations of Duterte and Marcos Jr. is essential to deduce the prominent similarities and differences in terms of their personalities, leadership styles, human rights management, and so on. Overall, this study is in pursuit of understanding Filipino voting behavior and its impact on women's rights in the Philippines in the context of Rodrigo Duterte and Marcos Jr.

## **II. Chapter 1: Is the Philippines an Illiberal Democracy?**

Fareed Zakaria defines illiberal democracy as “democratically elected regimes, often ones that have been reelected or reaffirmed through referenda, [but] are routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms”. There are 15 characteristics to describe what illiberal democracy is, and they are the following: “consolidation of power in the executive, charismatic leader, erosion of the independence of the judiciary, weakening status of the parliament, recourse to direct democracy (plebiscites/referenda), populist rhetoric/propaganda, discrimination of minorities, monitoring and molding of civil society, [and] media and internet censorship” (*Democracy at Risk*, 2017). Moreover, illiberal democracy is also characterized by Zakaria as a system where there are “curbs on academia and educational curricula,

targeted repression of opponents, restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly, disregard for rule of law and human rights, misuse of state resources (cronyism), emasculation of the electoral process, and forging of external enemies” (*Democracy at Risk*, 2017).

In this chapter, I will adopt Zakaria’s definition of illiberal democracy, and I will discuss how the Philippines is a suitable case for his definition. This can be done by giving background information in terms of the Philippines’ 1987 Constitution, the form of government, the role of the Catholic Church in Philippine society, and the importance of family in the State. In addition, the chapter will further extrapolate on the transition of the Philippines from an authoritarian to a democratic nation, the rise of various democratic movements, the Philippines’ sudden illiberal turn under the Duterte administration, and the continuation of such an illiberal democracy under Marcos Jr. Lastly, I will define illiberalism in a broader sense and eventually investigate how the Philippines is an illiberal democratic State.

## **1. The Republic of the Philippines: A Background**

### *a. The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines*

The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines is the result of the “people power (EDSA) revolution of 1986 which ousted the authoritarian regime of President Marcos” (Bacani, 2018). Villacorta (1988) refers to the EDSA revolution as a “peaceful upheaval [...] whose main objective was the overthrow of the martial law regime”. The EDSA revolution’s ideology “was not against foreign domination nor did it champion the liberation of the lower classes, having been led by the moderate middle forces” (Villacorta, 1988). Bacani (2018) explains that the core objectives of the Aquino administration “was to restore democracy and to rebuild democratic institutions”. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1986, President Corazon Aquino “issued Proclamation No. 3 which abrogated the 1973 Constitution of the Marcos period” (Bacani, 2018). Proclamation No. 3 was referred to as

the “Freedom Constitution”, and it was considered an “interim constitution which abolished the unicameral legislature, the office of the Prime Minister, and the power of the President to legislate” (Bacani, 2018). President Aquino called for the adoption of a new constitution, and it was expressed in the following article:

*ARTICLE V. ADOPTION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION*

*Section 1. Within sixty (60) days from date of this Proclamation, a Commission shall be appointed by the President to draft a New Constitution. The Commission shall be composed of not less than thirty (30) nor more than fifty (50) natural born citizens of the Philippines, of recognized probity, known for their independence, nationalism and patriotism. They shall be chosen by the President after consultation with various sectors of society.*

*Section 2. The Commission shall complete its work within as short a period as may be consistent with the need both to hasten the return of normal constitutional government and to draft a document truly reflective of the ideals and aspirations of the Filipino people.*

*Section 3. The Commission shall conduct public hearings to ensure that the people will have adequate participation in the formulation of the New Constitution.*

*Section 4. The plenary sessions of the Commission shall be public and fully recorded.*

*Section 5. The New Constitution shall be presented by the Commission to the President who shall fix the date for the holding of a plebiscite. It shall become valid and effective upon ratification by a majority of the votes cast in such plebiscite which shall be held within a period of sixty (60) days following its submission to the President.*

Atienza (2019) emphasizes that the 1987 Constitution is a reaction to the country's martial law experience. Thus, it can be inevitably condemned as a weakness, but it cannot be denied that it can also be a strength. Constitutional Commission (ConCom)'s member, Braid (2018), declares that "it reflects people's frustrations about the past as well as aspirations for the future". The 1987 Constitution was praised for its "innovative features that can move the country forward 'if genuinely implemented' and if the provisions are defended by the people who have the political will to do so" (Villacorta 1988). This includes "political leaders, various agencies, and personnel of government, as well as citizens who are conscious of the principles and goals of the constitution as well as their own rights and interests" (Villacorta, 1988). Moreover, Atienza (2019) commends the New Constitution as it illuminates "the concepts of representative democracy and separation of powers". The Constitution led to the formation of a presidential system and independent constitutional commissions, it promotes local autonomy, and it restores legislative and judicial powers through the president (Atienza, 2019). The 1987 Constitution is divided into 18 Articles, and it is structured as follows (*Constitution of the Philippines*, 2022): (I) National Territory; (II) Declaration of Principles and State Policies; (III) Bill of Rights; (IV) Citizenship; (V) Suffrage; (VI) Legislative Department; (VII) Executive Department; (VIII) Judicial Department; (IX) Local Government; (X) Accountability of Public Officers; (XI) National Economy and Patrimony; (XII) Social Justice and Human Rights; (XIII) Education, Science, and Technology; (XIV) Arts, Culture, and Sports; (XV) The Family; (XVI) General Provisions; (XVII) Amendments or Revisions; and (XVIII) Transitory Provisions.

The ultimate goal of the New Constitution is to prevent the reign of another oppressive ruling that the Philippines had previously experienced under the Marcos regime. This is supported by the establishment of "Presidential term limits", "a bicameral Congress", and a "Congressional

approval over declarations of martial law” (Atienza, 2019). Most importantly, the 1987 Constitution expanded the Bill of Rights to offer the utmost “protection for human and civil rights” (Atienza, 2019). It also fabricated an all-inclusive program for social justice and educational development. The Constitution also required the country “to be both ecologically safe and free from nuclear weapons”, it defined the duties of the military concerning the supreme civilian authority, and it prioritized people’s participation at both national and local levels (Atienza, 2019).

*b. Form of Government in the Philippines*

The Republic of the Philippines has a set of enshrined basic principles, and it includes the following: “Sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them”, “civilian authority is, at all times, supreme over the military”, “the separation of Church and State shall be inviolable”, and “the State ensures the autonomy of local governments” (*Constitution of the Philippines, 2022*). According to *Philippine Government* (n.d), the Philippines is a democratic and republican state “with a presidential form of government”, and it is a nation “governed by the rule of law” (*Constitution of the Philippines, 2022*). Its power is “equally divided among its three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial” (*Philippine Government, n.d.*). The current structure of the Philippine national government is “modeled after the U.S. national system” (Edleman, n.d.). As mentioned earlier by Atienza (2019), the New Constitution emphasized the principle of separation of powers. Hence, “legislation belongs to Congress, execution to the Executive, and settlement of legal controversies to the Judiciary” (*Philippine Government, n.d.*).

The legislative branch is responsible for making, altering, and repealing laws through the power bestowed by the Philippine Congress (*Philippine Government, n.d.*). According to Edleman (n.d.), the legislative branch is made up of two chambers which are the Senate and the House of Representatives. The former is the upper house while the latter is the lower house (Sawe, 2018).



The Senators are elected to serve for 6 years, and they can be re-elected; however, they may not be allowed to run for three terms consecutively (Sawe, 2018). On the other hand, the House of Representatives may choose to give up a “vacant legislative seat leading to a special election” (Sawe, 2018). The person who wins in the latter will eventually “serve for the remainder of the term of the former district representatives which will be considered as a single elective term” (Sawe, 2018).

The executive branch is comprised of the President and the Vice President, and they are “elected by direct popular vote and serve a term of six years” (*Philippine Government*, n.d.). Edleman (n.d.) notes that Philippine presidents cannot take office after their term has terminated. In addition, the executive branch is led by President and is also the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Sawe, 2018). In case of the President’s resignation, impeachment, or death, the Vice President would automatically take his/her place.

Lastly, the judicial branch is an independent branch headed by the Philippine Supreme Court (Edleman, n.d.). The judiciary has the power to “settle controversies involving rights that are legally demandable and enforceable” (*Philippine Government*, n.d.). According to Edleman (n.d.), the Supreme Court is made up of 15 justices; this includes “a Chief Justice who is head of the branch and 14 other Associate Justices who occupy the highest seats of the judicature” (Sawe, 2018). The Supreme Court justices are assigned by the President from a candidate list issued by the Judicial and Bar Council; the latter is fabricated by the 1987 Constitution to guarantee the selection of competent staff for judicial positions (Edleman, n.d.). Below the Supreme Court is the Court of Appeals which is composed of “one presiding justice and 68 associate justices” (Edleman, n.d.). Moreover, there Sandiganbayan Court is another court below the Supreme Court (Edleman, n.d.). According to Edleman (n.d.), the Sandiganbayan Court is an “anti-graft and corruption

court”. It is primarily responsible for “holding high government and military personnel accountable” as well as “addressing the culture of corruption in the Philippines” (Edleman, n.d.). Furthermore, there are regional, municipal, and regular courts (i.e. the Municipal Circuit Trial Courts) as well as Muslim Courts (i.e. Sharia District Courts) (Sawe, 2018).

*c. Role of the Catholic Church in the Philippines*

According to Gregorio (2023), there are 85 million Filipinos who identify themselves as Roman Catholic. This represents “78.8% of the over 108 million people who were counted in 2020” (Gregorio, 2023). To comprehend why the Philippines is “the only country in Asia in which Christianity is the national religion” (*Religion*, n.d.), the country’s colonial history can be scrutinized. *Religion* (n.d.) elucidates that the Spanish colonialism of more than 300 years in the Philippines is the most viable explanation as to why “Catholicism has been the cornerstone of Filipino identity for millions...” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). As a matter of fact, due to the substantial role of the Catholic Church in terms of Filipino identity, it is considered “at the heart of nationalism, social justice, and other movements” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). However, the Catholic Church has also been “associated with power, elitism, and exploitation at various points in history” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.).

Miller (n.d.) describes how “Spain introduced Christianity to the Philippines in 1565 with the arrival of Miguel Lopez de Legaspi.” In the early 1350s, Islam had been dispersing from Indonesia to the Philippines (Miller, n.d.). As the Spaniards arrived in the Philippines, Islam established its prominence in Mindanao, Sulu, Cebu, and Luzon (Miller, n.d.). Yet, Miller (n.d.) explains that Legaspi rapidly began the process of Christianization as Spain had a historical tradition of “expelling the Jews and Moros from Spain” (Miller, n.d.). It is essential to note that,

the supremacy over the pre-existing significance of Islam was not completely attained since there had been huge resistance by the Muslim population (Miller, n.d.).

According to *Catholicism in the Philippines* (n.d.), Catholicism and Spain were two inextricable factors that played a fundamental role in the Philippine administration. Consequently, they contributed to the discrimination and exploitation of Filipinos. For instance, the Spanish government granted religious orders such as the Augustinians, Dominicans, and Recollects the largest lands and estates (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). They would eventually rent “plots to tenant farmers” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). Moreover, these religious orders were “responsible for the religious education and spiritual well-being of their tenants” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). Unfortunately, some friars supported the exploitation of their parishes; thus, the Catholic Churches and their friars were “the wealthiest and most politically powerful elements within Filipino society” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). The friars were representatives of the authoritative power of the Spanish state and the foreign Catholic Church. On the other hand, local priests would seek the interests and demands “for greater authority in Filipino parishes” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). As a result of necessary resistance against the hegemonic rule of the Spanish government, a nationalist Filipino priesthood was fabricated (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). Eventually, the Philippines gained complete independence from its colonies (Spaniards and Americans) on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1946 (*Philippines – The World Factbook*, 2023).

On September 23, 1972, Ferdinand Marcos Sr. declared Martial Law in the Philippines (*Declaration of Martial Law*, n.d.). A large part of the Filipino population genuinely believed that “Marcos improved Filipinos’ lives (*Life under Marcos: A fact-check*, 2014). The Marcos era was even labeled as the “Golden Age” due to the country’s flourishing development (*Martial Law in Data*, n.d.). Nevertheless, the Philippines suffered from a “dark period of deep corruption,

violence, chaos, and repression” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.) under the tyrannical rule of Marcos. During this epoch, the Catholic Church played various roles (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). For example, some priests were “largely apolitical” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.), and they were afraid of the consequences of opposing the dictator. Furthermore, Marcos even exploited his relationship with the Catholic Church as he used the latter to cater to his political goals. He indoctrinated the majority of the Filipino population by letting them believe that he “had a divine mandate to lead the Philippines” (*Ferdinand Marcos*, n.d.) and that he “received visions directly from God” (*Ferdinand Marcos*, n.d.). Therefore, it was “necessary” for citizens to rally for popular support. But, some other priests and nuns would actively oppose Marcos as some would protested with arms against the state (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). The Catholic Church in the Philippines is heavily influenced by the Vatican; hence, it was “closely [working] with impoverished Filipinos on basic issues of social justice” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). One prominent church figure was Cardinal Jaime Sin; he demanded the termination of Martial Law and the “full restoration of civil liberties” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). In addition to that, Cardinal Sin led the Church in prioritizing the “mission of social justice through nonviolent action and the complete liberation of Filipinos from all forms of socially-mediated repression” (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). Most importantly, the Catholic Church contributed to the organization of the EDSA Revolution between February 22 and February 25 (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). Indeed, the Catholic Church played a pivotal role in terms of social transformation.

Furthermore, the Catholic Church has also influenced the views and opinions of many Filipinos in terms of social issues. For instance, Lipka (2015) explains how “many Filipinos have conservative views on social issues”, and they are mostly in parallel with Catholic Church

teachings. According to 67% of the Filipino population, “getting a divorce is morally unacceptable” (Lipka, 2015). Also, 93% of Filipinos believe that abortion is immoral (Lipka, 2015). Abortion is illegal in the Philippines, and according to Philippine law, women who undergo abortions can face prison time between two to six years (Chen, 2022). Unfortunately, there are still certain social issues that receive continuous stigma in the country, mainly due to Catholicism.

#### *d. Importance of Family in Philippine Society*

According to Scroope (2017), “family is considered to be the foundation of social life for most Filipinos”. The core family unit is the nuclear family, but the bond among extended family members is often tight-knit (Scroope, 2017). Furthermore, a close family does not merely encompass “genetic connections or bloodlines” (Scroope, 2017), but rather close neighbors, non-relatives, or friends can also be considered family. For example, a child can call his/her mother’s friend *tita* (aunt) or *tito* (uncle). Scroope (2017) adds that “filial piety” is another vital notion in Filipino culture. Many Filipinos believe that each family member has his/her own set of duties and responsibilities essential for maintaining respect and harmony between them (Scroope, 2017). For instance, younger members of the family are considered secondary to their elders, and they must always show respect to the latter (Scroope, 2017). In terms of gender roles in Filipino families, Scroope (2017) defines Filipino society as patriarchal “due to machismo attitudes and the masculine standards of many Filipino men” (Scroope, 2017). However, there are other instances where women play a significant role in the Philippines (i.e. women’s significant participation in the political and economic arenas) (Scroope, 2017).

Family is pivotal in Philippine culture and society mainly because family is also part of a Filipino’s national identity. However, as family and Catholicism play a fundamental part in Philippine society, certain social issues remain taboo in the country. For example, Curato (2020)

mentions the countless debates when it comes to reproductive health and how “women are not natural allies when it comes to progressive women’s issues” (Curato, 2020). A lot of women want to preserve “conservative” and even “oppressive” views to respect family values (Curato, 2020). Moreover, Tanyag (2020) adds how the Philippines had two female presidents, and they both managed to block significant developments in sexual and reproductive health; it is important to note that these two presidents, Cory Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, are women with “very strong Catholic identities” (Tanyag, 2020). In terms of the association between family and Catholicism, Filipina women are expected to be like Virgin Mary. They are expected to resemble a “woman who is good at caring, who is good at being selfless, martyring herself to, [leave] her family to care for her” (Tanyag, 2020), but in reality there are gaps.

In regards to family in politics, political dynasties are pertinent in Philippine society. A political dynasty is defined as “an elected official [...] [who] has relatives in elected office” (Borres, 2021). Borres (2021) distinguishes two types of political dynasties, and they are “thin dynasty” and “thick dynasty”. The former is “when relatives succeed each other back-to-back”; whereas, the latter is “when several family members hold political office at the same time” (Borres, 2021). Referring to Article 2 Section 26 of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines, “the State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law” (Borres, 2021). Yet, Borres (2021) declares that the Philippines has been dominated by families of politicians for centuries. They get to “control their respective home regions and a majority of national positions” (Borres, 2021). A 2015 study shows that “75% of legislators in the Philippine Congress were found to be from political dynasties” (Borres, 2021). Unfortunately, the notion of a political dynasty is a “well-practiced illegal act in the Philippines” (Borres, 2021).

## 2. The Illiberal Turn of the Philippines

### a. *The Transition of the Philippines from Authoritarianism to Democracy*

Historically, the Philippines experienced several communist movements. The latter greatly believed that the nation was not progressing because the State was heavily influenced by “bureaucrat capitalism, feudalism, and U.S. imperialism” (*Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army*, 2015). Hence, Jose Maria Sison, head of the Communist Party of the Philippines – New People’s Army, aspired to thoroughly modify the Philippine government and replace the latter with people who come from the working class (*Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army*, 2015). It is important to note that there existed increasing tension between the group and former President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. (*New People’s Army*, 2023).

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1971, two grenades were thrown at a Liberal Party rally in Plaza Miranda, Manila leaving nine people dead and several others injured (*Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army*, 2015). Through the years, the instigator of the Plaza Miranda bombing remains unknown. Yet, there are two major theories: the first one implies that the CPP-NPA was responsible for the bombing, and the second one entails that Marcos was the one liable (*Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army*, 2015). Theorists hypothesized that Marcos insinuated the attack to allow him to hold control over the country (*Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army*, 2015). Eventually, Marcos grabbed the opportunity and suppressed the “leftist political activity and suspended habeas corpus” (*Communist Party of the Philippines – New People's Army*, 2015).

Taking into account the fear of having a communist takeover, Marcos officially signed Proclamation No. 1081, s. 1972, and it denotes that “the entire Philippines as defined in Article I, Section 1 of the Constitution [is] under martial law” (*Proclamation no. 1081, S. 1972*, 1972).

*Report of an Amnesty International Mission to the Republic of the Philippines 22 November - 5 December 1975 (1976)* states that Marcos ordered the armed forces “to maintain law and order throughout the Philippines, prevent or suppress all forms of lawless violence as well as any act of insurrection or rebellion and enforce obedience to all laws and decrees, orders and regulations promulgated by [the President] personally or upon [the President's] direction”. Marcos demanded that all individuals “presently detained, as well as all others who may hereafter be similarly detained for the crimes of insurrection or rebellion” (*Report of an Amnesty International Mission to the Republic of the Philippines 22 November - 5 December 1975, 1976*). Also, all related offences “shall be kept under detention until otherwise ordered release by [the President]” (*Report of an Amnesty International Mission to the Republic of the Philippines 22 November - 5 December 1975, 1976*) or by the President's duly designated representative.

According to Dela Peña (2021), Marcos’ martial law is a “golden age for corruption [and] abuses”. Marcos’ epoch is “the darkest time in Philippine history” (Dela Peña, 2021). He was elected in 1965, and his term ended in 1986; hence, he governed the Philippines for 21 years. Marcos’ loyalists believed that he was able to grow the Philippines’ economy. It is true for the early years of his governance, specifically in 1973 and 1976 “when GDP hit 8.92 percent and 8.81 percent” (Dela Peña, 2021). However, in the later years, the State experienced its worst recessions ever, particularly in 1984 and 1985 with a GDP of “negative 7.32 percent and negative 7.04 percent” (Dela Peña, 2021).

