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The controversial legacy of the late dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos
and the 2022 Philippine presidential election: A landslide victory
for Ferdinand BongBong Marcos Jr (BBM)

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Abstrakt

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit den Wahlen auf den Philippinen im Jahr 2022. Für viele sollten die Ergebnisse eine historische Zäsur markieren: Der Sohn des ehemaligen philippinischen Diktators Ferdinand Marcos sollte als der 17. Präsident in die Geschichte des Landes eingehen und folglich für die kommenden sechs Jahre über die Geschicke des Landes verfügen. Senator Ferdinand ‘BongBong’ Marcos (BBM) Jr hatte bereits im Jahr 2016 als Vizepräsident kandidiert, war jedoch nur knapp an seinem Vorhaben gescheitert. Mit ihm ins Amt als Vizepräsidenten hatte es außerdem seine damalige Verbündete Sara Duterte geschafft. Sara, wie auch BongBong, sind für ihre jeweiligen kontrovers diskutierten familiären Hintergründe bekannt; beide gehören sie zwei der mächtigsten Familiendynastien auf den Philippinen an. Der Name Duterte hatte vor allem in jüngster Vergangenheit vermehrt für Aufruhr gesorgt. Es war nämlich dem zu diesem Zeitpunkt scheidendem Staatsoberhaupt Rodrigo Duterte, dem Vater von Sara, zuzuordnen, dass mit seinem Amtsantritt des Jahres 2016 eine blutige Anti-Drogenkampagne unter der Prämisse des sogenannten ‘war on drugs’ von nationalem Ausmaß entfacht worden war. Der Name ‘Marcos’ scheint auf den Philippinen hingegen seit jeher allgegenwärtig. Der verstorbene Ferdinand Marcos und seine heutige Witwe Imelda waren in den 1960er Jahren zu internationalem ‘Ruhm’ gekommen, zuletzt auch durch des Paares gute Beziehungen zu den politischen Schwergewichten jener Zeit. Dazu gehörten unter anderem Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, Ronald Reagan, oder aber auch der Diktator Muammar al-Gaddafi. Waren die beiden Marcoses (allen voran Imelda) anfangs wahrscheinlich noch durch ihren Glamour und Extravaganz aufgefallen, so würde dieser Ruf zukünftig in eine andere Richtung ausschlagen, als sich der Politikstil des damals noch jungen Präsidenten Marcos über die zwanzig Jahre seiner Amtszeit ab 1965 hinweg als durch und durch autoritär entpuppen sollte. Als dann schließlich 1986 sein Regime zu Fall kam, würde den Marcoses fortan ein ganz anderer Status zu Teil werden. Die voerst auf unbestimmte Zeit ins Exil verbannte Familie, hatte unter der Betitelung ‘greatest robbery of a government’ den Einzug in das Guinness Buch der Weltrekorde gefunden. Erst kürzlich war dieser Eintrag entfernt worden, und es drängt sich die Frage auf, wie eine solche Kehrtwende möglich war, die im Jahr 2022 mit der Präsidentschaftswahl Ferdinand Jr’s den Zenith erreichen würde.

Abstract

This thesis examines the political landscape of the Philippines with a particular focus on the election of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 and the subsequent resurgence of Ferdinand "BongBong" Marcos Jr. in 2022. It investigates the historical contextualisation of the Marcos dictatorship (1965–1986) and its enduring legacy, particularly in relation to human rights violations, corruption, and the dynamics of elite power. A detailed analysis of the patron-client political framework and contemporary governance reveals the complexities of dynastic politics and socio-economic inequalities, which have been exacerbated by neoliberal policies.

Furthermore, an evaluation of the strategic communication and disinformation strategies deployed during the 2022 electoral campaign sheds light on the Marcos-Duterte alliance and the role of social media in influencing public opinion. By examining the interconnection between historical narratives and contemporary electoral strategies, this research illuminates the impact of authoritarian nostalgia and digital propaganda on voter behaviour in the context of persistent economic disparities.

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List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBM	BongBong Marcos
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Dr	Doctor
EDSA	Epifanio de los Santos Avenue
EOI	Export-oriented industrialization
FB	Facebook
FEU	Far Eastern University
GDP	Gross domestic product
GMA	Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo
HDI	Human development index
IMF	International Monetary Fund
Inc	Incorporated
ISI	Import substitution industrialization
Jr	Junior
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PARI	Pulse Asia Research Inc.
PBBM	President BongBong Marcos
Pcf/ PCF	Patron-client framework (patron-client, factional framework)
PHP/ Php	Philippine peso
PLM	Party of the Labouring Masses
PR	Public relations
PVA	Phone-verified account
SAL	Structural Adjustment Loan
SEA	Southeast Asia
SMS	Short Message Service
Sr	Senior
SWS	Social Weather Stations
TFDP	Task Force Detainees of the Philippines

US	United States
USA	United States of America
USD/ US\$	United States dollar

1 Introduction

1.1 Elections in the Philippines since 2016

In the first half of 2019, three key Southeast Asian countries conducted elections: Thailand held a parliamentary balloting in March; Indonesia held presidential, legislative, and local polls in April; and the Philippines held congressional midterms and a large number of local contests in May. The news from these elections is troubling. Democratic prospects in the region were already bleak, and the results of the voting arguably made them worse: In each of these three countries, authoritarian or at least increasingly illiberal rule appears to be consolidating. (Thompson 2019: 149)

Those with an affinity for Southeast Asia (SEA) are undoubtedly aware of the Philippines, an island nation that has been the subject of international media attention in recent years. Above all, it was the harrowing accounts and images of activists and journalists reporting on the so-called ‘war on drugs’ that were widely disseminated.

A teenage [...] lies on a mortuary table, dead from multiple gunshot wounds. A woman cradles her partner under the harsh light of television cameras, beside a piece of cardboard that labels him a “pusher[¹].” A sister, far from home, uses video-calling on her smartphone to mourn with relatives during the funeral of her brother. (Katz 2023)

The grievances in question are believed to have their origins eight years ago, when a controversial figure, branded a populist and the “Trump of the East” (Curato 2016: 92), entered the sphere of national politics thereby becoming the subject of global affairs.²

Thirty years after the ouster of the Marcos dictatorship, the specter of authoritarianism threatens to undo the limited gains of democratization in the Philippines. Reflective of the democratic rollback in the region and given the resilience of authoritarian electoral systems in Southeast Asia, dictatorship remains to be an attractive alternative for the Filipino elite and middle class longing to short cut the country’s economic development. The unexpected [election of Rodrigo Duterte to the presidency in 2016] and the near victory of Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos Jr. for vice president, reinforced this shift in the political mood of the electorate toward a return to a semblance of ‘strong man’. (Teehankee/ Calimbahin 2020: 110)

1 Colloquial term for drug dealer.

2 In the same year, so-called “new right populist politician[s]” (Ramos 2021: 310) gained significant public support and were therefore elected to high-ranking government positions in various countries around the world (Ravanilla/ Sexton/ Haim 2022). This is why 2016 has also been described as a “global wave of populism.” (Taylor 2016) However, according to Carpenter (2017), the resurgence of populism is by no means a novel occurrence, noting that it has been a long-standing phenomenon.

1.1.1 Victory of presidential candidate Rodrigo Duterte

Rodrigo ‘Rody’ Roa Duterte was inaugurated as the 16th President of the Republic of the Philippines³ on May 30th, 2016 (GOVPH n.d.). His electoral victory was somewhat unexpected for many fellow citizens, who may have initially been taken aback by the outcome.

During his tenure as mayor of Davao City⁴, which spanned more than twenty-two years, he had already become nationally renowned for his reckless crackdown on “criminals, drug users, and Communist rebels.” (Garrido 2022: 674) Moreover, reports of so-called ‘extrajudicial executions’ (or ‘extralegal killings’) allegedly being carried out under his supervision proliferated, earning him the moniker the “Punisher.” (Curato 2016: 92)

Since the People Power Revolution (EDSA 1) that toppled the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, the Philippines has frequently cycled through recurrent reforms and populism. But changes being introduced by the Duterte administration seem unusually deep and far-reaching—suggesting a concerted attempt to reorganize, or indeed replace, the liberal state-society relations that previously characterized the post-1986 political settlement. (Deinla/ Dressel 2019: 2)

In view of various accounts, the time of the “unfulfilled promise of elite democracy” (Aranda 2021: 90) will have ended with the arrival of 2016. Instead, a revival of Filipino nationalism seems to signal an impending paradigm shift in which antipathy to democratic liberalism was paired with anti-establishment ‘populist rhetoric’ that came to inform political discourse, paraphrasing Aranda (2021).

In the course of his perceived illiberal “strongman rule” (Lema/ Allard: 2022), the Duterte legislature reportedly violated the principles of liberal democracy and the institutions that uphold it, presiding over a wave of violence that was to attain a scale unprecedented in the nation’s immediate democratic experience. The preponderance of such an assault may have occurred under the auspices of the relentless government-led anti-narcotic offensive. (Garrido 2022: 647).

Against this backdrop, the Duterte presidency has been described “as a point of historical rupture, rather than merely another instance of populism sweeping the world.” (Deinla/ Dressel

3 For those readers who may not be familiar with the geographic location: The Philippines is situated in the western Pacific Ocean. The entire archipelago consists of more than 7600 islands (roughly 880 inhabited) and is home to approximately 106 million people speaking 170 different languages or ‘dialects’, a place of great ethno-cultural diversity (Wetzlmeier 2020: 10).

4 Sitting in the heart of Mindanao, the Philippines’ southernmost terrain, Davao is the largest dense urban center in the area.

2019: 2) In other accounts, Duterte's rise to power "signaled the pendulum swing in public sentiment towards authoritarian nostalgia." (Teehankee 2023: 22) In turn, future voting habits and the political direction of the entire region may prove to be markedly reshaped as a consequence. For Marco Garrido, author and associate professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, it fell to him to reintroduce "openness to certain authoritarian forms of government" (Garrido 2022: 673) as a viable political stance for the majority.

The election as president of Rodrigo Duterte, who openly dismisses democracy and human rights as "principles imposed by the West via modern imperialism", represents a marked illiberal turn in Philippine politics in 2016, thirty years after the end of president Ferdinand Marcos' economically debilitating and politically oppressive authoritarian rule. (Ramos 2021: 310)

In context, the announcement of 'BongBong'—the son of Ferdinand E. Marcos, the Philippines' late dictator with a reputation for plunder, and his wife's extravagant shoe collection, who had brutally ruled the country with an iron fist decades earlier, to succeed the outgoing President Duterte in 2022—was not entirely surprising or unexpected.

1.1.2 UniTeam—Ferdinand BongBong Marcos Jr political comeback

The Philippines held its 17th national (presidential) elections on the 9th of May, 2022. After all, it was former senator Ferdinand 'BongBong' Romualdez Marcos Jr ('BBM'⁵) who won by an overwhelming margin (President Republic of the Philippines n.d.). In total, he was supported by 31.6 million Filipino citizens "or as 58.77 percent of ballots cast," (Iglesias 2022: 576) granting Marcos Jr "the strongest popular-vote mandate in decades." (Wenzon 2022)

In the meantime, his political affiliate Sara Zimmerman Duterte-Carpio ('Inday Sara'), daughter of outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte, was inaugurated as vice president.⁶ In preparation for the impending voting season, she will have joined forces with BBM in 2021, subsequently operating as the UniTeam Alliance (Buan 2022).

Her approval rating among the electorate was even higher than that of her running mate. In all, she was the favored choice of 32.2 million Filipino nationals (equivalent to 61.53 percent of the total balloting) (Yang 2022).

⁵ Since assuming the role of president, BBM has also been referred to as 'PBBM.'

⁶ In the Philippines, the president and vice president are elected concurrently, yet independently of each other.

Broadly speaking, both candidates “scored landslide victories [...] forging a crucial alliance and running on a message of unity that also helped many allies win seats in the legislature and local government positions.” (Aljazeera 2022)

Nevertheless, the final election outcome was met with considerable controversy and concern. Given BongBong’s ‘infamous political heritage’ derived from his status as the descendant and namesake of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, the new president had eventually become the center of debate. Yet, despite the pervasive human rights violations perpetrated in the name of his family, the “younger Marcos has done little to distance himself from the legacy of his parents, instead opting to lean into it. He’s called his father a ‘political genius.’” (Westfall 2022)

1.2 Research question(s)

The circumstances surrounding the Marcos-Duterte unprecedented electoral victory, set against the backdrop of the candidates’ preexisting adverse reputation and controversy, continue to perplex analysts and observers alike. Indeed, as a field of ongoing inquiry, it remains a subject of discourse and debate. “How, some asked, could the son of the former autocrat, Ferdinand Marcos, a man who suspended elections, eroded checks and balances, curtailed media freedom, violated human rights, and engaged in rampant corruption, win office so convincingly?” (Dulay et al. 2023: 86)

In the following chapters, an attempt will be made to provide a comprehensive analysis from a variety of perspectives, as the forthcoming master’s thesis is intended to provide a greater insight into recent events or developments in the Philippines. All in all, the present author has spent about two years in the Philippines, which eventually led to a personal interest in the current issue.

Notwithstanding the ongoing controversy surrounding the Marcos dynasty, how to explain the overwhelming electoral success of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos’ only son, Ferdinand BongBong Marcos Jr (BBM) in the 9th of May 2022 Philippine presidential election? What factors were instrumental in his political success?

1.3 Concept, outline and objective

In light of the recent developments in the Philippines, it is unsurprising that a sizeable number of publications have been dedicated to this matter. Keeping this in mind, the study can only present a synthesis of the most relevant contributions.

In order to approach the multifaceted research question, selected online newspaper articles from three different media companies were used as a first reference point. Respectively, news reports published on the internet by *Al Jazeera*, *Rappler*, and *Reuters* between September 1st, 2011, and December 31st, 2022 (01.09.2021 – 31.12.2022), and retrieved via the search terms ‘BongBong Marcos Jr won elections reasons why’ or ‘BongBong Ferdinand Marcos Jr presidential elections’ were subjected to a comprehensive analysis.

The selection of the news agencies was based on the following considerations. Primarily, it was essential to incorporate a ‘Filipino perspective,’ which is why the Manila-based digital media company for investigative journalism Rappler was included (Rappler 2024). On the other hand, it was imperative to encompass a vast array of viewpoints, which is why two of the world’s leading international mass media outlets emerged as the most suitable choices: Al Jazeera, a Qatari media conglomerate from Doha which is partly financed by the state (Al-jazeera 2024), and the British newswire service Reuters with its headquarters in Toronto (Britannica 2024).

As of July the 8th, 2024, the online search yielded a total of 130 results⁷, of which 122 were web newspaper articles. The remaining eight findings consisted of either videos (documentaries) or overviews. Only 56 of these were topic-related, while the remaining 66 were deemed irrelevant. Finally, central themes and related claims or statements were identified through a systematic analysis of the subject-relevant contributions. In a further step, the frequency of occurrence was reviewed in order to ascertain the degree of relevance.

The most central arguments and/or hypotheses derived (deduced) were then utilized as the basis for the formulation of overarching thematic blocks, which ultimately exerted a pivotal impact on the structure and the elaboration of further research.

7 A total of 60 results were returned by the Aljazeera website, 58 by Rappler, and only 12 by Reuters.

2 Dictatorship under Ferdinand Marcos

2.1 Ascent to power

In 1965, Ferdinand Edralin Marcos was appointed the 10th President of the Philippines and assumed control of the Malacañang (Presidential) Palace⁸ in the capital city of (Metro) Manila. The ultimate consequence of his ascension to leadership was the establishment of a historical landmark that facilitated the advent of an authoritarian regime, “toppling what was thought to be the most stable democratic government in Southeast Asia.” (Crowther 1986: 339)

Despite promises to change the country for the better by establishing his self-proclaimed ‘New Society’, Marcos would eventually instrumentalize the state apparatus for personal gains. He thus has leveraged his influence to consolidate power and advance his personal agenda at the Filipino populace’s expense. In this way, he reached a previously unattained milestone, “accomplish[ing] something unprecedented in the history of the Philippine Republic: reelection.” (McCoy 2017: 27)

During the 1969 campaign, Marcos stumped vigorously, reaching even remote villages to personally place a check for PHP 2,000⁹ in the hands of each barrio captain¹⁰, obligating them, within the country’s political culture, to use every possible means to deliver a winning margin. This strategy cost the Marcos campaign an estimated USD 50 million, far more than the USD 34 million Richard Nixon had spent to win the US presidency just a year earlier [...]. In the aftermath of this costly flood of cash, the Philippine peso lost half its value, government services were slashed, and the economy contracted. (McCoy 2017: 27)

2.2 The martial law regime

In 1972, in response to intensifying criticism and political opposition, President Marcos issued Proclamation No. 1081, placing the entire nation under martial law¹¹ in order to bolster his executive sovereignty by enlisting the cooperation of the military in light of the height-

8 Official residence and main office of the Philippine president.

9 It is noteworthy that in 1969, PHP2000 (Philippine pesos) was roughly equivalent to US\$510 (US dollars) (Antweiler 2024). Based on the current exchange rate, the total cost of PHP2000 would be approximately US\$35.

10 The position of the highest elected official in a ‘barangay’ (which translates to ‘community’ in *Tagalog*, colloquially also referred to as ‘Filipino’, the national language of the Philippines).

11 Martial law is defined as the replacement of civilian government by military rule and the suspension of civilian legal processes in favor of military powers.

ened uncertainty at the time (Official Gazette 1972). “Operating under the Orwellian rubric of ‘constitutional authoritarianism,’ Marcos used his martial law powers under the 1935 Constitution and manipulated the passage of the 1973 Constitution to provide himself extraordinary powers.” (Teehankee/ Calimbahin 2020: 107) For he had finally conjured upon himself a new era, ushering in the Fourth Republic of the Philippines (1972 – 1986). After all, the Marcos administration effectively repudiated the post-war democratic ‘ancien régime’ and supplanted it with a new order based on his personal model (and politically advantageous to him).

To justify such radical intervention (‘Marcos Martial Law’), which literally meant absolute rule, he proclaimed a ‘revolution from the center,’ invoking the urgency of protecting the nation from an ostensible “gigantic communist conspiracy,”¹² (Overholt 1986: 1140) while emancipating the Filipino populace from the clutches of right-wing extremists, who were represented by the oligarchy and elites (Teehankee/ Calimbahin 2020: 107 f.).

It may therefore come as a surprise to learn with the passing of decades that Ferdinand Marcos’ only son, BongBong Marcos Jr, would once again reintroduce this revisionist historical account in an attempt to legitimize his father’s behavior. More on this shall be addressed on a later page (Reuters 2022a).

Indeed there seems to be no martial law as such, only Marcos Martial Law. But for Marcos, there was such a thing as “martial law” that was an available solution to persistent problems: of growing unrest and radicalization among students and other sectors of society, of continued allegations of spectacular surges in his personal wealth from the media and the opposition, of his slumping reputation and legitimacy in the eyes of the public.[...] It was also a solution to the nagging problem of presidential term limit imposed on his political fortunes by the 1935 Constitution. The irony, of course, is that the same constitution that constrained his powers provided him with the means to disregard it. (Malabed 2018: 9)

At the outset, a sizeable number of the citizenry expressed approval of the president’s move. Because “out of a broad consensus on the need for social and economic reforms that the democratic government of the Philippines had been unwilling to carry out” (Overholt 1986: 1140), even the United States concurred with the stance. But in the final analysis,

society riven by poverty, inequality, corruption, and crime, and accustomed to a view of democratic politics as mere conflict over patronage, proved utterly unwilling to defend democratic principles in the face of promised improvements in economic and social conditions. (Overholt 1986: 1140)

12 As reported by the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, at the time martial law was implemented, the number of communist rebels throughout the archipelago was less than 800. (Overholt 1986: 1140).

By the early 1970s, the country had become increasingly authoritarian, which signaled the imminent demise of liberal democracy. It was ultimately the case that Ferdinand Marcos and his wife, First Lady Imelda¹³, were to govern for the ensuing fourteen years (Crowther 1986: 347 – 352). In response to internal pressure, the government finally relented and lifted martial law restrictions in January 1981 (Overholt 1986: 1150).

2.3 People Power and the Marcos legacy

In February 1986, a non-violent civil protest movement, supported by broad sections of the Filipino community, had reached its zenith. Characterized by a spirit of popular dissent, the rebellion gained prominence by the sobriquet People Power or EDSA/ EDSA I¹⁴ Revolution.