In addition to that, anyone who expresses dissent against the former leader is considered a “threat” to the nation. According to *Philippines* (n.d.), there was a law that was passed in 1990 which allowed “suspicious” people to be arrested without a warrant. They would be put in “solitary confinement” and even “tortured” for weeks (*Philippines*, n.d.). The question would be, “Why



would innocent people be tortured?"; they were tortured for fighting against tyranny. Dela Peña (2021) stated that Amnesty International counted "there were 107, 200 victims, mostly killed, tortured, and imprisoned" by the deadly regime. The Human Rights Violations Victims' Memorial Commission (HRVVMC) showed that there were "238 cases of rape and forcible abduction", "217 cases of sexual abuse involving children and minors", "1,467 cases of psychological, mental, and emotional harm other than insanity, acts of lasciviousness", and "182 cases of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment" (Dela Peña, 2021). Under Marcos' regime, enforcers of martial law developed various torture techniques to silence critics and even innocent people (Dela Peña, 2021). They range from political opponents, journalists, and student activists to religious groups and even farmers (Dela Peña, 2021). Dela Peña (2021) describes these inhumane torture strategies, and they include the following: "electric shock, San Juanico Bridge, truth serum, Russian Roulette, beating, pistol-whipping, water cure, strangulation, cigar and flat iron burns, pepper torture, and animal treatment". "Electric shock" is characterized by the attachment of electric wires to the fingers and genitalia or arms and head of the victim (Dela Peña, 2021). "San Juanico Bridge" involves placing the body between two beds; if he/she falls from the latter, then he/she will be beaten (Dela Peña, 2021). "Truth serum" forces the victim to "talk drunkenly" by injecting a certain substance; this was conducted at the V. Luna General Hospital (Dela Peña, 2021). "Russian Roulette" involves forcing the victim to aim a loaded gun at his/her head and then pull the trigger (Dela Peña, 2021). "Beating" is when a group of military men would savagely beat the shackled victim (Dela Peña, 2021). "Pistol-whipping" is when the victim is beaten with the bottom of a rifle (Dela Peña, 2021). "Water cure" involves forcing water into the victim's mouth and then forcing him/her to throw up (Dela Peña, 2021). "Strangulation" involves constraining the neck by hand, electric wire, or steel

bar (Dela Peña, 2021). Other torturing methods include burning the victim's skin with cigars, flat irons, and even pepper (Dela Peña, 2021).

One of the prominent Martial Law victims was Liliosa Hilao. She was a 23-year-old female, communication arts student, and social activist from the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (PLM). She entered university “when student activism was at its height” (Francisco, 2017); however, instead of joining protests, she used to express her opposition against the Marcos dictatorship through her writings. Some of her famous critical creations were entitled “The Vietnamization of the Philippines” and “Democracy is Dead in the Philippines under Martial Law”. Hilao was about to graduate cum laude in 1973, but in April, “drunken soldiers from the Constabulary Anti-Narcotics Unit” (Francisco, 2017) beat her at her house, and they took her away to Camp Crame, which was a detention center. Hilao was found dead the next day. Official reports claim that she died due to suicide as she drank muriatic acid; however, autopsy results indicate otherwise. According to Francisco (2017), “there were cigarette burns on her lips, bruises on her body, [and] injection marks on her arms”. Hilao’s sister stated that Liliosa may be also sexually abused since her internal organs were extracted to cover up the malicious crime.

After 14 years of oppressive dictatorship by former President Ferdinand Marcos Sr., Filipinos came together to overthrow a totalitarian system in the People Power Revolution. On February 15, 1986, millions of individuals gathered to eradicate Marcos’ leadership and to bring about “a new era marked by true freedom and democracy” (*30th Anniversary of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution: GOVPH*, n.d.). With Proclamation No. 1071, s. 2015, the People Power Revolution, reestablished the democratic institutions and motivated the advent of political, social, and economic reforms in the Philippines. Corazon Aquino took the place of Marcos, and she worked towards establishing a democratic Philippines. On the other hand, the Marcos clan fled to

Hawaii carrying “baggage valued at \$7.7 million” (Drogin, 1986). Drogin (1986) states that they had “400 items of costly jewelry”, “more than 60 sets of pearl necklaces and chokers”, “a \$290,000 Burmese ruby”, and a \$44,410 diamond-studded ornamental hair comb”. In total, they all were valued at \$4 million. The Marcos family had so many luxurious items that their wealth was questioned by the U.S. Customs Service in Washington (Drogin, 1986). Simply put, Marcos stole \$10 billion from the Philippines, which inevitably drained the Philippine economy during his presidency (Drogin, 1986).

*b. The Rise of Democratic Movements*

According to Garrido (2021), “the first movement for democracy inaugurated the democratic period”. The first movement is particularly about the “installation of Corazon Aquino as president” (Garrido, 2021). Corazon Aquino was the first female president of the Philippines, and she served from 1986 to 1992 (*Corazon Aquino*, 2023). She took the place of Marcos, who was ousted during the EDSA Revolution, and her primary goal was to restore the Philippines’ democratic rule (*Corazon Aquino*, 2023). In fact, Aquino “became symbolic of the Filipino people’s desire for change following nearly two decades of authoritarian rule (*Corazon “Cory” Aquino*, n.d.). Aquino successfully halted many of the policies instigated by Marcos such as “returning an independent court system, repealing repressive labor laws, releasing political prisoners, and the creation of a commission to investigate human rights abuses under Marcos” (*Corazon “Cory” Aquino*, n.d.). Also, Aquino’s government worked towards attaining “peace agreements with militant communist groups as well as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), inviting the latter’s leader to return from exile” (*Corazon “Cory” Aquino*, n.d.). In addition, Aquino prioritized the integration of gender equality in the 1987 Constitution as well as the enactment of necessary laws such as “RA 6725: An Act Strengthening the Prohibition of

Discrimination Against Women with Respect to Terms and Conditions of Employment” and “Executive Order 348: Approval and Adoption of Philippine Development Plan for Women” (*Maria Corazon Cojuangco Aquino*, 2022).

Despite Aquino’s triumphant actions in restoring the nation’s democracy, Garrido (2021) explains that “the country found itself in the grip of political turbulence, economic recession, and general disorder”. For example, crime was widespread in Metro Manila, “particularly the kidnapping of Chinese Filipinos for ransom” (Garrido, 2021). There would also be problems including “power outages that struck periodically, uncollected garbage rotted in the streets, and traffic jams routinely paralyzed the metro” (Garrido, 2021). Considering the numerous predicaments that she had to take care of, “Aquino governed conservatively” (Garrido, 2021). Aquino received “strong support and guidance from the Catholic Church, including political guidance during the elections” (*Corazon “Cory” Aquino*, n.d.). Garrido (2021) adds that “she leaned on the military for support, took care not to alienate powerful landed interests, and chose to honor rather than repudiate the enormous international debt (\$28.5 billion) Marcos had incurred” (*Corazon “Cory” Aquino*, n.d.).

Eventually, when Aquino’s administration came to an end, there were many mixed sentiments about her presidency. Some thought that she was a heroine for replacing the dictator Marcos. But, critics pointed out “that she restored to authority families and power structures that had been displaced by Marcos—namely, the post-colonial Filipino oligarchy—without actually empowering wider Filipino society” (*Corazon “Cory” Aquino*, n.d.).

Garrido (2021) extrapolates further about the second movement of democracy, and it involves the ouster “of the populist president Joseph Estrada”. According to Garrido (2021), Estrada garnered great support particularly from the lower class since he was a “former movie star

and city mayor”. Estrada’s administration was a disaster ever since the start of his office. For instance, “he ran on the promise of alleviating poverty”, “his cronyism was flagrant”, “he distributed luxury vehicles seized by the Bureau of Customs to Cabinet members and political allies”, “[he] used government pension funds to support a crony’s corporate takeover, and “[he] helped another crony manipulate the stock market” (Garrido, 2021). Indeed, the middle class was terrified with “Estrada’s vulgar persona and haphazard style of governance” (Garrido, 2021). Moreover, Estrada was seen as an “an embarrassment to the office of the president” (Garrido, 2021) considering his “late night drinking”, “gambling sessions with cronies”, and “the mansions he had acquired for his several mistresses” (Garrido, 2021). Eventually, Garrido (2021) explains that accusations of Estrada “receiving kickbacks from an illegal lottery” was the last straw for the masses. The charges led to his impeachment, but the trial was disrupted by his allies in Congress. Therefore, massive protests, called Second EDSA Revolution, took place, and it led to the ouster of Estrada (Garrido, 2021). Then-Vice President Gloria Macapagal then replaced Estrada. But, she also had her own set of political scandals (Garrido, 2021).

The third, and last, movement for democracy involves the popular demand for Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino to run for president (Garrido, 2021). Noynoy Aquino is the son of Cory Aquino, and she was known for being “good-hearted” and “clean” (Garrido, 2021). When the 2010 presidential elections took place, polls showed huge support for her son. Garrido (2021) describes Noynoy as the “antidote to Arroyo’s toxic legacy”, and “he emerged [as] the most credible anti-Arroyo candidate” (Garrido, 2021). When he eventually won the elections, he prioritized a reform agenda aimed at combatting corruption (Garrido, 2021). Firstly, he prosecuted Arroyo and her associates. Secondly, he worked on improving tax collection and passing the Reproductive Health Law (universal access to contraception) (Garrido, 2021). Nevertheless, Noynoy’s administration

was not an exception to scandals. For example, in 2013, there were 10 billion Philippine pesos or 200 US Dollars “in discretionary or pork barrel funds [which] had been diverted to shell companies and into the pockets of members of Congress and government officials” (Garrido, 2021). In addition, Noynoy’s administration was criticized for the lack of responsibility in terms of handling relief operations during the destructive Typhoon Haiyan (Garrido, 2021).

*c. The Philippines’ Illiberal Turn under the Duterte Administration*

Certainly, the State has experienced consecutive democratic movements from former president Corazon Aquino until Noynoy Aquino (Garrido, 2021). However, “Filipinos have been frustrated with liberal democracy for a long time” (Garrido, 2021) because the liberal order’s so-called “good governance” narrative had been destabilized by a pork barrel scandal (Thompson, 2017). Those who played a key role in supporting such corruption (i.e. Catholic Church) were condemned, and governmental institutions persistently remained weak (i.e. prejudiced criminal justice system) (Thompson, 2017). Yet, with the triumphant takeover of former president Rodrigo Roa Duterte, “the Philippines took an illiberal turn” (Fernandez, 2021).

Rodrigo Roa Duterte was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1945 in Maasin, Southern Leyte, Philippines (*Rodrigo Duterte*, 2023). Duterte’s father was a former governor of the province of Davao, and his mother was a “community activist” (*Rodrigo Duterte*, 2023). Duterte’s mother had a pivotal role in the EDSA Revolution which ousted Marcos from presidency (*Rodrigo Duterte*, 2023). He graduated in Political Science from the Lyceum of the Philippines University in Manila in 1968; he also earned a Law degree from San Beda College in 1972 (*Rodrigo Duterte*, 2023). According to Ranada (2016), Duterte always had a rebellious and problematic nature ever since he was a child. He would always get into fights and get expelled from school (Ranada, 2016). Growing up in a city which was known for its “lawlessness” (*Rodrigo Duterte*, 2023), Duterte

pursued a career in politics as he “joined the Davao City prosecutor’s office, where he remained until he was appointed Vice Mayor of that city” (*Rodrigo Duterte, 2023*). Eventually, “Duterte was elected mayor in 1988, and he was reelected to that post twice over the subsequent decade” (*Rodrigo Duterte, 2023*). He was praised for transforming Davao “into one of the safest areas in Southeast Asia” (*Rodrigo Duterte, 2023*). But, the question is, “How did he renovate such a dangerous city?” According to *Rodrigo Duterte (2023)*, he had “harsh crime-fighting tactics” which led to “more than 1000 extrajudicial killings”; this was highly condemned by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. He maintained his “image of a coarse pistol-toting vigilante in the months leading up to the presidential election” (*Rodrigo Duterte, 2023*).

Duterte, a “strong leader” (Garrido, 2021) together with his aggressive campaign, was “able to play to the impatience of [the] populace and convince them to replace the liberal order” (Fernandez, 2021). Generally speaking, Fernandez (2021) believes that “Duterte exploited a ‘form of grievance politics’ that played on the failure of his predecessor [...] to deliver on his promises and the expectations he created”. Hence, as Duterte took office, “he capitalized on the resentment of the electorate on, among others, the stalled attempts in combatting corruption, inefficient institutions, and concerns on crimes and illegal narcotics” (Fernandez, 2021). It is also interesting to note that Duterte’s central focus of his administration was his “War on Drugs” where “police and vigilante forces slaughter suspected drug dealers and users in the streets – killing between 6,000 and 30,000 people” (Beauchamp, 2022). Overall, despite Duterte’s strongman political style, he has “the highest approval ratings” of any president in modern Philippine history” (Beauchamp, 2022).

*d. Continuation of Illiberal Democracy Under Marcos Jr.*

As Duterte's presidency came to an end, it is another opportunity for Filipinos to choose who would govern them for the next 6 years. According to Beauchamp (2022), Filipinos are not particularly rejecting democracy rather they are rejecting liberalism. Beauchamp (2022) also supports Dean Dulay, a political scientist at Singapore Management University who studies democracy in the Philippines. Dulay describes Duterte as the "first president who represented an alternative vision for the direction of the country [and that] Marcos is a continuation of that vision..."

Ferdinand "Bongbong" R. Marcos, Jr., also known as BBM, was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September 1957 in Manila Philippines; he is the son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr. BBM "served as a senator of the Philippines, governor of Ilocos Norte, and 2<sup>nd</sup> District representative of Ilocos Norte" (*Profile: Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.: Candidate for president - 2022 elections*, n.d.). In the 2016 elections, BBM ran and lost for vice president. It is also worth noting that "his older sister, Imee Marcos, is a senator, serving since 2019" (*Profile: Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.: Candidate for president - 2022 elections*, n.d.). Moreover, "Imee's son, Matthew Manotoc, is the Ilocos Norte governor, serving since 2019" (*Profile: Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.: Candidate for president - 2022 elections*, n.d.). Hence, this reminds us of the notion of political dynasty which was elaborated by Borres (2021).

In the 2022 presidential elections, BBM ran for president, but he does not have the same strongman style as Duterte. He has a "strong support base in the country's north due to his family's patronage network" (Beauchamp, 2022). Although BBM's father was known for his tyrannical and corrupt ruling, BBM's presidential campaign created a "vision of the ancient regime as a golden era" where it was "a time of domestic peace, low crime, and shared prosperity" (Beauchamp, 2022). In other words, BBM installed nostalgia politics where he wanted the Filipino



people to vote for a president who would “make the Philippines great again” (Beauchamp, 2022). Furthermore, Beauchamp (2022) mentioned how Dulay analyzed social media (i.e. TikTok and YouTube) as a vital tool in spreading fake news about the Marcos family. The videos that were flooding social media were not specifically informative, rather they were emotionally provocative to let everyone remember “how the country used to be” and “how the country looks right now” (Beauchamp, 2022).

### **3. Does the Philippines Fall Under the Category of Illiberal Democracy?**

#### *a. What is Illiberal Democracy?*

Illiberal democracy is a complex and evolving notion, and its meaning can vary across various countries and contexts. Illiberal democracy refers to a governing system where the basic elements and institutions of democracy exist; however, limitations on individual rights, civil liberties, and the rule of law, are evident. Citizens of an illiberal democratic State are most likely indoctrinated to believe that they are governed democratically. Yet, in reality, there is a corrosion of democratic values and norms as power is exploited and concentrated in the hands of a dominant leader or ruling party. Eventually, democratic principles such as separation of powers, accountability, and transparency decline in an illiberal democratic nation.

#### *b. The Philippines: An Illiberal Democratic State*

In an illiberal democratic State, issues such as media censorship, intimidation of critical voices, weakening of judicial independence, manipulation of electoral processes, and weakening of minority rights are all pertinent. Based on the investigation of different scholarly studies, it can be derived that the Philippines can be classified as an illiberal democracy.

The Philippines is an illiberal democracy, especially after the reign of former President Rodrigo Duterte. According to Bello (2017), the Filipino population mostly favored the “turn to illiberalism” primarily because they feared “the liberal democratic state [which] could no longer protect their lives [...] from criminals and the police”. Moreover, Bello (2017) adds that such fear may have originated from the idea that “due process, far from ensuring justice, had turned into a system of protection for the wayward, the corrupt, and the powerful”. By scrutinizing Duterte’s rise to presidency and his performance in the first six months in office, he proved his competency and will to significantly improve the Philippines. Bello (2017) supports this idea by stating how Duterte “relies more on instinct than on careful calculation but with perhaps more effective results”. But, with his strong will to achieve his political agenda for the nation, Duterte “resorted to measures that violate basic human and civil rights (Bello, 2017), which would ultimately contradict the values and goals of liberal democracy. According to Bello (2017), “Duterte is not only the local expression of the ongoing global counter-revolution against liberal democracy but a pioneer of this movement.” Duterte has shown his capabilities “for improvisation in a project in which the only thing that is really clear is the end goal” (Bello, 2017); that is the attainment of absolute power. Simply put, Duterte’s administration illustrated one of the characteristics of illiberal democracy, and that is power centralization. The concentration of power involves the weakening of checks and balances, the diminishment of separation of powers, and the power imbalance of other governmental branches in terms of executing effective checks on the executive branch.

Regarding media freedom, which is another characteristic of illiberal democracy, Duterte approached it with hostility (Bello, 2017). Duterte believes that “most media people who had been assassinated deserved their fate because they were corrupt” (Bello, 2017). Andolong (2016) adds

that Duterte claimed that “they are vultures pretending to be journalists”. In fact, the Philippines is “one of the world’s deadliest countries for journalists” (*Philippines*, 2023). Numerous cases occurred during Duterte’s supremacy. For instance, the ABS-CBN Network lost its franchise, and *Rappler*’s CEO Maria Ressa was also challenged by the former president via legal threats. Such actions can constrain the ability of the media to act as a watchdog, inhibit the free flow of information, and hamper citizens' access to diverse points of view.

Lastly, human rights abuses are another element of illiberal democracy. Duterte has faced condemnation for his approach to human rights, particularly about the war on drugs. According to *Philippines' 'War on Drugs'* (2017), Duterte’s war on drugs “led to the deaths of over 12,000 Filipinos [...] mostly urban poor”. It is worth noting that “even before he formally assumed presidency, extrajudicial killings of drug users and pushers began” (Bello, 2017). Duterte promised to “respect the law in his formal speech at Malacañang Palace” (Bello, 2017). Nevertheless, during his victory speech at the Del Pan Sports Complex, “he urged the low-income audience [...] to go kill addicts themselves because ‘it would be too cruel to have their own parents kill them’” (Bello, 2017).

## **Chapter 2: Human Rights in the Philippines**

According to *What are human rights?* (n.d.), human rights “are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings – they are not granted by any state.” They are universal principles that safeguard the dignity, equality, and freedom of all individuals regardless of their background (i.e. “nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status”). Human rights embrace different aspects such as civil rights, political rights, economic rights, social rights, and cultural rights (*What are human rights?*, n.d.). These rights were all historically formalized and officiated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in

1948 (*What are human rights?*, n.d.). Generally speaking, the UDHR “provides the principles and building blocks of current and future human rights conventions, treaties, and other legal instruments” (*What are human rights?*, n.d.) to guarantee a just and humane society.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the Philippines is committed to promoting and protecting human rights by referring back to the 1987 Constitution, the creation of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for human rights, and the State’s engagement with the international community. Additionally, I will explain how there are contradictions to the State’s commitment to human rights by providing data related to the Philippines’ low rankings in human rights indices as well as the prevalence of human rights violations particularly extrajudicial killings and impunity, repression of dissent, and constraints on freedom of expression.