The unification of hundreds of thousands of demonstrators on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the capital's (Metro) Manila main artery (thoroughfare) locally pronounced 'EDSA' (the acronym that would eventually become iconicized by the revolt to inherit its name), effectively precipitated the downfall of strongman Marcos and/or the dismantling of autocratic governance, ending twenty years of tyranny (Uyheng/ Roxas/ Herras 2021: 338).

Altogether, the triggering impetus to catalyze large-scale social unrest must reasonably point to the murder of the esteemed Filipino statesman and ardent political antagonist (archrival) of Ferdinand Marcos (including his wife Imelda), Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino. For his sudden death created a (social) rupture that gave rise to hitherto unforeseen resentments which, in due course, culminated in a revolutionary upheaval.

13 Marcos' widow Imelda Romuáldez Marcos is still alive today and actively supported her son BongBong in his bid for the presidency.

14 In fact, contemporary Filipino historiography recognizes three major popular uprisings ('People Power Revolutions'), collectively known as EDSA: EDSA or EDSA I, EDSA II, and EDSA III. In addition to the 'original' People Power movement that would 'dethrone' Ferdinand Marcos, the second and third revolts shall occur independently, as both have their roots in the same situational context, namely Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's assumption of the presidency in 2001. EDSA II was inspired by the corruption charges against President Joseph Estrada, resulting in his (forced) resignation. He was to be replaced by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, also known as 'GMA', who initially held the position of vice president (Reid 2001). In the aftermath of the ensuing controversy, EDSA III sought to mobilize against Estrada's ouster, but ultimately failed (Glenda 2015). In total, GMA held the presidency from 2001 to 2010. Her tenure marks not only the longest period served by a Philippine leader aside from that of Ferdinand Marcos (Sr), but also the reputation of being the most authoritarian, undemocratic, and corruption-riddled since the dictatorship. She appears to be known for her affiliation with the Marcos dynasty, particularly her instrumental role in facilitating the alliance between BBM and Sara Duterte in the lead-up to the 2022 elections (Soon 2012: 280).

The precise circumstances that led to Ninoy Aquino's demise remain shrouded in obscurity to this day. Lastly, the legal provision of tangible (criminally liable) evidence substantiating the Marcoses' culpability, whose involvement is strongly suspected, has ultimately failed to materialize.

Notwithstanding the official verdict, it arguably appears that the publicly witnessed shooting of the Philippines' highest-profile opposition leader at Manila International Airport was the result of a state-orchestrated conspiracy. Those involved may have acted with the complicity—or perhaps the command—of personnel within the superior echelons of the Marcos administration's governing apparatus. The consensus view among critics is therefore to blame then-acting Philippine Chief Executive Marcos himself (possibly the First Lady, or at least members of the president's most trusted inner circle), personally as the mastermind of the deadly assault, a position that certainly seems convincing (Komisar 1988: 42 – 74).

With the collapse of the dictatorial regime, Corazon 'Cory' Aquino, now widowed following the assassination of her husband Ninoy, was appointed the new president of the islands. The transition to the post-Marcos period also saw the establishment of the Fifth Republic (1986 onward), which in turn established the fundamental framework that serves undergird the currently extant liberal democratic constitution (Komisar 1988: 75 – 93) (Teehankee/ Calimbahin 2020: 109 f.).

In the immediate aftermath of the dictator's involuntary resignation amidst a rapidly intensifying political crisis, the incumbent United States President Ronald Reagan was poised to grant asylum to the recently deposed and now fugitive Marcos couple.

In anticipation of the imminent insurrection, which would have resulted in the storming and looting of Malacañang Palace, Ferdinand Marcos, together with his wife and offspring (and accompanied by close entourage), evacuated to Clark Air Base, north of Manila, and then airlifted to Hawaii. Much to the anger of the Filipino people, after two decades of bankrupting the motherland, the Marcos clan will manage (or be permitted) to smuggle a fortune in their luggage as they fled into exile (Hermann 2009: 96 – 103).

Sie hatten Millionen von Dollar in Form von Bargeld, Gold, Schmuck, Pelzen, Aktien und Depotscheinen mitgenommen. Auf dem Stützpunkt Clark wurde Marcos von Offizieren gezwungen, drei Millionen in bar auf den Philippinen zurückzulassen. Den Rest durfte er jedoch mitnehmen. (Komisar 1988: 143) (They had taken millions of dollars in cash, gold, jewelry, furs, stocks and certificates of de-

posit. At the Clark base, Marcos was forced by officers to leave three million in currency behind in the Philippines. However, he was allowed to take the rest with him.)

In 1989, following the forced expatriation to the USA, Ferdinand E. Marcos would pass away on the Hawaiian Islands at the age of 72, having endured a prolonged period of significant health difficulties.

A mere two years after the dictator's demise, Philippine authorities would lift the travel embargo first imposed upon the entire family, clearing the way for the remainder to resume integration into Filipino society. And once the initial shock over their return had dissipated, the dynasty's reputation shall be restored at some point in the future, as the Marcoses will eventually regain previous power and influence (Gavilan 2016).

The Marcos family return home to face graft and tax evasion charges, but are cleared. Over the next two decades, Marcos Jr, sister Imee, and mother Imelda, rebuild the family's political network, between them serving concurrently as governor of Ilocos Norte and its representatives in Congress and several stints in the Senate. (Reuters 2022b)

Upon completion of exile in 1991, Imelda Marcos will have petitioned for the repatriation of her late spouse's remains. Initially, such a proposal met firm resistance within the Philippine government, spearheaded by outgoing President Corazon Aquino.¹⁵

Following the transition of power in 1993, former First Lady Imelda yet sought assistance from then-incoming head of state, Fidel Ramos, in her quest to bring her husband's body home. But despite the president's eventual acquiescence, he was unequivocal in his rejection of Imelda's proposal that the deceased be interred at the Philippines' national cemetery with the honors of a formal hero's burial¹⁶.

Marcos' corpse had since undergone embalming—a process designed to delay decomposition and ensure optimum preservation—so that the former Filipino autocrat could be displayed in 'perfect condition' following future repatriation.

When Ferdinand Marcos was transferred to his native province, the body was cooled to a temperature below ambient ('refrigerated') and then placed in a transparent protective casket

15 Since then, Imelda has sought to cast doubt on Cory Aquino's integrity by portraying her as unscrupulous. The dehumanizing qualities are said to have manifested in her cruelty towards the formerly ostracized Marcos couple, in particular, Aquino's unwarranted prohibition of the bereaved Marcos widow, from burying her late husband in Philippine soil (Evers/ Greenfield 2019).

16 Ceremonial act of commemorative and national recognition granted upon post mortem, honoring the individual with a state funeral in the spirit of their heroic status.

within the dynasty's privately owned mausoleum. The glass coffin was then made accessible to the general public, with the expressed intention the dictator's remains be last entombed at a later date, for he was "yet to be buried because the state refuses burial." (Montalvan II: 2016) Overall, such narratives potentially would have been amplified by the 'physical presence' of the Marcos body on display, as they added just another layer to the 'mythological edifice' that will surround the legend (Teehankee 2023: 21 f.).¹⁷

At long last, decades after the 'provisional interment' of past Ferdinand Marcos, with the presidential inauguration of Rodrigo Duterte, the Marcoses found themselves in support—if only temporarily—of a political force poised to uphold their dynastic vested interests, as the year 2016 saw the entombment (reinterment) of President Marcos' human remains at the capital Heroes' Cemetery¹⁸, irrespective the controversy and associated protest activity anticipated to accompany the ceremony.

For Imelda, it meant the materialization decades-long struggle: The Philippine state's official though belated post-mortal celebration (glorification) of the legacy of her former dictator husband will, by extension, also prove to be the vindication of the Marcos family's collective renaissance. From contemporary (theoretical) perspectives, outcomes of recent elections are regularly interpreted as a testament to this. In a conversation with Al Jazeera, Francis Gealogo, academic and doctoral graduate in the field of Philippine history, related the below anecdote.

The hero's burial for Marcos resulted in an explosion of disinformation that culminated in Marcos Jr's election victory. His family's reputation, previously "known as corrupt, greedy, abusive" was "recalibrated into something fun and contemporary", said Gealogo. "Even the idea of Marcosian opulence—there are YouTube channels showing the family making light of it as if they were just like us." (Beltran 2022)

Early on in his electoral campaign, Duterte sought to gain momentum by rhetorically appealing on behalf of the nation's unfulfilled long-overdue tribute befitting its erstwhile strongman leader, whom he intended to bestow with a ceremonial hero's burial. In fact, the preceding

17 Likewise, the extremely 'lifelike' appearance of the corpse (it was often described as similar to a wax figure) was thought to have served even beyond the confines of Marcos supporters to arouse curiosity, akin to a tourist attraction. And while some ascribed a sacred quality to that occurrence, others will question the authenticity of the body on view (Montalvan II: 2016).

18 The correct name, as per the original Filipino designation, is 'Libingan ng mga Bayani', which may accurately be translated as 'Cemetery of Heroes'.

President Duterte has made no secret of his admiration for the late Marcos, a sentiment that has consistently surfaced throughout his political career (Aljazeera 2016).

2.4 Atrocities in the name of Marcos

2.4.1 Human rights violations

Throughout his time in office, President Marcos had assumed absolute control of the country and exercised firm and oppressive authority. Any resistance to his despotic rule was met with severe retaliation, while torture, rape, and even killing became legitimate methods of coercion and/or punishment (Aktionsgruppe Philippinen 1986: 7) (Hermann 2009: 54 – 57). The assassination of Ferdinand Marcos' most prominent political adversary, Filipino opposition leader Ninoy Aquino, carried out in broad daylight in 1983, was but one of numerous documented casualties of state-sponsored terrorism during that period (Komisar 1988).

In zwei aus den Jahren 1976 und 1982 stammenden Berichten hat *amnesty international* die Menschenrechtssituation auf den Philippinen untersucht und zahlreiche Beweise dafür vorgelegt, daß das Marcos-Regime Folterungen und andere Mißhandlungen an politischen Gefangenen verübt hat. Im September 1983 kam die in New York ansässige Internationale Rechtsanwaltskommission für Menschenrechte zu demselben Ergebnis: „Barbarische Formen von Folter“, so hieß es in ihrem *The Philippines: A Country in Crisis* betitelten und im Dezember 1983 publizierten Bericht, „werden gewöhnlich während der Haftzeit an geheimgehaltenen Orten praktiziert.“ Obgleich die Regierung Folterungen und andere Demütigungen politischer Gefangener abstreitet, häufen sich die Beweise dafür. (Aktionsgruppe Philippinen 1986: 37) (In two reports dating from 1976 and 1982, *amnesty international* investigated the human rights situation in the Philippines and provided ample evidence that the Marcos regime had committed torture and other ill-treatment of political prisoners. In September 1983, the New York-based International Commission of Jurists on Human Rights came to the same conclusion: “Barbaric forms of torture,” it said in its report entitled *The Philippines: A Country in Crisis*, published in December 1983, “are usually practiced during detention in secret locations.” Although the government denies torture and other humiliations of political prisoners, the evidence is piling up.)

In all, according to Amnesty International, “more than 3,200 people were killed, 35,000 tortured and 70,000 detained” (Enano 2022) under the Marcos autocracy, as reported by Al Jazeera.

2.4.2 Crony capitalism—Corruption and kleptocracy

Over time, the Marcoses, as well as their associates or so-called ‘cronies’¹⁹, engaged in practices that resulted in their personal gain at the expense of the public. Such illegal (and often highly sophisticated) activities were thus conducted in a manner that was detrimental to the collective welfare and contributed substantially to the skyrocketing national debt deficit of the Philippine Republic (Overholt 1986: 1154).

Foreign borrowing played a crucial role [because] [i]t produced economic growth well above what the domestic economy and the domestic policy environment could have achieved, providing temporary internal and external legitimacy to an authoritarian government. External funds also played an important role in building and maintaining a new domestic political structure that Marcos established to challenge the traditional Philippine elite. However, in the end, both the economic environment and the political structure created under the martial law years (1972-81) were inimical to the ability of the Philippines to sustain and service foreign debt, and the Philippine position unraveled quickly in the more adverse environment of the 1980s. (Dohner/ Intal Jr 1989: 375)

The self-enrichment strategies of the Marcos clan included the (mis)use or exploitation of external borrowing (foreign credit) from financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank Structural Adjustment Loan (SAL), which were originally intended to support local developmental projects (like infrastructure expansion, etc.) in the country. High levels of liabilities would sooner or later threaten a “balance-of-payments crisis” (Hutchcroft 1993: 160) and, by extension, jeopardize the economy as a whole, thereby exacerbating the already precarious living conditions of the nation’s millions (Aktionsgruppe Philippinen 1986: 80 – 86) (IBON 2022: 6 – 8).

In the 1970s, the Philippines underwent a period of accelerated economic growth. However, this momentum will have reversed sharply during the 1980s. Economists have ascribed this deceleration to an exacerbating budget deficit (due to significant debt accumulation) and elevating global interest rates. Based on projections by the World Bank, domestic markets are expected to have shrunk by approximately 15 percent during the final two years of the Marcos term (Lema/ Allard 2022).

19 Individuals who cultivated personal contacts with the autocrat have been labeled ‘Marcos cronies’. Cronies would benefit from such (reciprocal) affiliations in a number of ways. Among these were criminal immunity, political favors or access to monopolistic business interests, etc.

An integral part of the operation of the Philippine economy during the period of rapid debt buildup was the development of crony capitalism—the fostering, through a variety of means, of a small group of Philippine businessmen, including the president and his family. This included the standard measures of awarding government contracts, padding taxes, and providing kickbacks. [...] [But] [t]he most important aspect was the creation of monopolies, either through direct intervention to control an industry or through granting exemptions or exclusive privileges to favored individuals. (Dohner/ Intal Jr 1989: 399)

In the final corollary, well after Marcos' removal, the region continued to experience prolonged economic stagnation, a period of decline that lasted well beyond the anticipated duration of the post-dictatorship transition period. As reported by IBON foundation, a Philippine “non-stock non-profit development organization” (IBON 2015) with a focus on socioeconomics, the above scenario will have occasioned a uniquely destructive deindustrialization pathway, long-term repercussions of which are still being felt in the present era (IBON 2022: 11 – 17).

The Marcos regime left a legacy not just of systemic corruption and institutionalized authoritarianism but also of neoliberalism. It embedded corruption at the highest levels of the country's elite-dominated power structures and wove this ever deeper into the legal and political system. It also resulted in subsequent administrations consistently using violent repression against radical alternatives of nominally representative democracy. But it is arguably the neoliberal path of economic decline the regime started that has had the most far-reaching impact on the greatest number of people until today. (IBON 2022: 1)

Notwithstanding these challenges, the burden of the Marcos tyranny persistently manifests in the form of financial obligations (foreign loans). According to Richard Heydarian, syndicated columnist (correspondent for Al Jazeera) and lecturer at the University of the Philippines, by “some estimates, the Philippines is expected to pay the inherited debt from the Marcos era until 2025.” (Heydarian 2021)

2.5 The Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth

The deceased autocrat “made little distinction between public and private resources, using national resources to enrich his family members and cronies or to deepen the loyalties of his political patrons.” (De Castro 2007: 934 f.)

“The illegal asset recovery program has been problematic, both in the way it was thought out

and how it was implemented.” (Lustre Jr 2016) Hence, despite the extensive documentation of embezzlement under the Marcos regime, tracing ill-gotten wealth remains difficult in many cases. Pursuant to Chaikin and Sharman (2009), “[t]he money laundering methods used by Marcos in hiding his corrupt proceeds were so sophisticated that government officials believe that less than 10 percent of his illicit assets have been recovered.” (Chaikin/ Sharman 2009: 153)

As a result, the total value of the misappropriated assets cannot be ascertained, leading to discrepancies in the estimated sums. While Quimpo (2005) has quoted a figure of “US\$6.78 to US\$13.56 billion that Marcos amassed over twenty years in power,” (Quimpo 2005: 246) as extrapolated by Transparency International, another source concludes:

The Marcos regime’s corruption is fundamentally inestimable although estimates have still been attempted. The headline figure for ill-gotten or stolen wealth is conventionally US\$5-10 billion as of 1986 (*although Marcos’ former planning and finance secretary has been cited as saying it could reach as much as US\$30 billion*). This is a huge amount equivalent to anywhere from 16-33% of the country’s GDP of Php571.9 billion in 1985 (or US\$30.7 billion at the prevailing exchange rate then). (IBON 2022: 21, emphasis by the author)

In the end, there is only one thing that can be said with certainty: The totality of unaccounted riches is beyond comprehension, and the damage done to the Filipino community is likely incalculable. A number of individuals have therefore advocated for full investigation and financial restitution (Supreme Court E-Library 2003). Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the probability of obtaining compensation in the future is deemed to be remote, given the lack of success in previous efforts to recover the misappropriated assets (Lustre Jr 2016).

Unfortunately, the recovery of ill-gotten wealth has been both slow and difficult. Much of the optimism that attended its potential for success in the beginning has now turned into frustration. Out of the 35 recovery cases filed against the Marcoses, two have been rendered moot and academic, two have been dismissed, four have been terminated due to compromise agreements and 27 are still pending.[...] Understandably, there is growing sentiment that the ill-gotten wealth may never be recovered. (Mariano/ Bonoan/ Palarca 2001: 428)

All the more surprising, perhaps, given the Marcoses’ insistence on personal ownership of looted assets. “Bizarrely, the Marcoses to this day claim ownership of their ill-gotten wealth,

which includes ownership in [some of the nation's largest] corporations. Imelda Marcos, for instance, boasted: '*We practically own everything in the Philippines.*'"²⁰ (IBON 2022: 23)

²⁰ "We practically own everything in the Philippines, from electricity, telecommunications, airlines, banking, beer and tobacco, newspaper publishing, television stations, shipping, oil, mining, hotels and health resorts, down to coconut mills, small firearms, real estate and insurance." (Imelda Marcos as cited in IBON 2022: 29)

3 The Politics of the Philippines

3.1 Review—Research and academic scholarship

Of all the countries in the world aside from the United States, the Philippines arguably boasts the longest tradition and richest body of scholarship on local politics. [...] This richness of academic research on local politics in the Philippines is arguably understandable not in terms of the inherent appeals of the setting(s) for study or the idiosyncratic tastes of this group of scholars, but rather as a reflection of the long history of decentralized competitive politics in the archipelago [...]. Thus by now scholars have had the accumulated benefit of more than one hundred years of local elections—and thus local election results—to analyse across the dozens and hundreds of municipalities and cities scattered across the archipelago, encouraging and enabling myriad efforts to understand and explain observable patterns of variance, continuity, and change in local politics in the Philippines. (Sidel 2018: 26)

“Political and social scientists have interpreted Philippine politics in different ways.” (Quimpo 2005: 234) In 1995, Benedict Kerkvliet, professor emeritus of social sciences, completed a systematic review of the extant literature on Filipino local polity. Subsequently, the scholar proceeded to elaborate on three principal classifications that he concluded were apt for organizing or synthesizing the voluminous corpus of theoretical discourse. These included the *patron-client*, *factional (pcf)*, *patrimonial or elite democracy*, and *neocolonial or dependency* theoretical frameworks (Quimpo 2005: 229). In light of the insights outlined within this thesis, Kerkvliet’s proposition shall, in part, retain its relevance and warrant further consideration within the domain of contemporary research.

The following pages will provide a more detailed examination of the initial two concepts, as they continue to be of significant value in the evaluation of the 2022 election outcomes. This is consistent with the inquiry posed at the outset.

3.1.1 Pcf—The patron-client factional framework

Nevertheless, although the political scholarship in the Philippines represents a diverse array of works that employed distinct theoretical and conceptual lenses, its intellectual history and landscape is dominated by patron-client-framework (PCF) that explains the culture of dependency and power asymmetries underlying socio-political dynamics. This framework undergirds much of the notable works that examine the oligarchic and dynastic rule and elite formation in both state and nation-building. (Pernia, Ronald A. 2022: 65 f.)

During the pre-Marcos era of the 1960s to the early 1970s, the patron-client framework will have been the reigning dogma “for understanding local politics in the Philippines.” (Sidel 2018: 29) The idea that “patron-client structures” (Quimpo 2005: 234) or “the compadre system” (Simbulan 1965: xv) would essentially determine the societal context for political activity was not solely confined to the Philippine Islands. Rather, it has been widely recognized by social scientists all over the world, particularly in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Southern Europe (Quimpo 2005: 234).