## **1. The Philippines’ Commitment to Human Rights**

### *a. Human Rights in the 1987 Constitution*

*Constitution of the Philippines* (2022) mentions that the 1987 Constitution is divided into 18 articles. Two particular articles are directly related to human rights, and they are Article III and Article XIII. The former concerns the Bill of Rights; whereas, the latter relates to Social Justice and Human Rights. Smith (1945) explains that the Bill of Rights “establishes the relationship of the individual to the State and defines the rights of the individual by limiting the lawful powers of the State”; it is also “one of the most important political achievements of the Filipinos” (Smith, 1945). According to *The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines – Article III: GOVPH* (n.d.), the Bill of Rights is made up of 22 sections and every section promotes the protection of human rights in various aspects such as the right to “privacy of communication” (Section 2), “freedom of speech and expression” (Section 4), “right [...] to information” (Section 7), and so

on. As for Article XIII, Section 1, “the Congress shall give highest priority to the enactment of measures that protect and enhance the right of all the people to human dignity, reduce social, economic, and political inequalities, and remove cultural inequities by equitably diffusing wealth and political power for the common good” (*The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines – Article XIII: GOVPH*, n.d.). In addition, Article XIII discusses other rights related to “labor”, “agrarian and natural resources reform”, “urban land reform and housing”, “health”, “women”, “role and rights of people’s organizations”, and “human rights” (*The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines – Article XIII: GOVPH*, n.d.).

*b. Commission on Human Rights (CHR)*

Narrowing the scope to Section 17(1) of Article XIII in the 1987 Constitution, “there is hereby created an independent office called the Commission on Human Rights” (*The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines – Article XIII: GOVPH*, n.d.). According to *CHR | About Us* (n.d.), the CHR is an “independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) created under the 1987 Philippine Constitution”, and it was fabricated on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1987 under Executive Order No. 163. The CHR is delegated to perform investigations on human rights abuses against marginalized and vulnerable communities (i.e. civil and political rights) (*CHR | About Us*, n.d.). It is worth noting that the CHR enshrines six fundamental elements: “independence, pluralism, broad mandate, transparency, accessibility, and operational efficiency” (*CHR | About Us*, n.d.). Historically speaking, the CHR was primarily established to fight back against the atrocities during Martial Law. According to Section 11, Article II, of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the latter “gave CHR the mandate to protect and promote the rights and dignity of every human being in the country. The State values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights” (*CHR | About Us*, n.d.).

According to *The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines – Article III: GOVPH* (n.d.), the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) has the following powers and functions: “Investigate, on its own or on complaint by any party, all forms of human rights violations involving civil and political rights”; “adopt its operational guidelines and rules of procedure, and cite for contempt for violations thereof in accordance with the Rules of Court”; and “provide appropriate legal measures for the protection of human rights of all persons within the Philippines, as well as Filipinos residing abroad, and provide for preventive measures and legal aid services to the underprivileged whose human rights have been violated or need protection”. *The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines – Article III: GOVPH* (n.d.) also adds that the CHR has the responsibility to “exercise visitorial powers over jails, prisons, or detention facilities”; “establish a continuing program of research, education, and information to enhance respect for the primacy of human rights”; “recommend to Congress effective measures to promote human rights and to provide for compensation to victims of violations of human rights, or their families”; and “monitor the Philippine Government’s compliance with international treaty obligations on human rights”. Lastly, the CHR can “grant immunity from prosecution to any person whose testimony or whose possession of documents or other evidence is necessary or convenient to determine the truth in any investigation conducted by it or under its authority”; “request the assistance of any department, bureau, office, or agency in the performance of its functions”; “appoint its officers and employees in accordance with law”; and “perform such other duties and functions as may be provided by law” (*The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines – Article III: GOVPH*; n.d.).

*c. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Advocating for Human Rights in the Philippines*

Despite the prioritization of human rights in the 1987 Philippine Constitution and the presence of the Commission on Human Rights, the State remains stagnant in genuinely protecting human rights. According to *Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The State of the World's Human Rights (2023)*, the Philippines suffers from a significant number of human rights violations including “unlawful killings”, “repression of dissent and freedom of expression”, as well as “arbitrary arrest and detention”. Hence, various NGOs fight for the amelioration of the human rights situation in the Philippines. Some of these NGOs consist of the following: Amnesty International Philippines, Women’s Legal & Human Rights Bureau, and Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines.

Amnesty International is an international movement that advocates “for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all” (*Who We Are, 2023*). It is a movement joined by more than 10 million individuals “who take injustice personally” (*Who We Are, 2023*). People of Amnesty International are “independent of any political ideology, economic interest, or religion” (*Who We Are, 2023*). According to *By Laws of Amnesty International Philippines (2023)*, Amnesty International “forms a global community of human rights defenders with the principles of international solidarity, effective action for the individual victim, global coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and mutual respect” (*By Laws of Amnesty International Philippines, 2023*). Thus, Amnesty International performs thorough research and action intending to inhibit and terminate human rights violations.

Amnesty International Philippines has significantly contributed to the improvement of the human rights situation in the Philippines. It has pushed “the adoption of human rights-based policies and programs in the public and private sphere, supported grassroots and national movements in successfully demanding for their rights, helped capacitate individuals and

communities in pushing forward their agenda, and provided platforms for advocacy for those considered voiceless” (*Frequently Asked Questions*, 2023). Some of the most transformative human rights laws which are currently implemented due to Amnesty International Philippines are the following (*Frequently Asked Questions*, 2023): “Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act (2004), “Repeal of the Death Penalty Law (2006)”, “Juvenile Justice Act (2006), Magna Carta on Women (2009)”, “Anti-Torture Act (2009)”, “Respect for IHL Act (2010)”, “Responsible Parenthood Act (Reproductive Health Law, 2012)”, “Anti-Disappearance Act (2012)”, and “Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act (2013)”.

Women’s Legal & Human Rights Bureau (WLB) is another pivotal local organization established in 1990. WLB is specifically a “feminist legal organization advocating feminist legal advocacy” (*Herstory - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau*, 2022) to promote and defend women’s human rights. WLB has proudly contributed to the betterment of the “Philippine jurisprudence and legal landscape by handling cases with the use of the Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS) as a basis for self-defense” (*Herstory - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau*, 2022). The organization has also triumphantly drafted some of the bills that are currently present in Philippine laws; such bills “strengthen protections for women against violence and discrimination” (*Herstory - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau*, 2022). Notably, WLB “led the historical gathering of around one hundred women’s rights organizations and advocates in submitting the Philippine Shadow Report under the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)” (*Herstory - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau*, 2022). WLB has various projects such as “Engendering the Barangay Justice System”, “Human Rights and Policy Advocacy”, and “Understanding Women’s Access to Justice”. It is



essential to note that a *barangay* refers to “the smallest political unit in the country” (*Barangay*, n.d.).

According to *Engendering the Barangay Justice System - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau* (2022), Filipina women suffer from discrimination in *barangays* since “officials lack gender sensitivity and awareness”, they also “discourage women from reporting or engaging in the legal process”, and they have a mindset “that violence against women (VAW) is a ‘private’ issue to be resolved by the parties involved or their families”. Unfortunately, there are worse cases where domestic violence is involved. For instance, “*barangay* officials often mediate to reconcile the woman with her abuser despite RA9262 which prohibits such acts” (*Engendering the Barangay Justice System - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau*, 2022). Considering the maltreatment of women by *barangay* officials, WLB fabricated a program called the Engendering the Barangay Justice System (EBJS). According to *Engendering the Barangay Justice System - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau* (2022), the latter “aims to make justice more accessible to poor and marginalized women”. Such goal is attained by “advocating for local laws and policies promoting women’s rights and influencing local legislative processes”, “developing and supporting capacities of community women’s and their organizations for leadership and in engaging in feminist legal advocacy”, and “building the body of knowledge and developing tools and resources for community-based women’s organizations and local partners”.

As for the Human Rights and Policy Advocacy (HR and Pol-Ad) program, it “adopts a range of strategies in rights-claiming and demanding state obligation and accountability in various platforms at the community, national, regional, and international levels” (*Human Rights and Policy Advocacy*, n.d.). The main objective of this program is “to achieve the goal of increasing women’s access to justice and demanding accountability from the State for violations of women’s human

rights” (*Human Rights and Policy Advocacy*, n.d.). The HR and Pol-Ad program primarily targets human rights mechanisms both on the international and regional levels such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) respectively. Simply put, according to *Human Rights and Policy Advocacy* (n.d.), HR and Pol-Ad has a number of strategies such as “critically engaging the government and its institutions to ensure government’s fulfillment of its obligation to act with due diligence in eliminating gender inequality in all its structures, policies and practices”; “strengthening women’s movements in engaging the State in different platforms including in the legal system, to promote widely accepted women’s rights norms and standards”; “creating spaces towards increasing and institutionalizing women’s meaningful and substantive participation in the national, regional, and international platforms of women’s advocacy”; “develop effective reporting and feedback mechanisms to demand for accountability of the government to women’s rights in all its engagements and undertaking”; and “social movement building, which includes efforts to frame public discussion and agenda, enrich discourse on women’s rights, freedoms and development, and strengthen alliances and women’s contribution in progressive social movements.”

Lastly, in terms of “Understanding Women’s Access to Justice”, females who fall victim to violence still face multiple barriers to justice. Hence, WLB has been working towards fulfilling the elements of access to justice (*Understanding Women's Access to Justice - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau*, 2022). The latter is made up of “adequate remedies”, “addressing impunity”, “legitimacy”, “contextualizing structural imbalances”, etc. (*Understanding Women's Access to Justice - Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau*, 2022).

Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines (CHRP) is another organization founded in 2006. It originally started when then-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo officially visited London

during a time when the “number of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances in the Philippines” was critically increasing (*About Us – CHRP*, 2021). Consequently, they protested against her and decided to picket her hotel (*About Us – CHRP*, 2021). CHRP is functional due to dedicated volunteers who strive towards garnering donations and affiliations. CHRP works with several human rights organizations and NGOs in the Philippines (*About Us – CHRP*, 2021). Generally speaking, CHRP has a set of objectives, and they are the following (*About Us – CHRP*, 2021): “to put pressure on the Philippine government to stop the political killings and protect human rights in the Philippines”; “to raise awareness in the UK about political repression in the Philippines to put pressure on the Philippine government to respect human rights”; “to end British investment and trade links which benefit from human rights violations in the Philippines”; “to make connections between the issues of poverty and political oppression in the Philippines and situation of Filipino migrants in the UK”; and “to support genuine democracy and social justice in the Philippines as long as the term means to end repression and guarantee human rights”.

*d. The Philippines’ Engagement with the International Community*

In pursuit of a “just and humane society founded on human rights and the rule of law” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.), the Philippines has executed fundamental efforts in creating “human rights policies, mechanisms, advocacies and accomplishments, reflecting the Philippine government’s abiding commitment to the ideals of democracy and human rights” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). Moreover, as the Philippines strives towards attaining “a collective vision of ‘a strongly rooted, comfortable and secure life’”, the State continues to work towards fulfilling its human rights commitments and engagements with all related stakeholders and the international community (i.e. human rights mechanisms) (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.).

The Philippines played a vital role in developing UN human rights institutions from 1946 with the establishment of the Human Rights Commission up until the fabrication of the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2006 (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). Furthermore, the State consistently advocated “for greater transparency, fairness, and equity in the governance and processes of the HRC, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, and other human rights mechanisms” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). The Philippines has also been persistent in terms of “maximizing technical cooperation in the field of human rights by de-politicizing it and promoting constructive cooperation between UN human rights mechanisms and duty bearers” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). Therefore, the State supports “OHCHR’s voluntary trust funds for technical cooperation, financial and technical assistance for the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) [as well as] the greater participation of indigenous people in UN meetings” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.).

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR), according to *Universal Periodic Review* (n.d.), is a unique and State-driven process that involves reviewing the human rights records of all UN Member States. With the support of the Human Rights Council, the UPR allows each Member State “to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfill their human rights obligations” (*Universal Periodic Review*, n.d.). According to *Human Rights Philippines* (n.d.), “the Philippines fully supports the Universal Periodic Review as an effective mechanism to monitor and promote human rights compliance on the basis of dialogue and transparency”. Furthermore, the Philippines is “a state party to eight core international human rights instruments and six optional protocols” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.), and it “actively engages with [UN] treaty bodies submitting periodic reports on their implementation” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.); the treaty bodies include the following (*Human*

*Rights Philippines*, n.d.): The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel and Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The Philippines has bilateral and regional partners to facilitate human rights dialogue and cooperation. For instance, the Philippines has agreements with the European Union (EU), the United States (US), the Middle East (ME), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). According to *Human Rights Philippines* (n.d.), the Philippines “has a long-running technical cooperation program with the European Union on justice system reform”. The program led to a “significant contribution in paving the way to innovate and streamline justice reform efforts towards a common goal of a more efficient, effective and accountable formal justice system in the Philippines” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). As for the Philippines-United States relations, the two countries shared a history and commitment to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the Philippines in terms of consolidating the nation’s rule of law (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). In regards to the Middle East, there are over two million Filipino migrant workers in the region; hence, it is pivotal for the Philippines “to pursue close cooperation with bilateral partners in the region to uphold the rights and welfare of migrant workers” (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). It is important to do so since the *kafala system* is a pertinent dilemma, specifically in the Middle East. The partnership led to the creation of bilateral labor agreements such as the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding on Human Trafficking with the United Arab Emirates (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). Lastly, in terms of the ASEAN, the Philippines played a fundamental role in prioritizing human rights in the

ASEAN Charter (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). It motivated the fabrication of an ASEAN human rights body under Article 14, which eventually pushed forth the establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.). According to *Human Rights Philippines* (n.d.), the State consistently promotes advocacies related to children's rights, women's rights, as well as the rights of vulnerable groups. It also supports advocacies on the environment and climate as well as business and human rights (*Human Rights Philippines*, n.d.).

## **2. The Reality of the Human Rights Situation in the Philippines**

### *a. The Philippines' Low Ranking in Human Rights Indices*

According to *Philippines ranked 102 out of 139 countries on rule of law, dropping three positions* (2021), the World Justice Project (WJP) released the Rule of Law Index, which "evaluates rule of law in 139 countries or jurisdictions". The factors involved in this index are the following: "constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, fundamental rights, order and security, regulatory enforcement, civil justice, and criminal justice" (*Philippines ranked 102 out of 139 countries on rule of law, dropping three positions*, 2021). Mateo (2022) explains that the Philippines continues to be "one of the weakest in the region, although it is among the few countries that have reported improvements in the latest Rule of Law Index..." (Mateo, 2022). In 2021, the Philippines ranked 102<sup>nd</sup> out of 139 countries, but it "improved to 97<sup>th</sup> out of 140 countries" in 2022 (Mateo, 2022). In the Rule of Law Index, countries attain a score between 0 and 1; the latter indicates the strongest implementation of the rule of law (Mateo, 2022). The Philippines achieved a 0.47 score in the latest index; it is far from the score of 0.53 which it received in 2015 (Mateo, 2022). According to Mateo (2022), the Philippines' stagnant score is particularly due to the Duterte administration. Executive Director of WJP,

Elizabeth Andersen, declares that “authoritarian trends that predate the pandemic continue to erode the rule of law”; in addition, “checks on executive power are weakening and respect for human rights is falling”.

*Human Freedom Index 2022 (2023)* states that the Human Freedom Index (HFI) measures human freedom in a broad manner where there is an absence of coercive constraint. According to *Freedom Index by Country 2023* (n.d.), “human freedom enables and empowers people to do as they please, free from constraints or punishments, so long as it does not impinge upon the freedom of another.” The HFI uses 83 distinct indicators of personal and economic freedom in the following areas (*Human Freedom Index 2022, 2023*): rule of law; security and safety; movement; religion; association, assembly, and civil society; expression and information; relationships; size of government; legal system and property rights; sound money; freedom to trade internationally; and regulation. The Philippines’ rank “dropped five notches in the Human Freedom Index (HFI), indicating that it has become “less free” compared to the past years” (*Freedom index shows PH has become 'less free' than the past years, 2019*). In addition, HFI showed that the Philippines ranked 76<sup>th</sup> out of 162 countries which are lower than its rankings in 2016 and 2015 with ranks of 71<sup>st</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> respectively (*Freedom index shows PH has become 'less free' than the past years, 2019*).

Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is created by an anti-corruption watchdog called, Transparency International. It “ranks 180 countries and territories around the world by their perceived levels of public sector corruption” (*2021 Corruption Perceptions Index - Explore the Results; n.d.*). CPI has a scale between 0 and 100 where the former refers to “highly corrupt” and the latter as “very clean” (*2021 Corruption Perceptions Index - Explore the Results; n.d.*). In the case of the Philippines, it has a score of 33 out of 100 in 2021 (*2021 Corruption Perceptions Index*

- *Explore the Results*; n.d.). Based on the recent results of CPI, Baclig (2023) declares that “the Philippines saw a slight rise in ranking in an international corruption index, inching up a notch to 116<sup>th</sup> among 180 countries but retained low scores in [the] perception of corruption in government.” Baclig (2023) adds that democratic decline has been pertinent in recent years, especially among some of the most populous countries in the world (i.e. the Philippines). The Philippines has been facing numerous criticism mainly because of its “impunity [as well as red-tagging] against journalists, human rights defenders, and dissidents” (Baclig, 2023).

According to *Killing with impunity: Vast majority of journalists' murderers go free* (2022), the Global Impunity Index is an index prepared by the Committee to Protect Journalists, and it “spotlights countries where members of the press are murdered in retaliation for their reporting and the perpetrators go free.” With regards to the Philippines, it “retained its ranking as the seventh worst country when it comes to prosecuting killers of journalists, according to the latest report of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)” (*PH still 7th worst country in prosecuting journalists' killers – report*, 2022). The election of current president Ferdinand Marcos Jr. gave hope for a less intimidating and harsh leadership (*Killing with impunity: Vast majority of journalists' murderers go free*, 2022). Yet, there were two radio commentators named, Percival Mabasa and Renato Blanco, who were killed under the Marcos Jr. administration. This “raised fears that the culture of violence and impunity will endure” (*PH still 7th worst country in prosecuting journalists' killers – report*, 2022).

## *b. Human Rights Violations*

### *i. Extrajudicial Killings and Impunity*

According to *Extrajudicial Killings* (n.d.), the notion of extrajudicial killings or executions “happens when someone in an official position deliberately kills a person without any legal



process.” These malicious killings “can [...] be carried out by militias, death squads or other non-State actors, often target political opponents, activists, or marginalized groups” (*Extrajudicial Killings*, n.d.). International law declares that “the right to be free from execution includes freedom from any arbitrary or extrajudicial deprivation of life...” (*Extrajudicial killings in the Philippines*, 2019). The right to freedom from execution is a pivotal human right that should be legally promoted and protected by governments; the latter must do its utmost efforts in preventing such killings and holding those responsible accountable (*Extrajudicial killings in the Philippines*, 2019).

Ratcliffe (2020) says that after former President Rodrigo Duterte won the 2016 elections, “widespread and systematic” extrajudicial killings were significant. On March 2020, Duterte mentioned in his speech that it was “his job to scare people, to intimidate people, and to kill people” (*Philippines: UN must intensify pressure to end killings as impunity reigns*, 2020). Duterte’s campaign “War on Drugs” has resulted in over 12,000 deaths, mostly urban poor. According to *Philippines' 'War on Drugs'* (2017), “at least 2,555 of the killings have been attributed to the Philippine National Police”. Duterte’s “War on Drugs” grew its prominence by expanding “into areas outside the capital, Metro Manila, including to the provinces of Bulacan, Laguna, Cavite, and the cities of Cebu and General Santos” (Roth, 2019). According to *Philippines: UN must intensify pressure to end killings as impunity reigns* (2020), the majority of those people killed during the War on Drugs came from poor and marginalized communities. There is no accurate number of fatalities “because the government has failed to disclose official documents about the ‘drug war’” (Roth, 2019). Unfortunately, families who have lost their loved ones are helpless due to several obstacles in pursuing justice. Roth (2019) explains that masked gunmen who take part in killings appeared to be working closely with the police. Thus, it is quite skeptical to believe the government’s claims “that most killings have been committed by vigilantes or rival drug gangs”

(Roth, 2019). Furthermore, Duterte showed his commitment and support to police officers involved in the “drug war” by vowing to protect them from any prosecution (Roth, 2019). Duterte mainly targets “people suspected of having committed a crime, including those accused of using or selling drugs” (*Philippines: UN must intensify pressure to end killings as impunity reigns*, 2020). Duterte even criticized human rights organizations for their “timidity” as he said, “These human rights people are so timid. What do you do? Just count the dead? Sons of b\*tches, you should change jobs, not in human rights. Work at morgues if that’s all that you do.” (*Philippines: UN must intensify pressure to end killings as impunity reigns*, 2020).