3.1.1.1 Clientelism definition

In principle, the phrase ‘clientelism’ denotes a system of socially asymmetrical relationships between powerful individuals (patrons) and their clients (or, in other words, a system of patron-client relationships). On the influential side, this patron-client (clientelist) or “superior-inferior” (Simbulan 1965: xv) arrangement is also termed ‘patronage’.

In general, the existing scholarship in the field does not present a universally accepted definition of the concept. As an alternative approach, Hicken (2011) has hence proposed a set of distinctive attributes to delineate the phenomenon. Clientelist relationships would thereby typically embrace four characteristic qualities: dyadic relationships, contingency (reciprocity), hierarchy, and iteration (the ongoing nature of the relationship) (Hicken 2011: 290 ff.).

The element that every definition of clientelism has in common is the contingent or reciprocal nature of the patron-client exchange. The delivery of a good or service on the part of both the patron and client is in direct response to a delivery of a reciprocal benefit by the other party, or the credible promise of such a benefit. [...] Other forms of particularism target specific groups, but in the case of clientelism, that targeting *always* comes with strings attached. Politicians supply benefits only to individuals or groups that support or promise to support the politician. Likewise, the client supports only that politician who delivers, or promises to deliver, a valued benefit in return for the client’s electoral support. (Hicken 2011: 291)

In the initial stages of academic inquiry into this subject, research focused on the social (interpersonal) bond between the patron and the client. Consequently, the emphasis has been placed on the direct interaction between the two parties. “Clients, it was assumed, had a close personal relationship with the patron.” (Hicken 2011: 290 f.)

However, subsequent methodologies have served to obscure this image, painting a far more

complex account. Although face-to-face engagements retained their importance, the emphasis has shifted to the role of brokers (brokerage) and networks (Lemarchand/ Legg 1972: 155 f.).

Yet, despite acknowledging the intricacies of ‘more complex forms of clientelistic social organization,’ the preponderance of later studies (anchored in the pcf paradigm) still adhered to the assumption that their essence was constituted by dyadic relationships situated at the individual level (Hicken 2011: 291).

As pcf scholars have repeatedly argued, person-to-person connections (network ties) occur at every level of the social hierarchy, regardless of the sophistication of a given brokerage (intermediary) construct. These relationships would apply, for example, to exist “between the patron and high-level brokers, between high- and lower-level brokers, and ultimately between brokers and individual clients.” (Hicken 2011: 291)

Clientelism is characterized by the combination of particularistic targeting and contingency-based exchange. This method of contingent exchange thrives in both autocracies and democracies. It exists in a large variety of cultural contexts. Confronted with economic development, clientelism fades away in some political contexts but adapts and survives in others. (Hicken 2011: 289)

Perhaps the most common link drawn in the related literature was that between the level of economic development and the prevalence of patronage and client structures. Academics have described this correlation both across countries, inferring that clientelism appears to be more rampant in the emerging economies of the Global South, and within a nation, concluding that poorer populations will be more susceptible to (patronage) ‘clientelistic overtures’ than wealthier citizens.

The intellectual origins of such association could be traced “to the modernization and developmentalist schools from the mid-twentieth century, but current theorizing views the relationship between economic development and clientelism as probabilistic rather than deterministic.” (Hicken 2011: 299)

3.1.1.2 Pcf provenance and the Philippines

The most prominent protagonists of the “patron-client interpretation of Philippine politics” (Quimpo 2005: 234) are Carl Landé and Mary Hollnsteiner. While Hollnsteiner has centered her investigation on the dynamics of family and kinship, “trying to make sense of elections and related political events” (Kerkvliet 1995: 401), Landé directed his scrutiny towards the operational logics underlying the Philippines’ political party structure.

In the end, both will have arrived at a similar conclusion: The politics of the Philippines was built on a network of mutually interlocking bonds between bilateral pairs of individuals that might best be described as “dyadic ties.” (Landé 1965: 1)

In particular, Landé’s seminal 1965 study, entitled *Leaders, Factions, and Parties: The Structure of Philippine Politics*, has delivered a compelling and coherent depiction of the patron-client, factional framework largely responsible for its prominence (Sidel 2018: 26).

Carl Landé [...] provided a schematic picture of clientelism as an integrated system of local and national politics, with patron-client relations linking — through a wedding cake-like structure of brokerage — ordinary Filipino voters to local *leaders* to municipal councillors, vice mayors, and mayors up through provincial board members, vice-governors, governors, and congressmen and reaching the pinnacle of national politics among (nationally elected) senators and presidents. By Landé’s account, these patron-client relationships, and the selective benefits they delivered through discretionary use of state resources and regulatory powers, provided the incentives, attachments, and affiliations which mobilized Filipino voters and constituted Philippine political parties, with presidential democracy enabling two-party competition and turnover and thus ensuring both regular alliances and recurring defections across the party divide and self-correcting mechanisms for the division of the spoils of elected office and the maintenance of a stable equilibrium in Philippine politics and society. (Sidel 2018: 26 f.)

In contrast to Western democracies, Landé posited that the Philippine political system was characterized by a paucity of coordinated interest groups. Instead, it would comprise “networks of personal ties, to a great extent dyadic ties involving exchanges of favors between prosperous patrons and their poor and dependent clients.” (Quimpo 2005: 234)

In his analysis, the totality of these patron-client interrelations or “dyadic alliances” (Hicken 2011: 290) are constituted by “vertical chains [...] extending from wealthy, landed political leaders at the provincial level, down to lesser gentry politicians in the towns, down further to village leaders, and finally to ordinary peasants.” (Quimpo 2005: 234)

In alignment with his theory, it is these dyadic relationships that would serve as a conduit for the formation of ‘patron-client arrangements,’ familial kinship networks, and other ‘socio-structural entities.’

Similarly, scholar of comparative and Southeast Asian politics Paul Hutchcroft has referred to patronage as a “vital territorial glue,” (Hutchcroft 2012: 115) a crucial element in maintaining civic (societal) coherence.

Collectively, these reciprocal bonds may be considered the fundamental ‘units’ of the Philippine commonwealth. As such, they are said to assemble into ‘factions’, which pose the other key ‘ingredient for the country’s political architecture,’ commencing from the local territorial tier. In turn, as factions developed, they began to enter into alliances with and among each other, just as family, clientage or patronage, and other types of ‘social network clusters’ would have formed in the wake of prior factional closures. Yet, rather than being fixed or static constructs, these newly forged coalitions tended to be loosely coupled, dynamic, and frequently reconfigured. (Kerkvliet 1995, 402).

[A local or traditional faction] is a loose combination of a number of [...] family constellations with a rather large and prosperous family constellation at its core and smaller or less prosperous ones at its periphery. Within each family constellation a strong web of kinship ties binds related families together into a cohesive group. Between the allied constellations of a faction, a smaller number of dyadic ties – more commonly ties of marriage, compadre ties, or ties of patronship and clientship rather than ties of blood – create a lesser bond. Family constellations work in alliance with one another for varying periods of time due to the need to create combinations large enough to compete with some prospect of success in local elections or in other community prestige contests. (Landé 1965: 17)

Over time, the ‘patron-client, factional nexus’ (local factionalism) eventually transcended to the national domain, forging a ‘bureaucratic machinery’ that marked the birth of the Filipino polity, culminating in what later scholars have also coined the “patronage-based state.” (Kreuzer 2020: 4)

As part of these developments, a highly complex party political system did indeed materialize, comprising the structures and institutions that are currently in place. The evolution of the party landscape, and the concomitant development of individual party organs, purportedly would have followed a similar trajectory (Soon 2012: 278).

“Political parties are essentially composed of numerous alliances among [...] factions composed of families and patron-client networks. Which families and factions are in which faction and party fluctuates

considerably, as do the number of parties [...] But their elements – those constellations of personal relations – and their fluid nature persists.” (Kerkvliet 1995: 402)

In the progression of campaigning, the role of the political party will prove crucial for competing aspirants. To this end, the capacity of a candidate to mobilize supporters is contingent upon his or her ability to leverage personal contacts and networks. Early pcf scholarship has argued the necessity for the provision of financial incentives or other tangible benefits to garner constituents. To further incentivize supporters, this may have been complemented by offering future commitments (Kreuzer 2020: 4) (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 360). The influence of local authorities (government officials, etc.) was considered another typical aspect of electoral activities. Through their own promotional activities, these actors exerted influence by campaigning for a candidate for whom they themselves would act as clients within their respective networks (Reyes Jr 2018: 249 f.) (Kimura 2018: 17 – 20).

Lemarchand & Legg (1972) have contributed invaluable insights within this field of discourse by advocating a more holistic and sophisticated approach to the study of political clientelism. Their work has been vital in demonstrating the existence of diverse ‘clientship morphologies’ that extend beyond the parameters of the pcf typology.

[They] extended the analysis by highlighting more expansive clientage networks involving “an aggregate of role sets, serially linked in such a way that a patron also stands in the position of a client toward his superior.”[...] *The epitome of these patron-client and clientage networks is the persistence of political dynasty.* (Reyes Jr 2018: 250, emphasis by the author)

For the sake of clarity and to prevent confusion later on, it was deemed advisable to outline a central premise up front. The frameworks here presented are intended to explain the structural elements of social stratification vis-à-vis their impact on society.

In a democratic system founded upon a constitution, as is the case in the Philippines, the defining qualities of societal organization are significantly mediated through the electoral process. It is thus readily apparent that elections warrant a high degree of intrinsic importance, and as such, they will become the subject of repeated assessment in the forthcoming pages.

3.1.1.3 From traditional local factionalism to machine politics

Since the pioneering work of Landé and Hollnsteiner, Asian studies political scientist Kit Machado may have added a crucial modification to the pcf blueprint. Building upon the patron-client framework, Machado (1974) proposed a theoretical elaboration that would subsequently be incorporated into pertinent literary works as ‘political machine’ or ‘machine politic’ (Teehankee 2020: 102).