Duterte’s “War on Drugs” garnered critical international attention. For example, in January 2018, the European Commission called out the Philippines as the former “expressed strong concerns about [the latter’s] compliance with the human rights obligations...” (Roth, 2019). Roth (2019) extrapolates further by stating that the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced the start of a preliminary examination into the “drug war” killings in the Philippines. Consequently, Duterte responded, “by withdrawing from the Rome Statute, which takes effect in one year” (Roth, 2019). After a few months, the European Parliament executed efforts in condemning Duterte’s drug war. The European Parliament adopted a resolution to terminate the drug war and guarantee accountability (Roth, 2019). Moreover, the European Union (EU) vowed to use its resources “including suspending trade benefits if necessary – to persuade the Philippines to reverse its abusive trend” (Roth, 2019). In addition, Amnesty International believes that Duterte’s approach to minimizing crime rates is a “deeply flawed approach” (Roth, 2019). The drug war promotes the exacerbation of people’s problems related to drugs. Thus, Amnesty International shows its opposition in terms of punitive approaches based on criminalization (Roth, 2019). Instead, there should be a central focus on health and other social services such as

“prevention, information, harm reduction, voluntary treatment and rehabilitation services on a non-discriminatory basis...” (Roth, 2019).

Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch says, “President Marcos keeps telling foreign leaders that he’s ready to improve the human rights situation in the Philippines.” (*Philippines: No Letup in 'Drug War' under Marcos*, 2023). However, Robertson does not believe that the war on drugs will be over soon as long as the police kill suspected drug users with impunity. As Marcos took office in July 2022, thousands of people were killed due to the deadly campaign. Interestingly, according to *Philippines' Marcos to shut out ICC after losing drug-war appeal* (2023), President Marcos Jr. said that “he would cut off contact with the International Criminal Court (ICC) after it rejected an appeal asking it to stop investigating his predecessor’s lethal war on drugs.” His main reason was that the ICC’s interference and attacks on the sovereignty of the country are questionable (*Philippines' Marcos to shut out ICC after losing drug-war appeal*, 2023). In other words, President Marcos Jr. declares that he has confidence in the country’s institutions in terms of prosecuting crimes (*Philippines' Marcos to shut out ICC after losing drug-war appeal*, 2023).

#### ii. *Repression of Dissent*

Carlos Conde, senior Philippines researcher at Human Rights Watch, extrapolates on the notion of red-tagging. The latter is a malevolent practice “that targets people who often end up being harassed or even killed”. Conde adds that “red-tagging is rapidly shrinking the space for peaceful activism in the Philippines.” According to (*Philippines: End Deadly 'Red-Tagging' of Activists* (2022), this destructive act has been prominent in Philippine history since it is a technique used by the government “against the communist New People’s Army (NPA), which began in 1969”. Red-tagging involves “publicly accusing activists, journalists, politicians, and others and

their organizations of being directly involved in the fighting or supporting the NPA” (*Philippines: End Deadly 'Red-Tagging' of Activists*, 2022).

Under the Duterte administration, red-tagging became a very pertinent and deadly act. He initiated a “killing campaign” to attack so-called “communists” and “activists” (Hunt & Simon, 2023). He founded the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict in 2018, and he classified the Philippine Communist Party as a terrorist group to ban it (Hunt & Simon, 2023). Furthermore, Duterte signed an anti-terror law “to crack down on dissidents and the left-wing” (Hunt & Simon, 2023). Consequently, there was an increase in activist and journalist murder or incarceration (Hunt & Simon, 2023). Duterte invested billions of Philippine pesos making red-tagging an official governmental policy (*Philippines: End Deadly 'Red-Tagging' of Activists*, 2022).

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, Silvestre Fortades and Rose Maria Galias were shot dead by unknown aggressors; they were members of a “red-tagged” farmers and labor rights organization in the province of Sorsogon (*Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The State of the World's Human Rights*, 2023). Moreover, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, Natividad Castro, a “red-tagged” doctor, was arrested by the police as she medically assisted indigenous communities in Mindanao (*Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The State of the World's Human Rights*, 2023). In August 2022, police arrested Adora Faye de Vera who was a dedicated human rights activist ever since the Martial Law period in the 1970s. De Vera was red-tagged since she was “accused of murder and rebellion in relation to an alleged ambush in 2009 in which members of the security forces were killed” (*Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The State of the World's Human Rights*, 2023). According to *Philippines: End Deadly 'Red-Tagging' of Activists* (2022), civil society groups have called for the abolishment of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed

Conflict. The latter's red-tagging have "often precipitated violence against those named" (*Philippines: End Deadly 'Red-Tagging' of Activists*, 2022). Unfortunately, Conde elucidates that red-tagging continues to be "a key component of the Philippine government's abusive campaign against critical activists, journalists, and politicians." Conde calls for "the United Nations, European Union, and influential governments [to] not merely denounce red-tagging, but [to] publicly call on President Duterte to end this deadly practice" (*Philippines: End Deadly 'Red-Tagging' of Activists*, 2022).

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2020, Duterte signed the Anti-Terrorism Bill; this replaces the Human Security Act of 2007 (*Dangerous anti-terror law in the Philippines yet another setback for human rights*, 2020). However, Amnesty International has denounced this official Act, and it has called on the State to firmly reject this legislation since it "contains dangerous provisions and risks further undermining human rights in the country" (*Dangerous anti-terror law in the Philippines yet another setback for human rights* 2020). The Ant-Terrorism Bill defines terrorism as follows (*Dangerous anti-terror law in the Philippines yet another setback for human rights* 2020):

- *Engaging in acts intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to any person or endangers a person's life;*
- *Engaging in acts intended to cause extensive damage or destruction to a government or public facility, public place, or private property;*
- *Engaging in acts intended to cause extensive interference with, damage, or destruction to critical infrastructure;*
- *Developing, manufacturing, possessing, acquiring, transporting, supplying, or using weapons; and*

- *Releasing dangerous substances or causing fire, floods or explosions when the purpose is to intimidate the general public, create an atmosphere to spread a message of fear, provoke or influence by intimidation the government or any international organization, seriously destabilize or destroy the fundamental political, economic, or social structures in the country, or create a public emergency or seriously undermine public safety*

Additionally, following the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, “persons who propose, incite, conspire, and participate in the planning, training, and facilitation of an offense under the act, as well as those who provide support to ‘terrorists’ as defined under the act, or recruit members of a ‘terrorist organization’, could face life imprisonment without parole” (*Dangerous anti-terror law in the Philippines yet another setback for human rights, 2020*). The law also legalized 12-year imprisonment for the following offenses (*Dangerous anti-terror law in the Philippines yet another setback for human rights, 2020*):

- *Threatening to commit ‘terrorism’*
- *Inciting others or proposing to commit ‘terrorism’*
- *Voluntarily and knowingly joining any ‘terrorist group’*
- *Acting as an accessory in the commission of ‘terrorism’*

Lastly, the Bill “allows suspects to be detained without a judicial warrant of arrest for 14 days and can be extended by 10 more days, and placed under surveillance for 60 days, that can also be extended by up to 30 days, by the police or military” (*Dangerous anti-terror law in the Philippines yet another setback for human rights, 2020*).

Duterte signed the Anti-Terrorism Bill since terrorist groups such as the “Abu Sayyaf and the Communist Party of the Philippines have taken advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic” (*Duterte signs anti-terrorism bill, 2020*). Duterte believes that these groups are a threat to national security. Presidential Spokesperson, Harry Roque, even adds, “Terrorism[...] strikes anytime and anywhere. It is a crime against the people and humanity; thus, the fight against terrorism requires a comprehensive approach to contain terrorist threat” (*Duterte signs anti-terrorism bill, 2020*). Moreover, Secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Eduardo Año says, “The aim of the Anti-Terrorism Bill is to eradicate terrorism from our country. The people have nothing to fear from this bill; it is only the terrorists and their supporters who should fear it.” Amnesty International shows its denouncement of the Bill by demanding the Philippine government to “amend the Anti-Terrorism Act to ensure it is consistent with international human rights law and standards” (*Anti-terror act remains dangerous and fundamentally flawed, 2021*). The Act is considered a threat to the human rights domain mainly because its definition of terrorism is vague; hence, it will allow the government to exercise “excessive and unchecked powers” as well as execute “arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement” (*Anti-terror act remains dangerous and fundamentally flawed, 2021*).

Under the Marcos Jr. administration, repression of dissent remains a pertinent dilemma in the country; more particularly, red-tagging continues with Marcos. Marcos Jr.’s national security advisor has encouraged the termination of red-tagging (Esguerra, 2022). However, Edre Olalia, president of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers, doubts that Marcos would act upon this urgent matter. Marcos endorsed the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) during his campaign (Esguerra, 2022). In addition to that, Maria Ela L. Atienza, a

political science professor at the University of the Philippines, affirms how red-tagging enables the spread of disinformation (Ordoñez, 2022). Atienza adds that the combination of red-tagging and the Anti-Terrorism Act will be “a big challenge to the rule of law, independence of the Judiciary, accountability mechanisms and people’s rights” (Ordoñez, 2022). Therefore, the Marcos administration should work on ending the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and activists; the latter are simply exercising their rights or carrying out human rights work (*Deadly practice of 'red-tagging' continues under Marcos administration, 2023*).

### *iii. Constraints on Freedom of Expression*

According to Article III Section 4 of the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, “No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.” Although freedom of expression is a notion that is enshrined and practiced, Morato (2022) believes “that freedom of expression has its limitations, and more so, its repercussions.” Morato (2022) continues to explain that the Philippine legal system “underlined the restrictions on freedom of speech when it conflicts with other rights and protections, such as in the cases of libel, slander, pornography, obscenity, fighting words, threats, and intellectual property.” In other words, freedom of expression is protected by the Philippine constitution, and it allows individuals to express their thoughts and opinions “without fear of being censored by the government” (Morato, 2022).

“The Philippines spends more time in social media than any other country” (*Unshackling Expression: The Philippines Report, 2022*). Studies have shown that Filipinos have “the greatest increase globally of users spending more time in social media” during the COVID-19 pandemic



(*Unshackling Expression: The Philippines Report*, 2022). However, this does not automatically entail that the State's freedom of expression online is the most optimal (*Unshackling Expression: The Philippines Report*, 2022). Per *Unshackling Expression: The Philippines Report* (2022), "various governmental restrictions, limitations, attacks, and even abuses of this freedom exist, keeping the Philippines consistently near the top of 'most dangerous countries for journalists' lists". Morato (2022) agrees with this statement since she believes that due to extreme access and exposure of Filipinos to social media, they are more "susceptible to disinformation". Considering that the Philippines not only suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic but also grappled with "a pandemic of fake news" (*Unshackling Expression: The Philippines Report*, 2022). The Philippines had numerous cases of "disinformation, misinformation, and false information" (*Unshackling Expression: The Philippines Report*, 2022).

According to *Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report* (2021), Freedom House gave a score of 1 out of 4 in terms of the Philippines' free and independent media. Throughout Duterte's administration, reports have shown that there were "128 attacks and attacks against the press between July 2016 and April 2019" (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021). For instance, cases like "physical attacks, threats [...], smearing journalists as conspiring against the government, red-tagging, and distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks on alternative media sites" were all occurring. Unfortunately, there were "no major efforts by state agencies to investigate serious incidents or otherwise address the problem" (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021).

In 2019, founder of the one of the most prominent Filipino online news sites Rappler, Maria Ressa, was arrested due to several charges such as tax evasion, libel, cyber-libel, and violations of

securities regulations (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021). Rappler was doing its utmost effort in terms of critiquing Duterte's War on Drugs. Consequently, "its corporate registration [was] revoked by the government in 2018 for violating the prohibition on foreign ownership and control of Philippine media outlets" (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021). Furthermore, its reports were accused by the former president "of being part of a 'fake news outlet'"; thus, they were blocked from attending government events and interviews with state officials (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021).

In May 2020, the oldest and largest media network in the Philippines called, ABS-CBN, was forcibly shut down due to the "expiration of its operating license" (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021). Yet, Duterte was particularly keen on dismissing the network's broadcasting operations because he accused it of bias against him (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021). Congress voted against renewing ABS-CBN's license; hence, countless staff members lost their jobs (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021). Numerous press freedom and human rights groups denounced this shutdown (*Philippines: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*, 2021).

During Marcos Jr.'s presidency, he vowed to ameliorate the situation of press freedom in the country. Marcos declared this "after he ordered a probe on the killing of radio broadcast journalist Percival Mabasa" (Geducos, 2022). Palatino (2022) elaborates that despite Marcos Jr.'s promise of protecting the right to free speech and press freedom, he still "has failed to reassure the media community and the public that he will promote freedom of expression and reverse the impunity that worsened during the term of his predecessor." Moreover, considering the first 100 days of Marcos Jr.'s reign, the nation observed a "continuing decline in free speech" (Palatino,

2022). The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) recorded 17 cases of press freedom violations including “two media killings, four cyber libel incidents, two arrests for cyber libel, one libel charge, one case of surveillance and harassment, two cases of red-tagging, one denial of coverage, one physical assault, one death threat, and two instances of online harassment” (Palatino, 2022). It is also fundamental to note that during Marcos Jr.’s presidential campaign, some critics believed that “the supposed disinformation helped boost [his] campaign” (Carlos, 2022). He even enjoyed a landslide win in the 2022 elections (Carlos, 2022). He received “31,629,783 votes, or more than 15 million votes ahead of second placer presidential candidate Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo” (Carlos, 2022).

### **Chapter 3: Anti-Genderism in the Philippines**

According to *Gender equality: What is it and why do we need it?* (n.d.), “gender equality is when people of all gender have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities”. *Gender equality and women's empowerment* (n.d.) emphasize that it “is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world”. Advocates for gender rights believe that people of all ages and backgrounds (women, men, trans and gender diverse people, children, and families) can all be affected by gender inequality (*Gender equality: What is it and why do we need it?*, n.d.). Hence, it is pivotal to attain a more inclusive and equitable society by eradicating all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence.

In this chapter, I will address the notion of anti-genderism and its prevalence in the Philippines. I will begin by defining what anti-genderism is. Afterward, I will explore the gender situation in the Philippines by analyzing the government legislation related to gender as well as the political, economic, and social aspects. I will examine the relationship between the Catholic

Church in the Philippines and its influence on gender rights. Consequently, there will be an investigation of women's rights under the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations.

### **1. What is Anti-Genderism?**

To comprehend what “anti-genderism” is, it is essential to define what “gender” is. According to Wittenius (2022), gender is a social construct that focuses on the social gender relations such as “the ideas, expectations and norms directed at people within a society”. Gender is not “predetermined by nature, but by society (i.e. assumptions about how women and men should behave according to their gender” (Wittenius, 2022). Simply put, “gender relations are therefore not unalterable but can in fact be changed and shaped” (Wittenius, 2022). Furthermore, the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy perceives “gender ideology” as a concept that defies the traditional structure of a nuclear family, and it even “promotes’ homosexuality, which fundamentally undermines social structures” (Brett, 2022).

Hence, “anti-genderism” or an “anti-gender movement” refers to “a global phenomenon intent on rolling back the hard-won rights of women and LGBTQAI+ peoples around the world” (Engebretsen et al., 2023). According to Engebretsen et al. (2023), the anti-gender movement “claims that liberal progress has gone ‘too far’, especially as it relates to sexual and gender freedom” (Engebretsen et al., 2023). Wittenius (2022) adds that anti-gender movements “are often associated with racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and transphobia, ethnic-nationalist ideas as well as hostility towards elites.” Brett (2022) believes that the anti-gender movement has three key actors, and they are referred to as “old actors”. The latter is composed of “the Catholic Church”, “right-wing think tanks”, and “[right-wing] institutions” (Brett, 2022). Wittenius (2022) also adds “bourgeois conservatives or neoliberal circles” to the category of anti-gender movements. Yet, it

is important to emphasize that “not all anti-gender actors share the same views, but are united in their opposition to what they perceive to be feminist and pro-homosexuality propaganda” (Brett, 2022).

These anti-gender actors have certain strategies in terms of expressing their criticism of gender ideology. For instance, Wittenius (2022) states that the anti-gender movement clashes with “LGBTQ rights, abortion rights, and sex education in schools” to safeguard “traditional family values”. The movement argues that “such issues hypersexualize children and undermine the nuclear family structure” (Wittenius, 2022). According to Wittenius (2022), there is a shared argument that “political elites have introduced ‘gender ideology’ against the wishes of the people... [and that gender ideology] stemmed from communism, or be perceived as a form of neo-colonial control from the European Union by people in Eastern Europe, or by those in the Global South as a form of neo-colonialism.” Moreover, “anti-gender actors do not necessarily have to be in government to influence the state” (Wittenius, 2022). But, if they are able to access state actors via petitions or formal meetings, it will be “an opportunity to influence government policy” (Wittenius, 2022). In case of lack of access, “they may launch constitutional challenges, or intimidate civil society activists” (Wittenius, 2022).

## **2. The Gender Situation in the Philippines**

### *a. General Background of the Gender Situation*

According to Anonuevo (2000), “the gender situation in the Philippines is characterized by sharp contradictions.” On one side of the spectrum, data shows that there is an advancement of women in terms of political, academic, and professional excellence, as well as legislation (Anonuevo, 2000). On the other hand, such progression has been “contrasted by images of

prostituted women, battered wives, economically disadvantaged women, and exploited migrant workers” (Anonuevo, 2000). According to *Gender Profile of the Philippines* (2008), “the Philippines is the only country in Asia to have closed the gender gap on both education and health and is one of only six in the world to have done so.” The country’s political empowerment is experiencing remarkable improvement as economic indicators (i.e. estimated income, labor force participation, and income equality for similar work) develop (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Additionally, “the Philippines is the only country in the world where women have parity to men in senior management roles” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Yet, issues related to sex and other gender-related abuses remain problematic in the country (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008).

#### *b. Government Legislations Related to Gender*

The Philippines adopted the “Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (PPGD) 1995-2025” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). The latter is “a 30-year strategic plan that translated the Beijing Platform for Action into policies, strategies, programs, and projects for Filipino women” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). To enact the PPGD, “the Philippine government, with its partners in the non-government organizations, and the academe formulated the Framework Plan for Women (FPW) in 2001” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). The FPW has three main priorities and they are the following: “(i) promotion of women’s economic empowerment, (ii) protection and advancement of women’s rights, and (iii) promotion of gender-responsive governance” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). It is also worth noting that the Philippines is one of the few nations “that has adopted a GAD Policy Budget” that demands all governmental agencies to allocate “at least five percent of their respective total budgets for

programs, activities, and projects that address the needs and uphold rights of women.” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008).

There are also some notable women-related laws “as the government recognizes the role and influence of women in the Philippines” (Cudis, 2019). These laws include the following: RA 7877, RA 8353, RA 8505, and RA 9649. According to Cudis (2019), the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995, or RA 7877 was signed into law on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1995 during the administration of former President Fidel Ramos. RA 7877 is an act that “addresses the issue of sexual harassment committed in employment, education or training environment” (Cudis, 2019). Cudis (2019) explains that this law considers the following circumstances punishable:

*“Sexual favors made as a condition in the employment or granting promotions or privileges; or the refusal to grant the sexual favor results in limiting, segregating or classifying the employee which in any way would discriminate, deprive or diminish employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect...”*

Cudis (2019) continues by describing the Anti-Rape Law of 1997 or RA 8353. The latter declares “that any person having carnal knowledge of a woman through force, threat, or intimidation or by means of fraudulent machination or grave abuse of authority will be punished” (Cudis, 2019). Based on the brutality of the case, “the offense may be punishable [by] reclusion perpetua or life imprisonment” (Cudis, 2019). Another notable women-related law in the Philippines is the Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act of 1998 or RA 8505. This law “declares the policy of the State to provide necessary assistance and protection for rape victims” (Cudis, 2019). RA 8505 states that the government shall cooperate with its various institutions and

NGOs to establish a rape crisis center in every province and city; it “shall assist and protect rape victims in the litigation of their cases and their recovery” (Cudis, 2019).

c. *Gender Situation: The Political Aspect*

Filipino women have played a significant role in the government ever since historical times. For instance, “Filipino women were already allowed to vote and stand for election” in 1937 (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Moreover, “a woman has already been elected into Parliament (the first in the region)” in 1941 (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). In 1964, several Filipino women contributed to the United Nations, particularly the UN Commission on the Status of Women, in order to progress women’s global agenda (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Filipino also had the opportunity to be part of the Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee Chair and Experts (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008).

However, according to Anonuevo (2000), there exists a “deep gender divide”; for example, “the notable success of several women is overshadowed by the actual ground-level statistics” (Anonuevo, 2000). For instance, “Filipino men dominate as decision makers and managers while women are predominant professionals in government” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). In addition, despite the Philippines’ success in empowering two women Presidents, “the percentage of elective positions occupied by women is less than a fifth of the total number of positions” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Villavecer (2022) believes that “Filipino women leaders have to fight for their seat at the table in the government.” Approximately, 23 percent of current elected officials are females (Villavecer, 2022). Furthermore, merely 7 out of 24 senators are female in the Senate (Villavecer, 2022). Based on the 2021 report of the Global



Gender Gap of the World Economic Forum, the Philippines ranked 17<sup>th</sup> among 156 countries; take note that the lower the number, the nearer to closing the gender gap (Villavecer, 2022). Regarding the Philippines' ranking in terms of political empowerment, Villavecer (2022) says that the country is placed only in the 33<sup>rd</sup> rank. This is due to the fact that “women occupy only 28 percent of the seats in Congress and about 13 percent hold ministerial positions” (Villavecer, 2022).

When it comes to women's suffrage, Garcia & Ramachandran (2023) elaborate that “the status of Filipino women has significantly improved in terms of [...] their participation as active voters.” Referring to the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) data from 2016 to 2022, “the percentage of females among all registrants has consistently been at least 50 percent” (Garcia & Ramachandran, 2023). Additionally, “voter turn-out among women has also remained high from 2010 to 2022” (Garcia & Ramachandran, 2023); at least 75 percent of registered women vote on the day of elections (Garcia & Ramachandran, 2023). In the latest COMELEC data, female Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are actively participating in the election process (Garcia & Ramachandran, 2023). For example, in the 2019 elections, registered voters and actual voters overseas were mostly female constituting around 60 percent (Garcia & Ramachandran, 2023). Furthermore, according to Garcia & Ramachandran (2023), “voter turn-out among female registrants in the same elections was at 33 percent, while that among males was at 29.4 percent.”

#### *d. Gender Situation: The Economic Aspect*

Romero (2023) mentions how Philippine Senators described women's pivotal role in contributing “to economic growth” given the proper opportunities and pieces of training. Thus, according to Buchhave & Belhaj Hassine Belghith (2022), “the current status of women in the Philippines is both a cause for optimism and a reason to accelerate efforts for promoting better

access to jobs for all women.” For example, “the Philippines has the highest percentage of female professionals and technical workers, [and it] is the only country where women have parity to men in senior management roles” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Moreover, due to a lack of opportunities in the Philippines, some Filipinos opt for working abroad. Women outnumbered men as professionals, clerks, service and sales workers, laborers, and unskilled workers in terms of newly hired OFWs (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Consequently, women are empowered since their domestic work is of economic value, and it increased their sense of self-worth (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008).

However, at the same time, women are still being undermined in the Philippines. For instance, the labor force participation rate of Filipino women is 50 percent; this rate is lower than that of men (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Buchhave & Belhaj Hassine Belghith (2022) emphasizes this fact since “the Philippines’ female labor force participation in 2019 was one of the lowest in the EAP region (regional average rate is 59%).” On the other hand, “76 percent of Filipino men were in the labor force, creating a massive gender gap” (Buchhave & Belhaj Hassine Belghith, 2022). Based on Buchhave & Belhaj Hassine Belghith (2022)’s latest report entitled, “Overcoming the Barriers to Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Philippines”, they investigated the reasons why women are being held back from the labor market and what are the barriers that deter “the Philippines’ gain from the growth potential associated with women’s economic empowerment” (Buchhave & Belhaj Hassine Belghith, 2022). The report states that childcare and gender stereotyping are critical factors in terms of impeding women’s participation in the Philippine labor market (Buchhave & Belhaj Hassine Belghith, 2022). Indeed, the Philippines is performing well concerning “gender equality in the East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region and even globally” (Buchhave & Belhaj Hassine Belghith, 2022). But, with the consistently

low labor force participation of women, economic growth and elevated prosperity remains a “missed opportunity” (Buchhave & Belhaj Hassine Belghith, 2022).

*e. Gender Situation: The Social Aspect*

The Philippines is a patriarchal society “emphasizing male dominance in family structures and larger social institutions” (Valdez et al., 2022). Hence, Filipino women suffer from a number of detrimental issues such as “women in armed conflict, women victims of domestic violence, women in prostitution, women in prison, and single women” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Simply put, Filipino women are in a difficult position mainly due to society’s imposed gender roles (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). Men are expected to be the breadwinners of the family whereas women are seen as mothers, wives, and housekeepers (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008).

One prominent “health-related issue affecting women is the violence committed against them and their children” (*Gender Profile of the Philippines*, 2008). According to *Violence Against Women* (n.d.), violence against women (VAW) is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” The Philippines has a number of policies that deal with the problems of abuse and violence against women (*Women in the Philippines: Inspiring and Empowered*, n.d.). This includes Republic Act No. 9262, also known as, the “Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004” (*Women in the Philippines: Inspiring and Empowered*, n.d.). There is also an “Anti-Rape Law of 1997 which covers the concept of marital rape. Generally, the Philippines is doing a great job in fabricating an ample number of legislations to protect women,

but it boils down to the issue of effectively improving and implementing them (*Women in the Philippines: Inspiring and Empowered*, n.d.).

Unfortunately, cases of VAW considerably increased with the COVID-19 pandemic since women were trapped at home; they were not capable of seeking help and alternative shelter (Valdez et al., 2022). Valdez et al. (2022) add that “health, social, and legal services [were] largely inaccessible” due to the diversion of national resources to the pandemic response. Moreover, victims of VAW were not encouraged to seek help from the authorities mainly because of “state neglect and harassment from law enforcers” (Valdez et al., 2022). Indeed, “the social fabric remains tainted by [the] arrogance of male power” (Anonuevo, 2000).

### **3. The Catholic Church and Gender Rights**

According to Ruiz Austria (2004), the Philippines is unique from its neighboring Southeast Asian countries because of the dominance of Roman Catholicism. The latter all began due to the Spanish colonization of more than 300 years in the Philippines (*Catholicism in the Philippines*, n.d.). Consequently, “a strongly patriarchal system was imposed which had decidedly negative consequences on the role of women in society” (Mananzan, 2020). Mananzan (2020) continues by explaining that such a patriarchal society has led to the alienation of women “from public life, public decisions, and public significance”, and she highlighted four main issues that women struggle with due to the Catholic Church; these issues include the following: “Reproductive Health Law”, “sexual abuse by the clergy”, “continuing gender inequality in the Church”, and “feminist theology of liberation” (Mananzan, 2020).

The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, also known as the RH Law, is a law that ensures universal access to contraceptive methods, fertility control, sexual

education, and maternal care (Mananzan, 2020). Yee (2019) notes that ever since the enactment of Republic Act No. 10354, or the RH Law, in December 2012, “the Church and other religious and allied groups have hindered its rollout by questioning in the Supreme Court its constitutionality...”. Yee (2019) adds that the Church was “invoking the State’s responsibility to protect the life of the unborn child.” Simply put, the Catholic Church had a clear opposition to the RH Law; hence, this has delayed its enforcement for the past seven years (Yee, 2019). Subsequently, it has detrimentally affected the lives of millions of women and their families (Yee, 2019).

Yee (2019) says that religious groups, led by the Alliance for the Family Foundation Philippines Inc., executed efforts to halt the government’s distribution of contraceptives alleging that the latter were abortifacients. Presently, the Philippines’ contraceptive use is merely at 40 percent; this is “way behind its 2022 goal of a contraceptive prevalence rate of 65 percent, or more than 11.3 million women who are into modern and effective family planning methods” (Yee, 2019). It is also essential to note that, the Philippine government still isolates “single and unmarried women and adolescents from family planning services” (Austria, 2004). Hospitals also require the husband’s consent for sterilization processes despite the absence of a law demanding it (Austria, 2004). Austria (2004) adds that in the State’s sex education module on HIV/AIDS, condoms are not mentioned. A conservative Catholic group called, Abayfamilya, imposed a ban on emergency contraception (Austria, 2004). The group claims that it was an abortifacient (Austria, 2004). They referred to the “1987 Constitution which defined pregnancy as beginning at the ‘moment of fertilization’” (Austria, 2004). Thus, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2001, the Department of Health officially “imposed a ban on the emergency contraceptive pill [...] through Memorandum Order No. 18” (Austria, 2004).

In terms of the sexual abuse by the clergy, it has been a serious dilemma “which affects women, girls and, in some instances, young boys.” According to Mananzan (2020), in the case of unwanted pregnancies, “priests cannot and will not assume any responsibility for the children they bring into the world”. Therefore, victims have to carry the burden (Mananzan, 2020). Priests in the Philippines generally do not get imprisoned for their offenses; they just get transferred to another parish where the sins are often repeated (Mananzan, 2020). Rev. Shay Cullen, an Irish priest who lived in the Philippines for decades and works with victims of child sexual abuse said, “It’s a culture of cover-up, a culture of silence, a culture of self-protection... It’s a silent consent to the abuse of children” (Sullivan, 2019).

Regarding the “continuing gender inequality in the Church”, the latter still has not fully accepted the notion of women’s empowerment despite the “great progress in gender consciousness in the Philippines” (Mananzan, 2020). According to Mananzan (2020), the Catholic Church remains stubborn in terms of holding a conservative view of women. For example, in “Catholic Church teachings, Sunday mass sermons, or even in Catholic-run schools for girls” (Austria, 2004), there is a dictum to “obey your husband” (Mananzan, 2020). Mananzan (2020) says that battered women are encouraged to stay in their marriages in order to protect their families and not be a “broken family”. Moreover, in terms of the concept of “virginity”, the Catholic Church “makes women who lose their virginity [...] feel like garbage” (Mananzan, 2020). Reflecting on the notion of virginity, Austria (2004) explains the dynamic interplay between “traditional sexual morality”, “the Philippine penal law”, and the “category of sexual crimes”, which are referred to as “crimes against chastity”. In accordance with Austria (2004), the regulatory concepts that are present in the penal provisions on Crimes against Chastity are the following:

- *Virginity raises the penalty. As mentioned earlier, “robbing a woman of virtue” defined as the hymen (proof of sexual inexperience) is the core or essence of the crime committed.*
- *Consent lowers the penalty but does not cancel out criminal liability in the crimes of seduction and abduction.*
- *Force raises the penalty. It is not enough to say that one was raped but one has to be able to allege that she put up a fight.*
- *Good reputation is a pre-requisite in the absence of virginity for widows or single women but not married women.*

Additionally, Mananzan (2020) extrapolates on the “sexist tone addressing the assembly as ‘brethren’, praying for the salvation of ‘mankind’, and exhorting to love one’s ‘fellowmen’”. In other words, women are degraded to minor roles in the liturgy (Mananzan, 2020). For instance, women are unable to fully participate in terms of fundamental decision-making processes, and they are deprived of taking full ministry in the church (Mananzan, 2020). Whereas, male priests have the power to govern marriage and family life (Mananzan, 2020). It is interesting to mention that Pope Francis said that “the ban on women from becoming priests of the Roman Catholic Church will likely last forever” (Butuyan, 2016). Furthermore, Pope Francis referred to the 1994 apostolic letter of the late Pope John Paul II (Butuyan, 2016). The letter declares that “ordaining women as priests is not possible because Jesus chose only men as apostles” (Butuyan, 2016). Therefore, as the Catholic Church bans from being priests, it creates this idea that men and women are not equals (Butuyan, 2022).

Concerning the Catholic Church’s stance on sexual orientation and gender expression, there is an “embodiment of both conflict and harmony between doctrinaire teachings on identity

and modernity” (De Guzman, 2022). The Catholic Church imposes its beliefs that they are opposed to homosexuality, and they firmly insist on the notion that there are only two genders (De Guzman, 2022). Furthermore, in regard to the anti-discrimination law, De Guzman (2022) believes that there are “devout Catholic senators who see equal rights as an extension of the faith, but have run up against determined opposition”. Unfortunately, the implementation of this law is still farfetched; hence, some cities have fulfilled their own anti-discrimination policies in the meantime. According to Transgender Europe’s Trans Murder Monitoring project, “at least 77 murders of trans and gender-diverse people took place between 2008 and September 2021” (De Guzman, 2022). A notable example would be the case of Jennifer Laude who is a transwoman killed by a U.S. Marine in 2014 (De Guzman, 2022); President Duterte eventually released him. Simply put, Rey Valmores-Salinas, Chairperson of LGBT rights group Bahaghari, “blames the Catholic Church and other religious groups for blocking the anti-discrimination law even though ‘LGBT rights are human rights’” (De Guzman, 2020).

#### **4. Women’s Rights Under the Duterte Administration**

##### *a. Duterte’s Diminishment and Objectification of Women*

Republic Act No. 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women (MCW) is a human rights law specifically about women “that seeks to eliminate discrimination through the recognition, protection, fulfillment, and promotion of the rights of Filipino women, especially those belonging to the marginalized sectors of society (*FAQ: Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women*, 2022). To further comprehend what the MCW is, it can be seen as the “local translation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)”, particularly in defining gender discrimination, state obligations, substantive equality, and temporary special measures” (*FAQ: Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women* 2022).



Moreover, the MCW recognizes human rights guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Despite, the MCW being signed into law on August 14, 2009 (Guevarra, n.d.), Duterte fails to respect it. Tan (2016) mentions that Duterte “admitted his womanizing ways on national TV”. He even “admitted that he currently has three girlfriends and a common-law wife, but that does not mean that he sees and treats women merely as objects” (Tan, 2016). In 2016, as Duterte prepared for his State of the Nation Address (SONA), an estimated 40,000 demonstrators were expected to rally against him (Haynes, 2018). Considering Duterte’s “very overt sexualization of women” (Haynes, 2018), women’s rights activists were inevitably present to call for their rights. Duterte had several cases of objectifying women; for instance, he “made inappropriate comments about Leni Robredo’s legs, his female Vice President”, “[he] joked about raping [the] Miss Universe [beauty queen]”, “and [he] equated having a second wife to keeping a ‘spare tire’ in the trunk of a car” (Haynes, 2018).

Furthermore, Duterte “kissed a married woman in front of an audience of overseas Filipino workers [...] in Seoul, South Korea” (Haynes, 2018). The woman said that the kiss was not malicious, but various politicians and women’s rights groups condemned such action by justifying it as an abuse of power (Haynes, 2018). PhD candidate in Gender Studies at the University of Cambridge, Sharmila Parmanand says that “... the infrastructure to combat sexism is struggling against a political culture that is still very patriarchal” (Haynes, 2018). Therefore, a prominent hashtag called #BabaeAko, which can be translated to #IAmAWoman, was significant during Duterte’s administration. Filipino women posted videos of themselves on social media calling out Duterte’s sexist behavior. Haynes (2018) explains that there are “high-profile female leaders,

including Congress representatives, former Solicitor General Florin Hilbay, and a former cabinet member of the Duterte administration, Judy Taguiwalo.”

During a post-typhoon briefing in Camarines Sur, “Duterte and other government officials [...] joked about sex and womanizing” (*Form of violence:’ CHR tells Duterte, officials ’sexist, misogynistic remarks’ are never right*, 2020). Hence, CHR Commissioner Karen Gomez-Dumpit criticized them for objectifying women and their actions were intolerable considering that the Philippines is a signatory of CEDAW (*Form of violence:’ CHR tells Duterte, officials ’sexist, misogynistic remarks’ are never right*, 2020). Presidential spokesman Harry Roque justified Duterte’s jokes by saying that “the President, more or less, wants to lighten the mood...”; all he witnessed throughout the day were tragedies of the typhoon (*Form of violence:’ CHR tells Duterte, officials ’sexist, misogynistic remarks’ are never right*, 2020). Ironically, in commemoration of Women’s Month on the 8th of March 2021, Duterte wanted Filipinos “to reject the backward mindset that fueled a culture of gender oppression” (Ranada, 2021).

#### *b. Duterte’s War on Drugs and its Impact on Families*

One of the most notable consequences of Duterte’s War on Drugs is the extreme impoverishment of families. In addition, children of those who were killed during the War on Drugs, suffer from great psychological distress due to witnessing the violence, economic hardships as they lost their families’ breadwinners, and dislocation from their homes and schools. In terms of the latter, they may even be vulnerable to bullying and discrimination (Conde, 2023). Conde (2023) adds that “many children are left with no choice but to work, and some end up homeless and living in the streets, further exposing themselves to danger, violence, and criminal activity.” As a result of their dire living conditions, families have no other choice but to seek help from

higher authorities. However, Conde (2023) explains that families have been reluctant in terms of “approaching the government for help because they consider the police and other government officials to be responsible for the loss they have suffered.”

Filipino families seek aid from “civic and non-governmental groups, particularly from those from the Roman Catholic Church and a few Protestant and ecumenical groups” (Conde, 2023). In these communities, services such as psychosocial support, economic assistance, educational support, and supporting livelihoods are provided (Conde, 2023). But as the number of killings increases, these resources can be overwhelmed and insufficient (Conde, 2023). Unfortunately, the Philippine government has not developed any particular programs related to the “drug war” victims. In fact, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)’s former top official told Human Rights Watch that “there has never been a single cabinet meeting under Duterte in which the effects of the ‘war on drugs’ on children was discussed” (Conde, 2023).

The Philippine government may have some contributions in terms of helping the victims by providing funeral and medical expense subsidies (Sugaya, 2022). The State also has the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), which is a “human development measure of the national government that provides conditional cash grants to the poorest of the poor” (*Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program: GOVPH*, n.d.). The 4Ps aims to provide financial aid to improve children’s (aged 0-18) health and education (*Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program: GOVPH*, n.d.). However, the government has no other forms of support (Sugaya, 2022). Thus, Smith et al. (2023) suggest to build regional capacity essential for “sustaining evidence-based public health programs, strengthening mental health initiatives, and advancing social justice.” Smith et al. (2023) accentuate on the significance of advancing social justice “in the context of health

disparities and drug-related stigma in the Philippines, emphasizing care equivalence and dignified support for socio-economically disadvantaged families (especially children)”.

*c. Duterte and his Stance on the SOGIE Bill*

According to *SOGIESC (2023)*, the SOGIE Equality Bill acknowledges the “fundamental rights of every person regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.” The SOGIE Bill aims “to provide fair and equal opportunities for *everyone* in accessing basic social services, opportunities, healthcare, protection, and justice while acknowledging and breaking down the barriers that exist for people with diverse SOGIE” (*SOGIESC, 2023*). Unfortunately, the Philippines still lags behind in terms of this issue. Thus, many Filipinos do not feel safe and secure due to the lack or absence of “proper safeguard and protection for people with diverse SOGIE” (*SOGIESC, 2023*). Furthermore, Filipinos face a daily struggle in areas related to access to social services as well as academic and economic opportunities. But, most notably, members of the SOGIE community are prone “to harassment and violence from their own communities, and deprived of means and mechanisms to demand accountability” (*SOGIESC, 2023*).

Ranada (2019) says that Duterte does not declare the SOGIE Equality Bill as urgent; instead, he sees that the Anti-Discrimination Law is of greater urgency. Duterte’s chief legal counsel, Salvador Panelo, stated that “the SOGIE Equality Bill is problematic because it supposedly ‘discriminates’ since it benefits only LGBTQ+” (Ranada, 2019); whereas, the Anti-Discrimination Law is applied to everyone. When Duterte was asked if the SOGIE Bill is an urgent bill, he said “yes”. Hence, it can be observed that the State is confused about the two bills. Senator Risa Hontiveros says, “President Rodrigo Duterte’s statement that he plans to certify as urgent the SOGIE Equality Bill, only to be corrected by his spokesperson that the President was referring to

an Anti-Discrimination Bill, shows Malacanang's policy confusion regarding how to address discrimination against the LGBT community" (Ranada, 2021). When it comes to the concept of same-sex marriage, Duterte was not in favor of the latter – whether be it church or civil (Parrocha, 2020). Duterte said that he will not intervene in the law-making process that protects the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community (Parrocha, 2020).