[In the Philippines,] [t]raditional factions were organized around leading families whose prominence was based on wealth associated with landownership. With the introduction of elections and the organization of parties under American rule early in [the 20th] century, factionalism became the primary force underlying electoral competition in the[...] communities. [...] As the organizational center of the traditional faction was a family or constellation of families, kinship ties were the basic cement at the faction’s core. The primary ties binding the heads of lesser families at the periphery to the faction’s leaders were patron-client relationships, personal loyalty and mutual obligation growing out of the exchange of favors between unequals. Hence such *factions were unspecialized organizations. That is, they had their origins in extra-political forms of organization in the traditional social order and they did not come into being primarily for political purposes.* (Machado 1974: 524, emphasis by the author)

Pcf methodologies built on the assumption the fundamental basis of social structure was constituted by mutual loyalties and/or reciprocal obligations inherent in family and client-patron interconnections. Machado, however, would contend that while such dynamics may explain ‘localized patterns’, they were insufficient to account for highly convoluted partisan constellations that emerge at a macro scale.

It has been only with the influx of elections and the formation of political parties under US domination, that ‘locally oriented factionalism’ first appeared to become the principal driving force of elective competition in the Filipino municipalities (Teehankee 2020: 103). “Such town factions early became the constituent units of the national political parties.” (Machado 1974: 524) It may seem important to note, however, that these traditional factions were not driven primarily by political considerations, in the author’s view.

This did not change until the early 1930s, when the phenomenon of ‘professionalized factional polity’ slowly took shape (Machado 1974: 524). In consequence, “kinship ties declined as a factor, [whereas] instrumental relationships became more important ingredients of the cement binding the central element of the faction.” (Machado 1974: 525)

Overall, the key impetus for societal transformation should be attributed to, among other factors, the interplay of “factional ties with more modern institutions of party and government,” (Machado 1971: 1184) as well as the postwar expansion of mass political participation.

By some accounts, population growth, urbanization, industrialization, and economic diversification promised the ‘modernization’ of ‘traditional’ patron-client relations into more ‘professional’ forms of machine politics, or the diversification and attenuation of patron-client relations into forms of voter mobilization and interest aggregation more conducive to the delivery of collective goods and the promotion of the broader public interest. (Sidel 2018: 27)

In the post-World War II period, as mass mobilization will have become increasingly important, the need for politicians to secure the support of local leadership in order to garner a substantial quantity of votes (large constituencies) had crystallized as a political imperative. Owing to their capacity to dispense public resources, national and/or provincial political figures were well positioned to persuade ‘local party faction representatives’ to join forces (Machado 1971: 1193).

In due course, regionally established (traditional) factions were to have shed their previously held ‘apolitical identity’ and proceeded to undergo a profound metamorphosis into highly specialized ‘politico-organizational entities’. For Machado, this had meant an alteration in the nucleus of the formerly established factionalism, from extended kinship or family clan coalitions to an “electoral machine,” (Machado 1971: 1183) organized around a central leadership and its following, encompassing both the communal and the federal realms, and created almost exclusively for political means (Machado 1971: 1183).

“To the extent that such changes represent a decline in the autonomy of local elites, they have important implications for the Philippine political system as it now moves in an authoritarian direction,” (Machado 1974: 525) alluding to the then-impending Marcos tyranny (Kimura 2018: 20 f.) (Teehankee 2020: 102 – 108).

3.1.2 Patrimonial or elite democracy framework

Cultural factors, such as the kinship system, the compadre system, and superior-inferior relationships mingle with other factors to produce a complex system of dependency which is often exploited by the elite in their bid for political power. The competition to attain political decision-making posts is characterized by the effective use of the resources which the elite control. Political organizations are essentially elite organized, financed, and led. The absence of mass organizations preclude the possibility of political alternatives outside the elite system. The high concentration of formal power in the hands of power-holders, accentuated by the general lack of public opposition, gives public officials considerable licence in the exercise of their powers. Often, these powers are abused. In office, the elite politician seeks to maintain, not only his position, but also to advance his interest or the interests of his class. Government then becomes a provider of benefits to elite interests. (Simbulan 1965: xv f.)

3.1.2.1 Elite in theoretical perspective

The loaded word ‘elite,’ like so many other sweeping conceptions, has been used to convey divergent ideas across time and space. In the instant setting, though, the term is most often invoked in a way that is probably consistent with Karl Marx’s understanding of the ‘ruling class’, which he referred to as those who possess and control the means of production (50Minuten.de 2020: 23 f.). That is also why the rubric ‘political-socio-economic elite’²¹ might be most suitable as an adequate description of the phenomenon addressed by the literature and/or web articles reviewed herein. In the Filipino case, this would correspond to the so-called (modern) *principalia* class (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 361).

In general, speaking of ‘the elite’ may not exclusively refer to the single individual, but also to his or her extended family (political dynasties), all of whom belong to a distinct class within a given societal hierarchy that stands out from the ranks of all other civil strata by virtue of its wealth and hence influence (Simbulan 1965: 7 – 11).

The claim to power of this group is based on the superordinate position it occupies in the social structure. Possessing the key values necessary for the exercise of influence such as wealth, education, prestige, and skill, it also acquires power. (Simbulan 1965: xiv)

21 Technically, this would imply merging the two categories of ‘class’ and ‘elite’ (unfortunately, a detailed exploration of the respective terminology, especially with regard to ‘class’, is hardly possible in the current setting, as it would go beyond the scope of this master’s thesis). It should be noted, however, that the ‘elite idea’ is theoretically independent from social class. Yet, this distinction does not align with the observable reality (Simbulan 1965: 9 f.).

This is particularly pertinent in the contemporary environment of a country that is markedly socially stratifying, with pronounced disparities between socioeconomic classes, as the likelihood of profound imbalances in the allocation and distribution of pivotal resources (namely material wealth, educational opportunities, power, privilege, and competence), among these heterogeneous groups is very likely (real).

Overall, when referring to ‘the political elite’, this label would denote those who hold or exercise power within a political system. It entails not only people in positions of authority, but also the social cohorts from which leadership habitually emanates. If there is a clustering of critical goods such as wealth, status and influence in the combined possession of political clout, then one could argue that there is an established elite (Simbulan 1965: 10 f.).

3.1.2.2 Overview—Historical roots and origins

Philippine society has traditionally been rigidly stratified and leadership has always been closely associated with the top strata of society. Whether under native or foreign rule, this pattern has persisted through the centuries — from pre-colonial times to the present. (Simbulan 1965: 22)

3.1.2.2.1 The mestizo elite under Spanish dominion

In her address to the Filipino-Chinese Federated Chambers of Commerce on the 9th of March 1987, newly elected President Corazon Aquino, shortly after the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos, drew upon the metaphor of homecoming to refer to her Filipino-Chinese ancestral roots. Her great-grandfather, she would insist, had arrived in the Philippines sometime in the distant past as an impoverished immigrant from the Chinese mainland.

It is reasonable to conclude that her urgent need, given the nation’s impending bankruptcy, to foster a sense of optimism among a group of Manila’s leading business figures made some embellishment comprehensible. However, it must be acknowledged that President Aquino, born Corazon Cojuangco, had hailed from one of the most affluent and influential families within the archipelago (Anderson 1988: 3)

Politologist Benedict Anderson saw no better illustration of the extent to which Philippine society had been infiltrated by elites, immediately after the collapse of the Marcos regime.

Yet there is a core of truth in President Aquino's claims [that] offers a useful guide to understanding the peculiarities of modern Philippine politics. The '-co' suffix to her maiden name is shared by a significant number of other dynasties within the national oligarchy: Cuenco, Tanjuatco, Tiangco, Chioco, etc. It originates from the Hokkienese k'o, a term of respect for older males; and it shows that her family originated among the Chinese mestizos who bloomed economically under the Spanish colonial regime and consolidated their wealth with political power under the Americans. (Anderson 1988: 4)

Anderson (1988) identified the historical durability and resilience of the locally dominant class as being primarily attributable to the continuity of their elite status. In his essay, *Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams*, the author has traced the genesis of this phenomenon to the mid-16th century, namely to the 1560s, when the first Spaniards made landfall on the archipelago under the command of Felipe II.²² With the advent of Spanish colonization, Anderson will argue that local 'elite formations' gradually proliferated, an emerging cast he deemed the *mestizo* elite (Anderson 1988: 3 – 5).

Upon their arrival, the modest number of *conquistadores* were confronted with a paucity of opportunities that could potentially yield immediate financial gain. It would appear that the most salient conduit for expedient wealth was commercial intercourse with Imperial China (the Celestial Empire). Manila rapidly evolved into a hub for the so-described 'galleon trade', a lucrative exchange of Chinese silk and porcelain for Mexican silver, which was then resold across the Pacific Ocean and finally in Europe at a substantial profit. Such enterprise required minimal entrepreneurship. The essential prerequisites were simply to be situated in Manila, possess political capital, and cultivate business affiliations with Chinamen merchants and/or craftsmen who congregated at the harbor.

In contrast to other ancient Southeast Asian civilizations, such as Cambodia, Java (Indonesia), and Siam (Thailand), the Philippine Islands lacked both a noteworthy 'military apparatus' and a sophisticated 'social bureaucratic structure' upon the arrival of Iberian colonialism. This meant that no great force was warranted for the purposes of subjugation or subsequent reinforcement. In fact, small outposts stationed throughout the countryside were generally sufficient, and as a result, Spanish dominion, especially in the provinces (rural subdivisions), was largely mediated through religion.

The net effect was that the island nation would get 90 percent Roman Catholic because of

²² The etymological provenance of the island's name is derived from the Spanish monarch, Felipe II, and was bestowed upon the archipelago in his honor.

missionization in various regional dialects rather than in Spanish, which had never established itself as the mother tongue. By the cessation of Spaniard oppression, no more than five percent of locals spoke its linguistic legacy.

Over time, priests engaged in sexual relations with indigenous women, despite the prohibition against marrying them or bequeathing property to their offspring. Later in history, when American colonization would replace the Spanish crown, the US intruders had the clergy expelled from their lands, which would eventually fall into the hands of people like President Corazon Aquino's lineage. Thus, the region has never seen the rise of a *criollo*²³ class as it has in other parts of the world.

In the early days, the Catholic Church may have even sought to christianize the Chinese empire. In the case of the Philippines, for example, missionaries seemed eager to convert what European settlers would have been calling *sangleys*²⁴, peoples of mixed Chinese and Filipino parentage. While the Chinamen fathers proved utterly resistant to proselytizing, the friars were remarkably efficient with the next generation.