*d. Duterte vs. Maria Ressa*

Maria A. Ressa is a Filipino-American journalist who has been working in the industry for more than 37 years (*Maria A. Ressa*, n.d.). She co-founded Rappler which is the only "digital [...] news site that is leading the fight for press freedom in the Philippines" (*Maria A. Ressa*, n.d.). Before she co-founded Rappler, Maria Ressa's focus was "investigating terrorism in Southeast Asia" (*Maria A. Ressa*, n.d.). Ressa ran CNN's Manila office for around 10 years then she opened another CNN office in Jakarta where she ran it from 1995 to 2005 (*Maria A. Ressa*, n.d.). Eventually, Ressa returned to the Philippines as the senior vice president in charge of ABS-CBN's multimedia news operations; she was able to manage thousands of journalists for the largest news organization in the country (*Maria A. Ressa*, n.d.).

Rappler's mission is "to speak the truth to power and build communities of action for a better world [...] through cutting-edge stories, conversations, and collaboration" (Geronimo, 2021). Hence, Rappler's journalists have been passionately doing their job in exposing the government's corruption as well as scrutinizing the financial holdings and potential conflicts of interests of top politicians (Geronimo, 2021). In terms of Duterte's administration, Rappler has been especially critical of his leadership; they investigated his extrajudicial killings, documented the government's disinformation on social media, and reported his top advisers' illegal acts

(Geronimo, 2021). Consequently, Duterte showed his exploitative power. For instance, Dante Ang, the owner of the Manila Times and a fierce Duterte supporter, published accusative content on their site against Ressa (Geronimo, 2021). This theatrical set-up attempted “to put Rappler out of business and discredit Ressa and possibly send her to jail” (Geronimo, 2021). After three months, Ressa was forced to “go on trial in six separate courtrooms in Metro Manila and face the frightening prospect of spending decades in prison” (Geronimo, 2021). In 2017, Duterte accused Rappler of “violating the Philippine constitution and declared in his SONA that the news site was “fully owned by Americans” (Obordo, 2021). He even criticized “it for being fake and it being Filipino is also fake” (Obordo, 2021). This criticism was later proven to have no basis, instead, it was instigated to spark retaliation against Ressa and her colleagues (Obordo, 2021).

Obordo (2021) says that Ressa and Santos Jr, former Rappler researcher, “are currently out on bail after being convicted of cyber libel in June 2020 and facing up to 6 years in prison”. Cyber libel is a new criminal law introduced in 2012; it is the same year Rappler was founded (*Hold the line': Maria Ressa fights for Press Freedom under Philippines' Duterte*, 2021). Moreover, Rappler had to deal with its accusation of “violating a constitutional ban on foreign ownership in securing funding, as well as tax evasion” (*Hold the line': Maria Ressa fights for Press Freedom under Philippines' Duterte*, 2021). Fortunately, Maria Ressa and her Rappler team “were [...] cleared of tax evasion charges” (*Nobel winner Maria Ressa, news outlet cleared of tax evasion*, 2023). Ressa stated that the accused tax evasion was among the legal cases used by Duterte to deter critical reporting (*Nobel winner Maria Ressa, news outlet cleared of tax evasion*, 2023).

In 2021, Maria Ressa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her outstanding work to “safeguard freedom of expression” (Root, 2023). Ressa was also praised for divulging the truth about Duterte’s abuse of power and growing authoritarian rule (Root, 2023). In addition, Ressa’s

publication “earned a reputation for its in-depth reporting and tough scrutiny of Duterte’s deadly war on drugs (Root, 2023). Paradoxically, Duterte congratulated her for being “courageous [to] fight for freedom of expression in the Philippines” (*‘Very happy’: Duterte congratulates Maria Ressa on Nobel prize*, 2021). Harry Roque praised her for receiving such a prestigious award; he said that the latter is a “victory for a Filipina and we are very happy for that” (*‘Very happy’: Duterte congratulates Maria Ressa on Nobel prize*, 2021).

*e. Duterte vs. Leila de Lima*

Leila De Lima is “a Filipino lawyer, human rights activist, [and] politician.” (*Leila De Lima*, 2019). Previously, she served as the Chair of the Philippine Commission on Human Rights and the Philippines’ Secretary of Justice (*Leila De Lima*, 2019). De Lima, as a human rights activist and a former Senator, is known for her outspoken denunciation of Duterte’s leadership, especially of his War on Drugs. Consequently, Duterte accused her “of having an affair with her driver and her bodyguard, alleging that the latter collected money from drug lord detained in the New Bilibid Prison, the facility De Lima had raided years earlier” as a form of revenge (McLaughlin, 2023). McLaughlin (2023) explains that “unfounded accusations and bombastic insults were part of Duterte’s style and his appeal.” For instance, Duterte bragged publicly about watching De Lima’s alleged sex tape saying that “he would like to show it to the Pope” (McLaughlin, 2023). At a certain point, Duterte even suggested that De Lima kill herself (McLaughlin, 2023).

According to *Philippines: Leila de Lima's acquittal a long-overdue step towards justice* (2023), the Philippine National Police arrested De Lima on February 24, 2017, on drug-related charges. Various local and international organizations (i.e. Amnesty International) insisted that these “charges against her were fabricated and that the testimonies by witnesses against her were manufactured” (*Philippines: Leila de Lima's acquittal a long-overdue step towards justice*, 2023).

Unfortunately, the court proceedings against De Lima in the past six years were being delayed; this includes “the repeated failure of prosecution witnesses to appear in court and changes in judges handling the cases against her” (*Philippines: Leila de Lima's acquittal a long-overdue step towards justice*, 2023). In 2018, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that De Lima’s detention was arbitrary, of no legal basis, and is non-observant of international norms related to the right to fair trial (*Philippines: Leila de Lima's acquittal a long-overdue step towards justice*, 2023). According to Philip Sawali, a lawyer and De Lima’s former chief of staff, De Lima’s case illustrates “a snapshot of almost everything that went wrong in the Philippines in the last six years” (McLaughlin, 2023). Sawali adds that the Philippines is suffering from a shrink “[...] of civic spaces, weaponization of legal processes to go after critics and journalists, lawyers, [and] political opponents...” (McLaughlin, 2023). On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2023, the drug charge against De Lima was dismissed by the Philippine court (Magramo, 2023). This dismissed charge was acquitted “on the ground of reasonable doubt”, and it was “one of two remaining criminal charges against her” (Magramo, 2023).

*f. Duterte vs. Leni Robredo*

Maria Leonor Gerona Robredo, or also known as Leni Robredo, is a human rights lawyer and the former Vice President of the Philippines (*Maria Leonor G. Robredo*, n.d.). Essentially, Robredo was “elected separately from Duterte and was not his running mate” (Morales & Lema, 2021). Robredo has always been “a thorn in Duterte’s side”, and she was critical of Duterte’s tyrannical war on drugs, his foreign policy with China, and his COVID-19 management (Morales & Lema, 2021).

In terms of Robredo’s stance on the war on drugs, she believes that it is important to invest in rehabilitation and prevention rather than executing a killing spree (Mendoza, 2021). Hence,



Duterte appointed Robredo as the co-chair of the Inter-Agency Committee on Anti-Illegal Drugs (ICAD) on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2019. She then declared that she will continue to fight against illegal drugs “with as much vigor” but with the absence of killings (*Robredo to pursue war on drugs in other ways, but 'with as much vigor', 2022*). Moreover, Robredo said that she will encourage the Philippine government to collaborate with the United Nations, but this was highly opposed by the Duterte administration (*Robredo to pursue war on drugs in other ways, but 'with as much vigor', 2022*). Yet, despite the opposition, Robredo was insistent as she met up with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) “where they discussed best practices and the experiences of other countries in the anti-drug campaign” (*Robredo to pursue war on drugs in other ways, but 'with as much vigor', 2022*). Additionally, Robredo met US officials such as members of the US State Department’s International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the US Agency for International Development; they discussed the possibility of modifying and ameliorating the Philippines’ anti-narcotics law (*Robredo to pursue war on drugs in other ways, but 'with as much vigor', 2022*).

As a result, Robredo deduced that the government should have a “clear baseline data on the real drug situation in the country – this includes transparent data of how many were killed in anti-drug operations – [...] to measure the effectivity of the ongoing drug war” (*Robredo to pursue war on drugs in other ways, but 'with as much vigor', 2022*). As Robredo was doing her duties as a drug czar, the Duterte administration was alarmed due to the possibility of leaking the actual number of people killed during the drug war. In fact, Duterte even warned Robredo that she may lose her job if she shares classified information with foreign entities (i.e. the United Nations).

Eventually, Duterte fired Robredo as the designated drug czar 19 days after his appointment (*Robredo to pursue war on drugs in other ways, but 'with as much vigor', 2022*).

In regards to Duterte and his stance on the country's foreign policy, Grossman (2021) says that Duterte "pledged to shift his country's foreign policy away from the United States—a longstanding treaty ally—in favor of China and Russia." Duterte even proudly boasted that it "was time to say goodbye to Washington" (Grossman, 2021). Consequently, Robredo was worried that Duterte was "seen as selling out [the Philippines] to China" (*Duterte seen as 'selling out' to China, says deputy, 2019*). Hence, Robredo called on Duterte "to take a stronger stand to protect the country's sovereignty in the disputed South China Sea" (*Duterte seen as 'selling out' to China, says deputy, 2019*). Cepeda (2021) says that Robredo believes that "having an 'inclusive and independent' foreign policy that favors no specific countries would be beneficial for the Philippines." But, at the same time, Robredo is open to cooperating with China in the areas of trade and investments (Cepeda, 2021).

Lastly, when it comes to Duterte's management of the COVID-19 pandemic, Robredo declared that he was "more focused on politics than COVID-19 response" (*Robredo: Duterte more focused on politics than covid-19 response, 2021*). She believed that there was no genuine concern in tackling the health crisis; for example, the chief executive was not really informed of the COVID-19 situation making him not know all the details. In addition, she questioned the "Department of Health's purchases of overpriced personal protective equipment" (*Robredo: Duterte more focused on politics than covid-19 response, 2021*). Robredo had the great urge to ask Duterte "to just let her handle the crisis instead" since she thinks that the State is being directionless and ineffective (Cepeda, 2021). Robredo claims that the country is dealing with "the lack of decisive leadership at a time when people need it most" (Cepeda, 2021).

## 5. Women's Rights Under the Marcos Jr. Administration

### a. *Marcos Jr. vs. Leni Robredo*

The Marcos-Robredo rivalry can be dated back to the 2016 elections where they were competing for the position of Vice President of the Philippines (Pasion, 2017). According to Pasion (2017), Leni Robredo was the former Camarines Sur 3<sup>rd</sup> District representative. She decided to run for Vice President in 2016, and she was competing against then-senator Marcos Jr., who is the son of the former dictator Marcos Sr. (Pasion, 2017). Robredo won “by only a slim margin” (Pasion, 2017). When the day of Robredo’s oath-taking arrived, Marcos organized an election protest “claiming there was massive cheating in the polls” (Pasion, 2017). Other than her dealing with Marcos Jr.’s election protest, Robredo had other obstacles to overcome in her first year as vice president. For example, she was appointed as Duterte’s housing minister, but she quit after being excluded from cabinet meetings (*Factbox: Marcos and Robredo lead field ahead of Philippine Presidential Vote, 2022*). In addition to that, Robredo “faced online attacks and rumors” and even became “the subject of draft impeachment complaints” (Pasion, 2017). On the other hand, Marcos Jr. was very insistent on the notion “that the vice presidency was ‘stolen’ from him” (Pasion, 2017). Therefore, Marcos Jr. allocated his time to “visiting loyalists around [the Philippines] to thank them for their support during the elections” (Pasion, 2017). He was so persistent that he even updates the public about his whereabouts on social media (Pasion, 2017).

The long-time rivalry resumed during the 2022 Presidential elections. According to Caballero-Anthony (2022), Marcos Jr.’s “vice-presidential bid was said to be a dry run for a presidential campaign in 2022”. Marcos Jr. was certain that he had an advantage over Robredo since he had a “strategic partnership with Sara Duterte”, the daughter of former President Duterte

(Caballero-Anthony, 2022). On the other hand, Robredo's presidential bid came later and her campaign was under-resourced (Caballero-Anthony, 2022); thus, she relied mostly on "grassroots support and volunteerism" (Caballero-Anthony, 2022). Robredo was successful in capturing the hearts and minds of numerous Filipinos, mainly the younger generation. Hence, she was able to inspire her supporters to organize "pink rallies" which were reminiscent of the "yellow" People Power Revolution in 1986 (Caballero-Anthony, 2022). Yet, Marcos Jr. and his partner Sara Duterte were "backed by a strong political machinery" (Caballero-Anthony, 2022); this made the duo's victory not unexpected. As Marcos Jr. won the 2022 Presidential elections, Caballero-Anthony (2022) says that "he has promised to bring back the 'good old days' of the old Marcos regime, which according to his revisionist campaign was prosperous and stable".

*b. Marcos Jr.'s Lack of Priority in Terms of Women's Rights*

When Marcos Jr. was running for President in the 2022 elections, he surprised some feminists as he showed a progressive stance in terms of women's rights in the Philippines. For instance, Marcos Jr. showed his support regarding the "enactment of an abortion law for 'very severe cases'" (Abad, 2023). He believed that it is the women's choice to decide whether to keep or terminate their pregnancies. Moreover, Marcos Jr. said that he has nothing against same-sex marriage (Abad, 2023). In commemoration of International Women's Day, "Marcos supported pro-woman laws through the Presidential Legislative Liaison Office" (Abad, 2023). He amplified the importance of women in national development; thus, he wants "to invest in women and enact laws that provide them equal opportunity and allow the nation the full benefit of their participation and contribution" (Abad, 2023). However, considering Marcos' one year into the presidency, his progressive stances were not being practically implemented yet. Abad (2023) mentions that "gender-related laws were missing from his State of the Nation Address priority bills."

The Filipino population can observe the contrast in personalities between Duterte and Marcos Jr. The former is known for his vigilante style and his “malevolent active hatred and intimidation” (Abad, 2023). Whereas, the latter is known for being a “gentleman” and has not shown any signs of machismo or misogyny (Abad, 2023). Despite Marcos Jr.’s personality, it cannot be a guarantee that he would prioritize women’s rights. Sylvia “Guy” Claudio, former Dean of the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman’s College of Social Work and Community Development, says that the current Marcos administration has been focusing on other issues (i.e. Maharlika Wealth Fund) while delaying its strategy in terms of the SOGIE Bill. The same applies to the abortion law as he seems to comprehend the grave situation that abortion seekers face in the country. However, the Filipino masses are not secure whether Marcos is genuine in turning this comprehension into action (Eugenio, 2023).

Concerning the SOGIE Bill, LGBTQ+ groups expressed their urgency to the President to fully implement the bill. But, the “SOGIESC Equality Act was again pushed back to the committee level by Senate Majority Leader Joel Villanueva” (*LGBTQ+ Group urges Marcos to reveal stance on SOGIE Bill, 2023*) since he said that the measure needed “further study” (*LGBTQ+ Group urges Marcos to reveal stance on SOGIE Bill, 2023*). Additionally, in Marcos’ second SONA, he the masses by not mentioning anything related to women and gender rights, minorities, and the SOGIE Bill (Abad, 2023). The youth group called, the Kabataan party-list, denounced Marcos since he has “misprioritized” the policies “in favor of the passage of bills that serve to ensure their own hold on power by silencing the youth and plundering and profiteering off public funds” (Relativo, 2023).

#### **Chapter 4: Filipino Voting Behavior and Women’s Rights**

According to *OHCHR and elections and human rights* (2023), “the right to vote and to stand for election is at the core of democratic governments based on the will of the people”. Conducting honest and fair elections is pivotal to fostering a society that promotes and protects human rights (*OHCHR and elections and human rights*, 2023). This is because “the right to vote [...] is intrinsically linked to a number of other human rights” (*OHCHR and elections and human rights*, 2023). These rights include the following: “the right to freedom from discrimination”, “the right to freedom of opinion and expression”, “the right to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly”, and “the right to freedom of movement” (*OHCHR and elections and human rights*, 2023). Indeed, voting is an essential requirement to “influence governmental decision-making” (Ferguson et al., 2003). According to Ferguson et al. (2003), “the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, recognizes the integral role that transparent and open elections play in ensuring the fundamental right to participatory government”.

In this chapter, I will explore the notion of voting, specifically in the context of the Philippine electoral system. Moreover, I will analyze how Filipinos choose their leaders by investigating the 2016 and 2022 Presidential Elections. Consequently, I will examine how Filipinos view gender equality in the Philippines by discussing why women leaders still need to prove themselves.

## **1. Philippine Electoral System**

### *a. History of Philippine Suffrage*

According to *Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education* (2009), the first electoral system was practiced in the Philippines in the midst of the Spanish and American colonial period. However, “the process [...] was limited only to [the] male, educated, and landed voters and was more ceremonial rather than a genuine democratic mechanism” (*Your Vote. Our Future.*

*a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). Such an exclusive suffrage was seen in Section 1, Article V of the 1935 Philippine Constitution under the heading called, "Suffrage" (Samonte, 2022). The latter entailed the following (Samonte, 2022):

*"Suffrage may be exercised by male citizens of the Philippines not otherwise disqualified by law, who are twenty-one years of age or over and are able to read and write, and who shall have resided in the Philippines for one year and in the municipality wherein they propose to vote for at least six months preceding the election."*

Eventually, in 1937, Act 4112 was implemented; therefore, women were granted the right to vote to allow "peasant movements [to gain] meaningful participation in political parties and in actually [...] filling [...] government positions" (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). The first democratic election took place in 1946 where it was for the President, Vice-President, members of the Senate, and of the House of Representatives (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). When Marcos Sr. declared Martial Law in the Philippines, the 1935 Constitution was dismissed and a new one was adopted (1973 Constitution) (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). The latter enabled Marcos Sr. to lead the country as a President and Prime Minister "with legislative powers, under transition provisions – a one-man dictatorship" (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). Overall, Marcos Sr.'s intent was "to gain legitimacy for his undemocratic administration..." (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). He disregarded the democratic procedures, and he tried to manipulate the electoral process to ensure triumph (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). In due course, Marcos Sr. was "boycotted by the political opposition", and "a broad-based anti-dictatorship movement" was organized (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009).

*b. Philippine Suffrage in the Present Time*

According to the *1987 Constitution* (n.d.), Article V under the heading of “Suffrage” declares the following:

***Section 1.*** *Suffrage may be exercised by all citizens of the Philippines, not otherwise disqualified by law, who are at least eighteen years of age, and who shall have resided in the Philippines for at least one year and in the place wherein they propose to vote, for at least six months immediately preceding the election. No literacy, property, or other substantive requirement shall be imposed on the exercise of suffrage.*

***Section 2.*** *The Congress shall provide a system for securing the secrecy and sanctity of the ballot as well as a system for absentee voting by qualified Filipinos abroad.*

*The Congress shall also design a procedure for the disabled and the illiterates to vote without the assistance of other persons. Until then, they shall be allowed to vote under existing laws and such rules as the Commission on Elections may promulgate to protect the secrecy of the ballot.*

In the Philippines, elections take place at various levels (national and local) (Hafiz, 2022). Hafiz (2022) explains that at the national level, “elections are used to select presidential and vice presidential candidates separately, senators directly, and party-list”. At the local level, governors and deputy governors are separately elected in 81 provinces, mayors and deputy mayors are separately elected in 146 cities, and municipal mayors and municipal vice mayors are separately elected in 1,488 municipalities (Hafiz, 2022). In regards to the legislative elections, Hafiz (2022) says that “Filipinos elect members of the House of Representatives with city and district-based electoral districts.” Generally, “the election will choose a president, vice president, 12 senators,



300 lower house legislators, and about 18,000 officials [...] including mayors, governors, and their deputies” (Petty, 2022).