Along with their numerically much smaller 'Spanish-Filipino counterparts', those born 'sangley' were given the unique civil status of 'mestizo'²⁵ under colonial law, which 'racially classified' them as *mestizo de sangley* or *sangley mestizo*.

The mestizo element of the principalia class, unlike its Mexican and other Latin-American counterparts, was not solely a mixture of the Spanish and the native. Rather, it was predominantly a racial mixture of the Filipino with the Spanish and Chinese, with the latter being much more numerous. (Simbulan 1965: 34)

Mestizo children were socialized with Roman Catholic values imparted by their Christian mothers, grouped into their own guilds, and instructed to avoid "political transvestitism" (Anderson 1988: 6) by conforming to a uniform costume and hairstyle. Within colonial society, they and their successors were in the process of manifesting a novel social stratum that would

23 In the Spanish colonial empire, the descendants of Europeans born in the colonies were designated as *creoles* ('criollos'), a term used deliberately to differentiate them from Spaniards born in the mother country (*peninsulares*). Individuals of mixed European-indigenous heritage were commonly identified as 'mestizos', while those of 'pure aboriginal lineage' were marked as *indios*.

24 This archaic expression is thought to derive from the Chinese Hokkien dialect and is said to roughly translate as 'business'. During the Spanish colonial period, it was commonly used to refer to individuals with Chinese fathers and indigenous Filipino mothers.

25 The racial construct of 'mestizo', originally intended to denote a person of 'indigenous Spanish blood', underwent a significant shift in meaning over time due to changing conditions, and ended up being used typically to describe people of Chinese and 'native' Filipino descent (Anderson 1988: 6).

separate itself from “the *indio* masses.” (Anderson 1988: 9) This development would lay the cornerstone for an ‘elitist ruling caste’ (Anderson 1988: 5 – 6) (Simbulan 1965: 27 – 51).

[T]he infusion of the mestizo element, resulting from the racial mixture between Spanish officials, soldiers, priests and prosperous Chinese merchants on the one hand and Filipino women on the other, produced the mestizo character, not only in outlook and culture, but also in physical features as well which, up to this day, is so prominently manifested in the principalia class. (Simbulan 1965: 37 f.)

Yet, as Anderson (1988) has pointed out, in the absence of British imperialism, it might seem reasonable to expect that the sangleys would have remained an outcast minority. Upon Madrid’s entry into the Seven Years’ War²⁶, London promptly occupied Manila in 1762 and sustained its occupation for the following two years. Filipino mestizos (de sangley), often subjected to Iberian exploitation and disrespect, forged an alliance with the marauding enemy. But with the withdrawal of the British power, they would leave their allies at the disposal of their Spanish tyrants. Thereafter, most of the rebellious (sangley) mestizos would receive expulsion, and immigration from China was banned by decree for nearly a hundred years. Into the resulting void stepped chiefly the remaining mestizos, who assumed control of much of the local commerce activity and, following the example of their ‘coreligionists’ and/or ‘fathers of faith’, began to pursue small-scale latifundism²⁷.

The nineteenth century, nevertheless, would mark the final formation of a mestizo class. With the loss of the Americas, the Spaniards might have been predicted to pour into the archipelago. Instead, the last Spanish galleon sailed in 1811, as the Iberian motherland was torn by conflict. Eventually, new immigrants would enter, not Spaniards, but Anglo-Saxons (Englishmen and Americans) and again, sangleys, from mainland China (Anderson 1988: 7 f.).

In 1834 Manila was fully opened to international trade, and Cebu^[28] City and other smaller ports followed in due course; the ban on Chinese immigration was abolished. Chinese discipline, austerity, and energy quickly drove the mestizos out of interisland trade and small-scale urban business. On the other hand, the internationalization of the economy after 1834 offered the mestizos—now a quarter of a million strong in a four million population—new opportunities in the countryside, in combination with

26 The Seven Years' War (1756-1763) was an armed conflict involving all the major European powers of the time. Each party sought to achieve a balance of power and territorial gains in Europe, expand their colonial holdings and influence in North America, India, and Africa, secure control of the transatlantic sea routes, and obtain trade advantages.

27 Large-scale agricultural enterprise.

28 Cebu (with Cebu City as its administrative capital) is a province in the Central Visayas region of the Philippine archipelago, encompassing the main island of Cebu and more than 150 smaller surrounding islands and islets.

British and American trading houses. These businesses saw the possibilities in fullscale commercialization of Philippine agriculture, and thus provided the necessary capital and commercial outlets to permit the mestizos to become, for the first time, real hacendados^[29]. (Anderson 1988: 7)

Toward the late stages of Spanish hegemony, an emerging cohort of mestizos were able to access advanced education as a result of their progressively augmented prosperity. It was anticipated that a significant proportion of them would thus soon be attending the same educational institutions, reading comparable literature, contributing to the periodicals alike, and (inter)marrying among each other's relatives. As such, "they inaugurated the self-conscious consolidation of a pan-Philippine [...] mestizo stratum, where their elders had formed dispersed clusters of provincial *caciques*^[30]." (Anderson 1988: 8, emphasis by the author) In time, "within the colonial state, the late Spanish colonial era thus saw the crystallization of local élites whose mixed parentage enabled a unique fusion of economic and political power, however limited to the ranks of the [...] municipal-level." (Sidel 2018: 28)

Caciques are said to have performed a vital role in Spanish subjugation by being incorporated (assimilated) into the colonial administration. While subservient to the conquistadores, the co-opted local cacique elites were reputed for their oppressive behavior toward the indigenous (indio) peasantry (Manacsa/ Tan 2012: 50 f.). Eventually, they succeeded the Spanish supremacy (1565 – 1898) and advanced to become the supreme feudal rulers in the context of the impending American colonization (1898 – 1946) (Sidel 2018: 28).³¹

The 'recently (re)designed social order' is expected to persist and prevail for centuries, becoming progressively intricate with each passing generation. This may culminate in the manifestation of 'cacique democracy' in the 20th and 21st centuries, as postulated by Benedict Anderson (Estrada-Claudio 2014).

29 In the old Spanish Empire and its homeland, a *hacienda* was considered an estate comparable to the (aforementioned) Roman *latifundium*. It was run by landowners, known as *hacendados*, and the *encomienda* system, which provided the labor for the corporation (Simbulan 1965: 27 – 32). Haciendas could range from plantations (including livestock and fruit or vegetable farms) to mines or factories, with many haciendas combining these operations. The word originates in Spanish and implies 'productive business enterprise' (Venus-Maslang 2014: 113).

30 The etymology of 'cacique' is rooted in the Spanish language, where it was historically used to refer to tribal chieftains (Estrada-Claudio 2014).

31 By 1565, the entirety of the Philippine Islands had fallen under Spanish sovereignty, marking the beginning of a period of foreign subjugation that would span several centuries. While Spaniard occupation came to an end in 1898, American colonists asserted sovereignty over the archipelago the very same year. Only in the aftermath of World War II should the United States relinquish its authority, leading to the declaration of Philippine independence in 1946 (Paredes 2015: 169).

3.1.2.2.2 American colonization and cacique democracy

In essence, Anderson (1988) has proposed a continuous genealogy of the Filipino modern elite (*principalia*), tracing its historical antecedents back to the *caciques* of the Spanish colonial epoch. “Thus, Anderson coins the term *cacique democracy*, the marriage of American electoralism with Spanish *caciquism*.” (Quimpo 2005: 239)

In his final analysis, the advent of ‘political dynasties’ would coincide with the supposed ‘glory days’ of American colonialism. Accordingly, this period saw a proliferation of elective offices at the provincial and municipal levels, largely filled by local elites or *caciques* who appointed their relatives and associates to these positions (Anderson 1988: 10 – 16).

With the end of Spanish colonial rule, the Americans began a period of democratization in the Philippines by introducing free, fair, and competitive elections both at the local and national levels from 1902 to 1938 [...]. However, those who sought seats in the national legislature from 1907 to 1932 were mostly from privileged families. Furthermore, the U.S. government imposed prerequisites such as performance on literacy tests and property ownership for those seeking public office. These requirements favored specific wealthy families who could trace their ancestry from the *Principalia* class that dominated the political and economic system during the period of Spanish colonialism. (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 361 f.)

In the early post-colonial period with the approaching Third Philippine Republic (1946 – 1972), private armed groups and armies as well as ‘provincial warlords’ would come to prominence amidst the efforts of the landed elite to suppress unruly labor (the impoverished peasantry) and consolidate ‘oligarchic’ (*cacique*) rule. As such, the incumbent ruling class did not encounter any substantial internal threats to its monopoly of executive power, a period, that Anderson (1988) characterized as the apogee of *caciquism* (*caciquismo*)³², “the full heyday of *cacique democracy* in the Philippines.” (Quimpo 2005: 239) In conformity with this account, the Third Republic has thus witnessed the inaugural appearance of the Philippines being designated as an ‘elite democracy’, as Teehankee & Calimbahin (2020) note (Teehankee/ Calimbahin 2020: 106 f.).

Since its inception, the very notion of *cacique* or elite democracy, frequently associated or in-

32 The Spanish word was adopted to describe a political environment in which an authority figure wields extraordinary (indiscriminate) power. In Filipino, the designation *datu*, has served to imply a royal rank analogous to that of ‘*cacique*’ (Simbulan 1965: 25).

voked in conjunction with ‘oligarchy’³³, has garnered a great deal of attention, especially in academic discourse. With reference to the Philippine experience, was variously named and conceptually interpreted, with new insights added as decades pass (Manacsa/ Tan 2012: 50).

3.1.2.3 Oligarchic patrimonialism

Building on Benedict Anderson’s historicist (to some extent Marxist) approach, Paul Hutchcroft has advanced (theorized) his version of *(neo)patrimonialism* and the *patrimonial oligarchic state* or *oligarchic patrimonialism*, which in turn would draw upon Max Weber’s thoughts on ‘patrimonialism’ (Hutchcroft 1993: 20 – 50). In the view of Weber, “the genuinely patrimonial office, [...] the political administration ... is treated as a purely personal affair of the ruler, and political power is considered part of his personal property.” (Max Weber as cited in Hutchcroft 1991: 415)

Political administration—whether in the pre-martial law period or under martial law or in the [post-Marcos] Aquino years—is often treated as a personal affair. The state apparatus is choked continually by an anarchy of particularistic demands from, and particularistic actions on behalf of, those oligarchs and cronies who are currently most favored by its top officials[.] [...] Particularistic demands continued to prevail, with the difference that one ruler was appropriating a much larger proportion of the state apparatus toward the service of his own private interests. (Hutchcroft 1991: 415 f.)