According to Hafiz (2022), “the Philippines has a presidential system of government”. The 1987 Constitution states that the President should be a “natural born and registered voter of the Philippines”, “must have resided in the Philippines 10 years before election is held”, and “must be able to read & write” (*How Does the Philippine Electoral System Work?*, 2020). The President’s function is to “exercise control over all the executive departments, bureaus, and offices [and] is also the commander-in-chief of all Armed Forces of the Philippines” (*How Does the Philippine Electoral System Work?*, 2020). The President’s term should be “6 years with no provision for re-election” (*How Does the Philippine Electoral System Work?*, 2020). The same qualifications also apply to the vice president of the Philippines (Hafiz, 2022). It is essential to note that “the presidential and vice presidential elections are not chosen in one package, but separately” (*How Does the Philippine Electoral System Work?*, 2020). For example, former President Duterte and former Vice President Robredo did not campaign as partners; in fact, the two often disagree on numerous issues (Hafiz, 2022). Hafiz (2022) says that such collision “increases the potential for cohabitation and has implications for executive instability”.

### *c. The Automated Election System (AES)*

Referring to Section 2 of Republic Act No. 8436, an automated election system (AES) is “a system using appropriate technology for voting and electronic devices to count votes and canvass/consolidate results” (*Republic Act No. 8436*, n.d.). The primary aim of the AES is “to speed up the election process [...] and reduce the risk of human error or fraud” (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). According to *Your Vote. Our Future. a*


*module for citizen-voters' education* (2009), the modernization and automation of the electoral process started in 1992 with Commission on Elections (COMELEC)'s Modernization and Excellence Project or Operation MODEX. This project constitutes eight components such as the "legal framework", "registration", "election process", "education campaign", "information technology", "facilities", "institutional structure", and "personnel" (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009).


It is interesting to note that, in May 2010, the Philippines is the first country in Southeast Asia to execute "the first automated elections in Southeast Asia" (*The Philippines: The first-ever automated elections in Southeast Asia*, n.d.). There were 50.7 million voters who used 82,000 optical scanner voting machines to cast more than 800 million votes allowing 85,000 candidates to narrow down to 17,000 posts (*The Philippines: The first-ever automated elections in Southeast Asia*, n.d.). Not only did Filipinos know about the results rapidly, but the results were also "accepted by all participating political parties, thanks to the transparency of the system" (*The Philippines: The first-ever automated elections in Southeast Asia*, n.d.).

Dwelling into the features of the AES, there are five elements such as the (a) official ballot, (b) stand-alone machine, (c) audit trail, (d) minimum human intervention, and (e) security measures (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). The official ballot has oval shapes related to the pre-printed names of candidates; it has 300 names of candidates (150 names on one page and 150 names on the other page) (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). The official ballot "has a watermark and ultraviolet features, and one barcode with corresponds to each ballot" (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). Every elective position has a delegated color, and a marking pen

is distributed by the Board of Election Inspectors (BEI) during Election Day (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). The voter inserts the ballot into the machine, and the latter scans both sides to generate and store a digital image (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). The figure below is a sample of the official ballot for the 2022 elections.

**MAY 9, 2022 NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS**  
BRUNEI PE, NEGARA BRUNEI DARUSSALAM,  
ASIA PACIFIC  
Type: National and Local





Clustered Precinct ID: 90010001  
Precincts in Cluster:  
0001A

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR VOTING**

(1) Completely blacken the inside of the circle  inside the name of the desired candidate.

(2) Use only the marking pen provided for blackening the circles.

Signature of Chairman

PRESIDENT / Vote for 1			
<input type="radio"/> 1. ABELLA, ERNIE (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 4. GONZALES, NORBERTO (PDSP)	<input type="radio"/> 7. MARCOS, BONGBONG (PPP)	<input type="radio"/> 10. ROBREDO, LENI (IND)
<input type="radio"/> 2. DE GUZMAN, LEODY (PLM)	<input type="radio"/> 5. LACSON, PING (PDR)	<input type="radio"/> 8. MONTEMAYOR, JOSE JR. (DPP)	
<input type="radio"/> 3. DOMACOSO, ISKO MORENO (AKSYON)	<input type="radio"/> 6. MANGONDATO, FAISAL (KTPNAN)	<input type="radio"/> 9. PACQUIAO, MANNY PACMAN (PROMDI)	
VICE PRESIDENT / Vote for 1			
<input type="radio"/> 1. ATIENZA, LITO (PROMDI)	<input type="radio"/> 4. DUTERTE, SARA (LAKAS)	<input type="radio"/> 7. PANGLINAN, KIKO (LP)	
<input type="radio"/> 2. BELLO, WALDEN (PLM)	<input type="radio"/> 5. LOPEZ, MANNY SD (WPP)	<input type="radio"/> 8. SERAPIO, CARLOS (KTPNAN)	
<input type="radio"/> 3. DAVID, RIZALITO (DPP)	<input type="radio"/> 6. ONG, DOC WILLIE (AKSYON)	<input type="radio"/> 9. SOTTO, VICENTE TITO (NPC)	
SENATOR / Vote for 12			
<input type="radio"/> 1. AFLANG, ABNER (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 17. D'ANGELO, DAVID (PLM)	<input type="radio"/> 33. HONASAN, GRINGO (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 49. PADILLA, ROBIN (PDPLBN)
<input type="radio"/> 2. ALBANI, ABRAHAM (WPP)	<input type="radio"/> 18. DE LIMA, LEILA (LP)	<input type="radio"/> 34. HONTVEROS, RISA (AKBAYAN)	<input type="radio"/> 50. PANELO, SAL PANALO (PDPLBN)
<input type="radio"/> 3. ARRANZA, MANG JESS (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 19. DEL ROSARIO, MONSOUR (PDR)	<input type="radio"/> 35. JAVELLANA, RJ (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 51. PIMENTEL, ASTRA (PDPLBN)
<input type="radio"/> 4. BAGULAT, TEDDY (LP)	<input type="radio"/> 20. DIAZ, DING (PPP)	<input type="radio"/> 36. KIRAM, NUR-MAHAL (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 52. PINOL, MANNY (NPC)
<input type="radio"/> 5. BAILEN, AGNES (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 21. DIKNO, CHEL (KANP)	<input type="radio"/> 37. LABOG, ELMER (MGBYN)	<input type="radio"/> 53. RICABLANCA, WILLIE JR. (PM)
<input type="radio"/> 6. BALITA, CARL (AKSYON)	<input type="radio"/> 22. EJERCITO, JV ESTRADA (NPC)	<input type="radio"/> 38. LACSON, KUYA ALEX (KP)	<input type="radio"/> 54. ROQUE, HARRY SPOX (PRP)
<input type="radio"/> 7. BARBO, LUTZ (PDPLBN)	<input type="radio"/> 23. ELEAZAR, GEN. GUILERMO (PDR)	<input type="radio"/> 39. LANGIT, REY (PDPLBN)	<input type="radio"/> 55. SAHIDULLA, LADY ANNE (PDOS)
<input type="radio"/> 8. BAUTISTA, HERBERT BISTEK (NPC)	<input type="radio"/> 24. EREÑO, BRO. ERNIE (PM)	<input type="radio"/> 40. LEGARDA, LOREN (NPC)	<input type="radio"/> 56. SISON, JOPIET (AKSYON)
<input type="radio"/> 9. BELGICA, GRECO (PDOS)	<input type="radio"/> 25. ESCUDERO, CHIZ (NPC)	<input type="radio"/> 41. LIM, AREL (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 57. TEODORO, GIBO (PRP)
<input type="radio"/> 10. BELLO, SILVESTRE JR. (PDPLBN)	<input type="radio"/> 26. ESPIRITU, LUKE (PLM)	<input type="radio"/> 42. MALLILIN, EMILY (PSM)	<input type="radio"/> 58. TRILLANES, ANTONIO IV (LP)
<input type="radio"/> 11. BINAY, JOJO (UNA)	<input type="radio"/> 27. ESTRADA, JINGGOY (JMP)	<input type="radio"/> 43. MARCOLETA, RODANTE (PDPLBN)	<input type="radio"/> 59. TULFO, IDOL RAFFY (IND)
<input type="radio"/> 12. CABONEGRO, ROY (PLM)	<input type="radio"/> 28. FALCONE, BAL FALCON (DPP)	<input type="radio"/> 44. MARCOS, FRANCIS LEO (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 60. VALEROS, REY (IND)
<input type="radio"/> 13. CASTRIGNONES, BRO JOV (PDPLBN)	<input type="radio"/> 29. GADON, LARRY (KBL)	<input type="radio"/> 45. MATULA, SONNY (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 61. VILLANUEVA, JOEL TESABAN (IND)
<input type="radio"/> 14. CAVETANO, ALAN PETER (IND)	<input type="radio"/> 30. GATCHALIAN, WIN (NPC)	<input type="radio"/> 46. MINDALANO-ADAM, MARETA (KTPNAN)	<input type="radio"/> 62. VILLAR, MARK (NP)
<input type="radio"/> 15. CHAVEZ, MELCHOR (WPP)	<input type="radio"/> 31. GORDON, WOW DICK (BYNP)	<input type="radio"/> 47. CLARTE, ATTYDR LEO (BIGOS)	<input type="radio"/> 63. ZUBAGA, CARMEN (IND)
<input type="radio"/> 16. COLMENARES, NERI (MGBYN)	<input type="radio"/> 32. GUTOC, SAMIRA (AKSYON)	<input type="radio"/> 48. PADILLA, DRA. MINGUITA (PDR)	<input type="radio"/> 64. ZUBIRI, MIGZ (IND)

Figure 1: Inquirer.net (source)

In terms of the stand-alone machine, it is important to know that “throughout the voting process until the printing of the initial 8 copies of election returns (ERs), the Precinct Count Optical Scanner (PCOS) machine is not connected to any transmission cable or modem” (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). After the first few ERs are printed, the BEI “connect the links for transmission to eliminate doubts that the PCOS can be manipulated remotely” (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). The figure below shows what does a PCOS machine look like.



Figure 2: ABS-CBN News (source)

With regards to the audit trail, the PCOS machine produces “an audit log which documents and reports the activities processed by the machine at a particular date and time” (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). The Commission will randomly select precincts to generate a random manual audit (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’*

*education*, 2009). In terms of the minimum human intervention, members of the BEI are the only ones responsible for operating the PCOS machine, and the transmission is done electronically (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education*, 2009). Lastly, when it comes to security measures, the AES guarantees the greatest security methods by the use of the following:

- *Use of password and personal identification number (PIN)*
- *Digital signatures of BEI Members*
- *Encryption, the same security system used by banks (i.e., 128-bit encryption, random encryption, no single/master decryption code)*
- *Less-than-2-minute transmission speed*
- *Multiple data source (i.e., paper ballot, digital ballot image, scanned data)*
- *Hard copies for distribution*
  - *30 copies of election return at the precinct level*
  - *30 copies of certificate of canvass at municipal level*
  - *14 copies of certificate of canvass at provincial level*
- *Audit Log*
- *Data storage device*
- *Transmitted data (i.e., results, reports)*
- *Activity reports (i.e., Initialization/Zero Report, Transmission Reports, Audit Log)*
- *Series of systems tests (i.e., mock election, testing and sealing, 2 areas etc.)*
- *Back up batteries (16-hour capacity)*
- *Back up PCOS units*

During the Pre-Election Phase, there is a process of “registration” as well as “testing and sealing of [the] machine” (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). The registration phase respects “RA 8189 or the Continuing Voters’ Registration Act of 1996 and by COMELEC Resolution No. 8514 rules and regulation on the Continuing Registration of Voters” (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). The qualified applicant must personally appear at the local COMELEC office (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). The applicant must verify their identity and residence through their valid ID that includes their picture and signature (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). After the applicant’s status of registration is verified, the applicant will receive and fill out an application form in 3 copies (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). Afterward, the applicant’s biometrics will then be digitally captured, and an acknowledgment receipt will be administered (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). In the case of an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) Law “applies the mechanic in RA 8189 of personal registration” (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). This is done either with the BEI in their place of residence or with the representative of the Commission in the Philippine embassies, consulates, or other foreign service establishments (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009). In the case of testing and sealing of machine, the public should execute test ballots, at least three days before Election Day, to ensure that the PCOS machine is functioning effectively (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’ education*, 2009).

During Election Day, the registered voter goes to his/her polling place where the BEI is responsible for overseeing the elections (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters’*

*education, 2009*). The BEI includes trained and certified personnel by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) to use the AES (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education, 2009*). The voting period starts at 7 am and ends at 6 pm (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education, 2009*). Before the voting process takes place, the BEI “shows the empty ballot box, initializes the PCOS machine, and prints the Initialization Report or the “Zero Report” to [prove] that there is no entry or vote in the machine’s memory” (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education, 2009*).

When it comes to the casting of votes, there are certain steps to be respected and followed. The procedure is as follows (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education, 2009*):

- *The voter looks for his/her name in the list of voters posted outside the polling place.*
- *The voter presents an ID to the BEI in assigned clustered precinct.*
- *Upon verifying the voter's identity, BEI gives voter a ballot containing the list of candidates for various vacant elective positions.*
- *The voter shades, the entire oval corresponding to her/his choice of candidate, using a special marker.*
- *Voter personally feeds the accomplished ballot into the PCOS Machine. The ballot will go straight to a translucent ballot box. The machine will store the data and take a photo of the ballot.*
- *The BEI member marks voter's finger with indelible ink.*

After the voting period ends at 6 pm, there is another process that needs to be done; it involves counting, canvassing, and transmitting the votes (*Your Vote. Our Future. a module for*

*citizen-voters' education, 2009). The latter is a tedious procedure, and it illustrated below (Your Vote. Our Future. a module for citizen-voters' education, 2009):*

- *The BEI executes a closing function on the machine to prevent it from accepting additional ballots/votes. The machine automatically starts automated counting of the votes and prints eight (8) copies of the Election Returns (ERs).*
- *The BEI distributes the initially printed ERs. One copy is posted outside the precinct for public viewing.*
- *The BEI attaches transmission cable/modem to the machine.*
- *The BEI performs transmission function which starts transmittal of data to the (a) Municipal Board of Canvassers (MBC); (b) COMELEC central database; and (c) data server of accredited groups including the Kapisanan ng mga Broadcasters sa Pilipinas (KBP), political parties, and citizens' arm through the machine. After the transmission, BEI performs a function for the machine to print the remaining twenty-two (22) copies of the ERs for other accredited parties.*
- *After collecting the transmitted election returns, the MBC starts its canvassing the results by undergoing the same precinct process: The MBC prints its own Initialization or "Zero" Report; prints eight (8) copies of Municipal Certificate of Canvass (MCOC); attaches transmission cable/modem to the machine; transmits data to the Provincial Board of Canvassers (PBC); and prints the remaining 22 copies of MCOC. The MBC then proclaims the winners.*
- *From the municipal level, the data will be transmitted to the Provincial Board of Canvassers which will print a Zero Report, print eight (8) copies of Provincial COC*



*(PCOC), attach transmission cable/modem, transmit to the National Board of Canvassers (NBC), and print the remaining six (6) PCOC.*

- *The electronically transmitted results will be used as basis for canvassing/consolidation and proclamation of winning candidates for: city/municipal officials; provincial officials; district and party-list representatives; and senators.*
- *Congress will receive electronically transmitted results and will use either the transmitted results or the printed results as basis for the proclamation of the President and Vice-President. The 1987 Philippine Constitution authorized the Congress to promulgate rules for canvassing of results for President and Vice-President.*
- *The data from the COMELEC database will appear in the COMELEC Quick Count in real time as unofficial and partial results.*

According to Petty (2022), there have been problems during elections such as “vote buying”, “political violence”, and sporadic glitches with the PCOS machines. Thus, it is inevitable to have some fear of fraud in terms of the election results. But, Petty (2022) believes that “fraud [...] that would cast doubt on the credibility of polls or their outcome is very unlikely.” Following the Asian Network for Free Elections, which is an independent poll monitor, the Philippines’ most recent elections were “generally free and fair, with turnout remaining high at about 80%” (Petty, 2022). Yet, Wong (2022) sheds light on some of the nuisances in the Philippines’ electoral system “which reveal [the] deeply-rooted problems in Philippine democracy”. According to Wong, these complications include “leaders [being] elected on minority votes”, “a focus on candidates’ personalities rather than platforms”, “political parties serve as candidate-centric, non-ideological alliances”, and “the politics of personal patronage trumps development policies”.

## 2. How do Filipinos Choose their Leaders?

### a. *The Case of the 2016 Presidential Elections*

Considering “the country’s plurality or ‘first-past-the-post’ system, the candidate with the highest number of votes win” (Wong, 2022). Wong (2022) explains the notion of “vote splitting” and discusses how an unpopular candidate, regardless of the latter’s solid voter support, can win the elections based on the rule of minority. In the case of Duterte, he won “not by majority, but with a plurality of only 39 percent, or 16.6 million votes out of 44 million votes cast” (Wong, 2022). To comprehend how Duterte was elected President, Holmes (2016) states that “the 2016 Presidential elections remained personality-oriented, media-driven, and political clan dominated”. Duterte was able to convince the populace by focusing on three various factors, and they are “the clarity of his campaign message”, “significant support from a geographic area and associated ethno-linguistic groups”, and “serious questions of character and competence raised against his opponents” (Holmes, 2016).

According to Holmes (2016), Rodrigo Duterte “was definitely the star of the 2016 election” because he was the first president to originate from Mindanao and to be elected from a local position. Duterte’s presidential campaign was strategic because he emphasized one issue which is “criminality in general, and the pervasiveness of illegal drugs in particular” (Holmes, 2016). Referring to the data presented by Pulse Asia *Pulso ng Bayan* surveys of January, February, and April 2016, shows that “curbing the widespread sale and use of illegal drugs” was the most important issue for Filipinos; a majority of the population believes that the next president should address this dilemma. The results can be seen below:

Table 3. Pulse Asia *Pulso ng Bayan* surveys, January, February and April 2016 (Row in Per Cent)

National Concerns	Surveys		
	January 2016	February 2016	April 2016
Curbing the widespread sale and use of illegal drugs	36	39	41
Improving the pay of workers	38	39	34
Fighting graft and corruption in government	30	30	31
Reducing the poverty of many Filipinos	29	31	30
Controlling inflation	30	34	29
Creating more jobs	26	25	28
Fighting criminality	24	25	28
Enforcing the law on all whether influential or ordinary people	20	18	19
Increasing peace in the country	12	12	13

Note: Most urgent national concerns a presidential candidate should immediately address.  
 Base: Registered Voters with Biometrics.

Figure 3: Sage Journals (source)

Other than Duterte’s memorable “anti-crime message” (Holmes, 2016), Duterte consistently announces publicly that “change is coming”. This was complemented by the slogan *Tapang at Malasakit* (Courageous and Compassionate) (Holmes, 2016). Wong (2022) adds that it is not just about the candidate’s campaign narratives, but it is also about the persona. For instance, the combination of Duterte’s “well-curated ‘strongman’ image” as well as a strong social media campaign pushed him to attain his victory (Wong, 2022). Arugay (2016) describes Duterte as “humble, tough-talking, inarticulate, not well born, foul-mouthed, and allergic to politics in Imperial Manila”. However, Filipinos tend to focus more on the candidate’s charisma and appeal rather than the policy platforms or track record (Wong, 2022). Senator Ronald dela Rosa said that people won’t listen to issues or platform presentations since they would think that the candidate is just all words but no action (Wong, 2022). Unfortunately, Filipinos vote for someone “who will govern them but not necessarily how they will be governed” (Wong, 2022).

Duterte’s personality piqued the curiosity of many Filipinos (Arugay, 2016). So, despite his controversies (i.e. cursing Pope Francis), “Duterte did not experience any significant decline in his pre-election voter support” (Holmes, 2016). His pre-election preference was “higher or close to the voting support of other contenders” (Holmes, 2016). The table below shows “the voting support for Duterte across Pulse Asia’s non-commissioned surveys” (Holmes, 2016).

Table 4. Pre-Election Preference of Rodrigo Roa Duterte, Pulse Asia *Ulat Ng Bayan* and *Pulso Ng Bayan* Surveys, March 2015 to April 2016 (Row in Per Cent)

Area	March 2015	June 2015	Sept 2015	Dec 2015
Philippines	12	15	16	23
National Capital Region	7	11	21	27
Balance of Luzon	4	7	8	13
Visayas	9	13	14	18
Mindanao	34	37	29	43

Area	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	March 2016	April 2016
Philippines	20	21	24	34
National Capital Region	16	23	27	40
Balance of Luzon	8	10	15	22
Visayas	15	19	10	32
Mindanao	48	45	51	58

Figure 4: Sage Journals (source)

Moreover, observing another set of results published by Pulse Asia, it can be deduced how Duterte took the first place when it comes to who performed best in the presidential debate. The latter was read, watched, or listened to by Filipinos; they believed that the debate could potentially influence their votes. The table is as follows:

Table 5. Pulse Asia *Pulso ng Bayan* 16-20 April 2016 Survey on the Second Presidential Debate (Row in Per Cent)

Candidate	Location					Socio-economic class		
	RP	NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Duterte, Rodrigo	34	37	26	23	58	46	32	39
Poe, Grace	28	23	32	29	21	22	29	24
Roxas, Mar	16	8	17	27	8	17	16	12
Binay, Jojo	11	10	13	14	3	6	11	10
Defensor-Santiago, Miriam	3	6	2	2	2	6	3	1
I don't have enough knowledge to give an opinion	6	8	7	5	3	2	6	9
Don't know/Refused/ None	3	6	3	0	4	1	3	4

Note: Question: In your opinion, among the presidential candidates, who do you think did well in the debate?  
Base: Aware of the presidential debate, 65% of total respondents.

Figure 5: Sage Journals (source)

Sinpeng et al. (2020) declare that “the 2016 presidential contest is widely considered as the first ‘social media election’ in the Philippines.” However, the role of social media in amplifying Duterte’s chances to win President is quite questionable, especially since “Duterte himself was not actively engaged” (Sinpeng et al., 2020). Ressa (2016) explains that when he came into office, he had “an army of dedicated social media followers who embodied Duterte’s own brutish sensibilities and dominated the virtual political landscape” (Sinpeng et al., 2020). Ressa investigated Duterte’s campaign and explained how “Duterte was the only candidate who took [social media] seriously” (Lamble & Mohan, 2016). This is mainly because “they had no money and social media is essentially free” (*Trolls and triumph: A digital battle in the Philippines*, 2016). Considering that Facebook is the “predominant platform in the Philippines” (Bernido, 2022), Duterte took advantage of this. Consequently, “Duterte was able to gain the highest number of likes, engagement, and comments per post” (Sinpeng et al., 2020). Hence, Duterte’s fan base grew

by 99 percent (Sinpeng et al., 2020). Bernido (2022) adds that with Duterte’s limited resources, his campaign team “also equipped online volunteers and internet trolls to harass the opposition”. In fact, a researcher from De La Salle University (DLSU) analyzed that this widespread fake news, as well as internet propaganda, was prominent in the 2016 elections (Bernido, 2022). Some examples of Facebook posts can be seen below:



Figure 6: BBC (source)

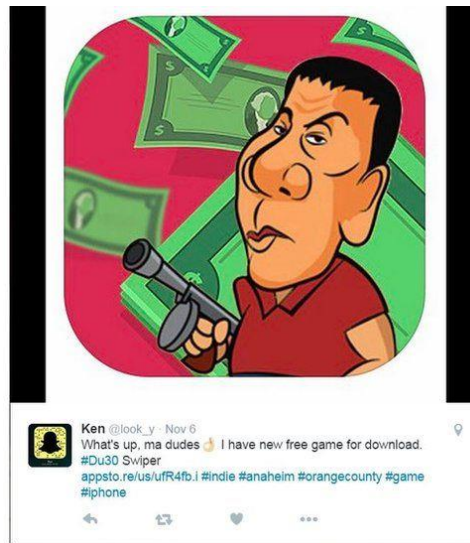


Figure 7: BBC (source)

*b. The Case of the 2022 Presidential Elections*

The 2022 Presidential elections are incredibly significant in terms of the Philippines' history (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022). According to Aries Arguay, a University of the Philippines Diliman political scientist, “this election is really a good versus evil campaign” mainly because Duterte symbolized “dynasty, autocracy, and impunity”; whereas, Robredo represented “integrity, accountability, and democracy” (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022). In this election, 10 candidates are competing for the presidency, but only 2 candidates really mattered (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022).

Marcos Jr. is one of the 2 notable candidates who is taking the lead in opinion polls. Marcos Jr. is a 64-year-old politician and “the son of the former dictator ousted in the People Power Revolution of 1986” (Myers, 2022). Referring to Marcos Jr.'s biography, he attended a private school in England, called Worth School, and he studied at Oxford University (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022). He repeatedly insisted that he “obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) from St. Edmund Hall” (Britton, 2021). Yet, Britton (2021) explains that Oxford University confirmed that “this claim is partly false”. Oxford University declared that “he did not complete his degree, but was awarded a special diploma in Social Studies in 1978” (Britton, 2021). Marcos Jr. entered the field of politics in 1980 as a governor of Ilocos Norte, and in 1992 he was elected to Congress again for the same province (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022). Although Marcos Jr. was found guilty of tax evasion, it did not jeopardize his political career (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022). In 2010, he was elected as senator, and he ran for Vice President but was unsuccessful due to Robredo's victory (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022).

It is also important to note that, Marcos Jr.'s running mate is Sara Duterte-Carpio, the daughter of former President Duterte; she is running for Vice President (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022).

Leni Robredo, on the other hand, is the other candidate who is of great importance in the 2022 Presidential elections. Robredo, who was Vice President at that time, was “running on a platform of good governance and an end to corruption” (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022). Robredo “[banked] on her millions of passionate volunteers to pip Marcos at the post” (Esguerra, 2022). Additionally, she organized rallies across the country and conducted what she calls a “people to people” campaign, which includes “going house to house, organizing food programs and health clinics as well as legal counseling” (Esguerra, 2022). According to Ratcliffe (2022), Leni Robredo is “a reformist who wanted to pass an anti-dynasty law”. In fact, Cleve Arguelles, an academic at De La Salle University, supports the latter by discussing how Robredo’s grassroots movements “offers a powerful alternative to the traditional ways of doing politics in the Philippines, where people are usually paid to attend rallies rather than the other way around” (Esguerra, 2022).

Scrutinizing Marcos Jr.’s campaign, he focused on “Unity” and even called his supporters “Uniteam” (Patag, 2022). He said that unity has become his advocacy because he genuinely believes that unity is the first and most important step to take to recover from the crisis we are in (Patag, 2022). According to Patag (2022), Marcos kept on reuttering the word “pagkakaisa” (or unity) more than 20 times for the 15 minutes he spoke. However, “concrete plans towards that unity were lacking in his speech” (Patag, 2022). *Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant* (2022) supported this idea by declaring that he “has provided little detail on his policies and has



avoided media interviews and debates”. As a matter of fact, Marcos Jr. was criticized for “skipping some of the presidential debates” (Mercado, 2022). He justified his actions by saying that these media debates are not productive and constructive since they are merely repetitive (Mercado, 2022). He was mainly talking about the controversial topic of his father, the late president, and former dictator (Mercado, 2022). He said, “I’ve been answering these questions for 35 years why do I have to answer them again and nothing’s going to change their opinion. My opinion isn’t going to change” (Mercado, 2022). It is significant to mention that social media played a huge role in Marcos Jr.’s campaign (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022).

Considering that Filipinos are active users of social media, Marcos Jr. took advantage of the latter. For example, “Twitter suspended more than 300 accounts promoting his campaign, which it said breached rules on spam and manipulation” (*Why the 2022 Philippines election is so significant*, 2022). He weaponized social media “to turn him into a national hero, claiming that he brought a ‘golden age’ to the Philippines” (*How Marcos Jr weaponised social media to rewrite history and win power*, 2022). Examples of propagandistic content would be “glossy TikTok clips showing ‘fun times’ during the Marcos era to Youtube videos declaring there was no martial law” (*How Marcos Jr weaponised social media to rewrite history and win power*, 2022).

To understand the voting behavior in the 2022 elections, Madeloso et al. (2023) conducted a study to understand how Filipinos choose their leaders. Results show that the voting behavior of the respondents were consistently “linked to the personal and leadership characteristics of the national candidates, as well as to the electoral processes surrounding their election, such as political machinery, popularity, and endorsement” (Madeloso et al., 2023). Furthermore, the respondents prioritized the fact that “a national candidate [...] is a holder of a college degree as

his/her personal characteristic and being honest and trustworthy as his/her leadership characteristic” (Madeloso et al., 2023). They also prefer someone “who is clear on his/her priorities, as well as one who is being talked about in their locality” (Madeloso et al., 2023). Lastly, the respondents “do not give importance to a candidate who is coming from a well-known family or relatives, as a personal characteristic, and were unlikely to be influenced by the endorsement of a church” (Madeloso et al., 2023). It is essential to note that the study was conducted on 41 college students, who study Social Studies at the Notre Dame of Midsayap College, aged 18 to 23 years old, mostly females, and were all registered voters (Madeloso et al., 2023). Therefore, it is not representational of the whole Filipino population.

According to *Halalan 2022 Philippine election results: ABS-CBN news* (n.d.), Marcos Jr. won the 2022 Presidential elections with a landslide of 31,104,175 votes. While, Leni Robredo only attained 14,822,051 votes (*Halalan 2022 Philippine election results: ABS-CBN news*, n.d.). Indeed, “the Philippines election results is a win for dynasty politics” (Ratcliffe, 2022). The 2022 elections prove “how people’s ‘emotional beliefs’ influence their voting preferences” (Magcamit, 2022). Comparing the political campaigns of Marcos Jr. and Robredo, Filipinos believe that if they gave the former the power to “bring [...] unifying leadership back to our country”, Marcos Jr. may be able to fulfill that promise (Magcamit, 2022). Whereas, if they voted for Robredo, the one who promised “to provide an inclusive government”, she may not honor her words (Magcamit, 2022). Hence, Filipinos disregarded Marcos Jr.’s accusations of being “corrupt, a pathological liar, or a morally bankrupt individual” (Magcamit, 2022). Instead, they projected onto Robredo by calling her “stupid, hypocrite, and fake” (Magcamit, 2022). Generally speaking, Magcamit (2022) believes that “emotions are some of the most powerful engines driving voters’ decisions, leading many Filipinos to defiantly support Marcos Jr.” Additionally, Marcos’ supporters believe that they

must stay loyal to him and his family, which indicates “how clashing emotions and emotional beliefs” are the driving forces of selecting, interpreting, and assessing the evidence of Filipino voters on the Marcos family’s history (Magcamit, 2022).

### 3. Voters and Women’s Rights: Why Women Leaders Still Need to Prove Themselves

According to Encinas-Franco (2021), “women’s participation in politics is important in democracies”. Evidence shows that the more women participate politically, the better results are in terms of social welfare (Encinas-Franco, 2021). Moreover, Encinas-Franco (2021) believes that women’s increased participation can help normalize women’s leadership. However, there are several factors that inhibit women’s access to politics; these elements include the following: “the lack of well-developed political parties”, “masculinist campaign strategies”, and “traditional norms about women” (Encinas-Franco, 2021). According to Statista, the House of Representatives is composed of only 28% women, and the Senate only has 29% women (Del Monte, 2022). Del Monte (2022) states that these percentages are “still far from the 30% which the UN recommends as ‘the minimum proportion of women in leadership positions, with a view to achieving equal representation’”.

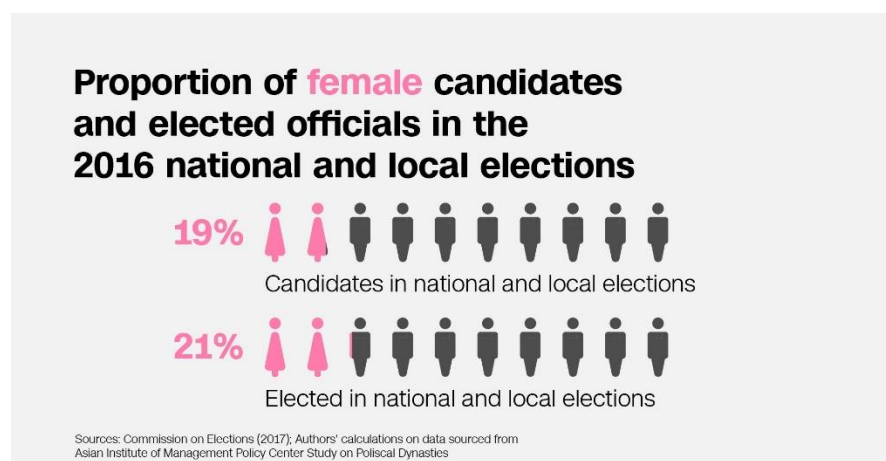


Figure 8: CNN Philippines (source)

In the 2022 elections, two women were competing for the top two national positions; they “come from divergent political paths, but both are being forced to navigate misogynistic stereotypes by the constant sexist remarks of outgoing president Rodrigo Duterte” (Remillano, 2022). Duterte thinks that women are not capable of handling those types of jobs (Remillano, 2022). Concerning the previous example, a notion called, violence against women in politics (VAWP), can be derived; VAWP is a concept developed by a feminist scholar named, Mona Lena Krook (Encinas-Franco, 2021). Krook refers VAWP to as a “problem with no name” because women in politics are hesitant to report it (Encinas-Franco, 2021). All sorts of threat, intimidation, and violence (i.e. “physical violence, semiotic violence, or using language of visuals to slut-shame, ridicule, mansplain women politicians”) are all part of VAWP (Encinas-Franco, 2021). The Duterte administration is an accurate example where VAWP is particularly evident (Encinas-Franco, 2021).

Comparing Robredo and Sara, a clear disparity can be observed. Robredo depicts herself “as a loving and empathetic mother willing to fight for her children (nation)” (Encinas-Franco, 2021). She uses the term *laban* (fight) to fight against patriarchy and to eventually attain freedom (Del Monte, 2022). Robredo’s campaign color is pink, but some may associate the latter with femininity and not something that would battle authoritarianism (Encinas-Franco, 2021). On the other hand, Sara Duterte “appears to be on the masculine side” (Del Monte, 2022). Ian Layugan, a writer and researcher says, “Sara cut her hair into a boyish bob, rides motorcycles, and shows off her tattoo [...] These all fit into the patriarchal narrative” (Del Monte, 2022). Unfortunately, Filipino voters seem to also comply to such gender stereotypes making it very difficult to value women leaders.

In accordance to Remillano (2022), the Philippines is a country that has double standards and traditional gender roles which hold on to the idea that “women are expected to be smart but

timid, an effective follower but not a leader”. Studies have shown that “over half of Filipinos believe men make better political figures than women”, which reiterates the patriarchy (Remillano, 2022). Del Monte (2022) declares that “women are educated to be leaders, but they do not become leaders”. Economist Bernardo Villegas said, “It’s cultural that women selflessly sacrifice themselves to devoting more of their time to family”. Not being able to engage in paid labor or working longer hours places a significant burden on women; it is not a matter of choice, but of destiny (Del Monte, 2022).

Although the Philippines has been praised for its progress in terms of gender equality, there is still work to be done (Del Monte, 2022). There remains a huge proportion of women “who are victims of domestic violence, economic disadvantages, discrimination, exploitation and prostitution” (Del Monte, 2022). Therefore, Curato says that “there's no good reason to celebrate women in power, if these women do nothing for women who are suffering”. Overall, the Philippines should invest in its education system to enlighten its people about the importance of choosing a leader who is competent enough to run a country (Del Monte, 2022). Souad Lundgren & Petrosiute (2016) say that “the more women there are in politics the more they will fight for women’s rights” because of their larger knowledge of values and experiences compared to men. The country has already “produced empowered and deserving women”; thus, they should be given the opportunity to lead it (Del Monte, 2022).

Focusing on the 2022 elections, Sara Duterte won Vice President with 31,561,948 votes against her competitor Kiko Pangilinan with only 9,232,883 votes (*Halalan 2022 Philippine election results: ABS-CBN news*, n.d.). In other words, the Marcos-Duterte duo gain leadership against Robredo-Pangilinan. Yet, it is interesting to ponder how Sara Duterte prevailed over her female competitor, Leni Robredo. Such a fact leads us to deduce a strong dynamic between dynasty

politics, patriarchal stereotypes, and voting behavior. Personally speaking, Sara Duterte had great assets which pushed her to win first place as Vice President. First, she is the daughter of Rodrigo Duterte, the president who was loved by the masses due to his strong and charismatic character. This did not only allow her to garner a large proportion of loyal Duterte voters, but it also enabled them to feel like voting for her would resume the political legacy of her father. Second, Sara Duterte's collaboration with Marcos Jr. increased her appeal to Filipino voters. The latter was convinced that the Marcos-Duterte partnership would be ideal since they can lead the country with their experience and fresh perspectives. Third and last, Filipinos believed that Sara Duterte's assertive and masculine personality played a significant role in making her unique, strong, and capable; such a character broke what society calls as traditional gender roles. Overall, Sara Duterte had a number of advantages against Robredo as dynasty politics and patriarchal stereotypes shaped Filipino's voting behavior and the country's political landscape at large.

### **III. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study comprehensively explored the relationship between how Filipinos vote and the degradation of women's rights in the Philippines, particularly under the administrations of Rodrigo Duterte and Ferdinand Marcos Jr. By executing a careful analysis of the secondary sources, research has successfully shown the complex dynamics that strengthen this relationship and shed light on the role of illiberal democracy in shaping these outcomes. The research question – “How does Filipino voting behavior influence the degradation of women's rights in the Philippines, with a comparative analysis of the Duterte and Marcos Jr. administrations, and what role does the rise of illiberal democracy play in shaping this relationship?” – has been effectively addressed throughout this study. It can be deduced that while both governments have

demonstrated signs of “illiberal democracies”, their impacts on women's rights have been expressed via different mechanisms.

Under the Duterte administration, anti-genderism was prevalent in the form of an objectification culture and a controversial stance on gender-related legislations. Examples include Duterte admitting “his womanizing ways on national TV” (Tan, 2016), making “inappropriate comments about Leni Robredo’s legs, his female Vice President”, “joking about raping [the] Miss Universe [beauty queen]”, and “equating having a second wife to keeping a ‘spare tire’ in the trunk of a car” (Haynes, 2018). In terms of the SOGIE Bill, Duterte does not declare it as urgent (Ranada, 2019). Unfortunately, these were all reinforced and exacerbated by Duterte’s tyrannical War on Drugs, affecting women and families disproportionately. For instance, children of those who were killed during the War on Drugs, suffer from great psychological distress due to witnessing the violence, economic hardships as they lost their families’ breadwinners, and dislocation from their homes and schools. Furthermore, Duterte’s conflicts with prominent women figures further emphasized the gendered dynamics at play. The former president had various issues specifically with Maria Ressa, as she led the investigation on the extrajudicial killings; Leila De Lima, as she was outspoken in denouncing Duterte’s leadership, especially of his War on Drugs; and Leni Robredo, as she was critical of Duterte’s tyrannical war on drugs, his foreign policy with China, and his COVID-19 management (Morales & Lema, 2021).

On the other hand, Marcos Jr.'s time in leadership is still early, but he illustrates an area of potential concern with regards to prioritizing women's rights, particularly within the context of the SOGIE bill. LGBTQ+ groups expressed their perseverance to the President to fully implement the bill. But, the “SOGIESC Equality Act was again pushed back to the committee level by Senate Majority Leader Joel Villanueva” (*LGBTQ+ Group urges Marcos to reveal stance on SOGIE Bill*,

2023) since he said that the measure needed “further study” (*LGBTQ+ Group urges Marcos to reveal stance on SOGIE Bill, 2023*). Moreover, in Marcos’ second SONA, he the masses by not mentioning anything related to women and gender rights, minorities, and the SOGIE Bill (Abad, 2023).

The rise of illiberal democracy, which was seen in both administrations, has led us to believe that such a concept fabricated an environment where certain women’s rights are prone to degradation. The concentration of power in leadership together with the shifting political landscape has repercussions on democratic checks and balances that are pivotal for promoting and protecting gender equality. Overall, this study unraveled various factors that lead to the decline of women’s rights in the Philippines, with Filipino voting behavior being the main reason. These findings create opportunities for more research and policy considerations, underlining the need for ample strategies to defend women's rights in the context of evolving political dynamics. As the Philippines keeps moving forward, comprehending these connections is crucial for pursuing inclusive governance and gender equality.

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