Echoing Hutchcroft (1991), the Marcos era from 1965 onward³⁴ marked a timely shift in power—that is, a change within the historically settled ‘patrimonial oligarchic stratification’—or, more accurately, a concentration of its power. Such alteration initiated a transition from the sovereignty of parochial political family factions to a pan-island oligarchy. One might describe this process as the ‘nationalization’ of a “largely decentralized patrimonial polity,” (Hutchcroft 1991: 415) as put forth by Hutchcroft. This involved the forcible engineering of a unified monopolistic hierarchy, while concurrently undermining the authority of “competing centers of power.” (Hutchcroft 1991: 415) Societal metamorphosis, correspondingly, meant moving from the coexistence of numerous separate autonomous and regionally embodied ‘tiered vertically ranked units’ to the installation of a singular ‘overarching hierarchsystem’.

33 The term ‘oligarchy’ is generally understood to signify a type of government and/or state wherein a fairly select circle exerts policy dominion, suggesting the meaning ‘rule of the few’.

34 From 1965 to 1986, but especially after 1972 with the declaration of martial law.

Reflecting these findings, some researchers have identified Ferdinand Marcos as a paradigmatic example of ‘caciquist, oligarchic behavior’ among Filipino strongmen. In a related example, Anderson would confer the (in)famous former president the rank of “The Supreme Cacique.” (Anderson 1988: 17)

Dissecting Marcos Martial Law, political scientist John Sidel portrayed its very nature as *bossism*, “a protracted period of national-level boss rule.” (Sidel 1999: 144) From his writings, bosses are “predatory power brokers who achieve monopolistic control over both coercive and economic resources within given territorial jurisdictions or *bailiwicks*.” (Sidel 1999: 19, emphasis by the author)

Bossism, as articulated by Sidel, has been expressed as a predatory tendency inherent in the Philippine state—“a complex set of predatory mechanisms for the private exploitation and accumulation of the archipelago’s human, natural, and monetary resources.” (Sidel 1999: 146)

In conclusion, it is perhaps scarcely surprising that the inherited hieratic relation of dominion (social power relations) remained relatively intact to outlive dictatorial leadership. From the outset of the transition period (briefly detailed in the subsequent section), it will have become readily apparent that the ‘old elitist establishment’, which had previously held sway, was poised for a resurgence. Both the “predatory oligarchy and the patrimonial state” (Hutchcroft 1993: 15) should soon demonstrate their capacity to thrive in the liberal reformist post-Marcos presence.

Given that “the oligarchic families had ample opportunities [...] to consolidate their power with the support of external forces[...] while the state remained woefully underdeveloped,” (Hutchcroft 1993: 15) their potential ability to (re)capture hegemony with relative ease may well have been evident, as Hutchcroft did argue.

Sidel (1999) was to contradict this account and deliver a scathing critique of the ‘strong society, weak state’ narrative popularized in the 1990s. While the latter could well be propelled by the naive misconception (delusion) the state had degenerated into a mere, seemingly victimized “object of oligarchical plunder,” (Quimpo 2005: 231) the Philippine body politic was in fact intrinsically rapacious by design, as Sidel already indicated earlier.

The author has challenged the ‘weak state’ by provocatively invoking its ambiguous (two-sided) qualities. ‘Filipino statehood’ may be undoubtedly “weak in its faults as a developmental state [but] strong in its capabilities as a predatory state.” (Quimpo 2005: 232) Human devel-

opment policies with weak constitutional protections against corporate rentiers were severely flawed because state governance was itself an ‘institutionalized thieving machine’ run by capital(ist) interests, as Sidel put it. Accordingly, he rejected the ‘weak state thesis’ in principle: Indeed, Philippine government administration was in fact quite capable of asserting vested motives vis-à-vis the public that were not necessarily driven by the landed elite. (Quimpo 2005: 230 ff.).

Despite differing initial assumptions, both experts may have been willing to concur, that the Marcos epoch “did not bring fundamental change to the particularistic, plunderous way in which dominant interests interact with the state, and with his departure came a fundamental resurrection of the more decentralized pre-martial law system.” (Hutchcroft 1991: 448) In the end, the dominant class (whether capitalist or oligarchic, etc.) would always be seeking to instrumentalize Filipino polity in its pursuit of ‘rent-seeking’ in a corresponding system that Hutchcroft (1993) classified as *booty capitalism* (Hutchcroft 1993: 140 – 170).

3.2 Governance and society today—Power within the modern polity

3.2.1 Persistent dynasticism and patron-client supremacy

Despite its rich democratic tradition, the country has not been able to reduce centuries old socio-economic inequalities that have sustained clientelistic politics. The continuing failure to consolidate and deepen democracy has negatively impacted on its quality of governance. Thus, the country’s democratic system has been labeled with several adjectives: “elitist,” “cacique,” “imperfect,” “delegative,” “illiberal,” “clientelistic,” “contested,” and “oligarchical.”[...] These adjectives collectively point to a diminished subtype of democracy—a “defective democracy.” (Teehankee/ Calimbahin 2020: 98)

3.2.1.1 Dynastic patronage

Consistent with previous propositions, Tusalem & Pe-Aguirre (2013) suggest the protracted dominance of wealthy dynastic elites, formerly derived from the region's democratization process enforced under US colonizers early 20th century, simultaneously created a culturally embedded system of patronage. This evolution will have culminated in the more contemporary perception of political figures as sublime, quasi "state-sanctioned patriarchs." (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 362) It was at the discretion of these so-described "dynastic patrons" (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 366) whether they choose to accommodate the basic material as well as immaterial needs of their 'wards' (for example, in a voting setting this would equal the supporters among the mass electorate). It can be reasonably inferred that said arrangement appears to manifest a considerable degree of concentrated authority. Also, given the pronounced disparity in vertical patron-client hierarchy, the prospective utilization of coercive measures, including political repression and the imposition of physical, psychological, or alternative forms of violence, can hardly escape consideration.

3.2.1.1.1 Patronal electioneering

From a contemporary perspective, early conceptualizations (visions) of the patron-client nexus (including those within the realm of pcf interpretations), may appear somewhat anachronistic. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that "patronage politics" (Reyes Jr 2018: 247) have a longstanding and deeply entrenched presence within the country's governance structure.

In his exploratory inquiry into the Philippine general (presidential) elections in 2010, political scholar Vicente Reyes Jr will present empirical evidence in support of this assertion.

The data published by Reyes Jr has offered substantial grounds that "powerful patron elites" (Reyes Jr 2018: 263) effectively exerted leverage over electoral mechanisms (elective machinery) and outcomes. Efforts in the past to implement progressive reforms discouraging such (manipulative) practices have either been co-opted or neutralized in favor of a status quo. In the final analysis, the rationale behind the existing nomination and election system, which was inherently encumbered by a plethora of citizen access restrictions (barriers to popular par-

ticipation) and political success ultimately tied to financial resources, would appear the proximate manifestation of a sophisticated patronage complexion promoting clientelism. (Reyes Jr 2018: 255 – 266).

Incumbents or those running for re-election perpetuate themselves and their allies in power through the strategic and tactical use of patron-client relationships. Presidential candidates who ran for the May 2010 elections were supported by the usual few patrons present in the Philippine political landscape for centuries. (Reyes Jr 2018: 263)

3.2.1.1.2 The elite and Philippine Congress

Historical scrutiny may reveal a consistent (‘traditional’) pattern of political bureaucratic dominance by a privileged Filipino ruling echelon through the state apparatus and/or administrative institutions. Against the backdrop of World War II and the liberation of the Philippine territory from Japanese occupation by US forces, the islands became the first colony in Southeast Asia to gain independence, although the country has since retained close military, political, and economic ties with its erstwhile colonizer (the United States).

The transition to the Third Republic took place within the constitutional order of 1935 and could be summarized as a transfer of sovereign power from the Americans to the local political-economic (business) elite, namely the mestizo or principalia upper class, which had gained regional influence in the course of the so-called ‘Philippinization policy’ nourished by the USA.³⁵ From 1946, this exclusive group will dictate national polity (Croissant 2022: 385).

It was proposed that local elites would directly influence domestic policymaking through the medium of Congress, as it constituted ‘a major pillar of the state’. To date, a significant proportion of the Philippine Congress is comprised of members drawn from local (family and/or political) clans (dynasties).

Despite the explicit prohibition of ‘an oligarchy’ in government administration following the toppling of the Marcos dictatorship, as set forth in the 1987 Charter, the legislature has been unable to prevent the emergence of ‘an elitist bias’ within its bureaucratic establishment.

Under Article II, Section 26, the Philippine state “shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.” (Tusalem/ Pe-

35 Such a development was also meant to serve the foreign interests of the US capital.

Aguirre 2013: 363) However, with the return to democratic ‘normality’ (in the post-Marcos period, beginning in 1987), the stranglehold of the ruling echelon on Congress appears to have grown in lockstep with the steady influx of new representatives descended from elite family backgrounds (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 363).

Overall, the ratification of the 1987 Constitution may have revived liberal democratic values or basic human rights; but it has also preserved (or actively shielded) ‘oligarchic prerogatives’ and expansive monopolies (oligopolies) by eschewing the urge for real political reform and hence social transformation. Against this backdrop, the government remains overwhelmingly dominated “by a scandalously narrow elite.” (Heydarian 2021) Indeed, by 2021, over 70 percent of the seats in the national legislature will be held by oligarchs or tycoons. In the Congress, this percentage has recently even climbed to more than 80 percent (Heydarian 2021).

Dynastic dominance in Congress began in earnest soon after the Philippines gained independence from the United States in 1946. Data collected [from] 1946 to 1963 show 584 political leaders—serving as presidents, vice presidents, congressional representatives, senators, and provincial governors—coming from 169 prominent political clans. Among these clans are *the Cojuangco-Aquino clan*, *the Romualdez-Marcos clan*, *the Estrada clan*, and *the Macapagal-Arroyo clan* that were able to elect one of their own kindred to the presidency, while at the same time proliferating in occupying positions in other national and local posts, including the House of Representatives. (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 363, emphasis by the author)

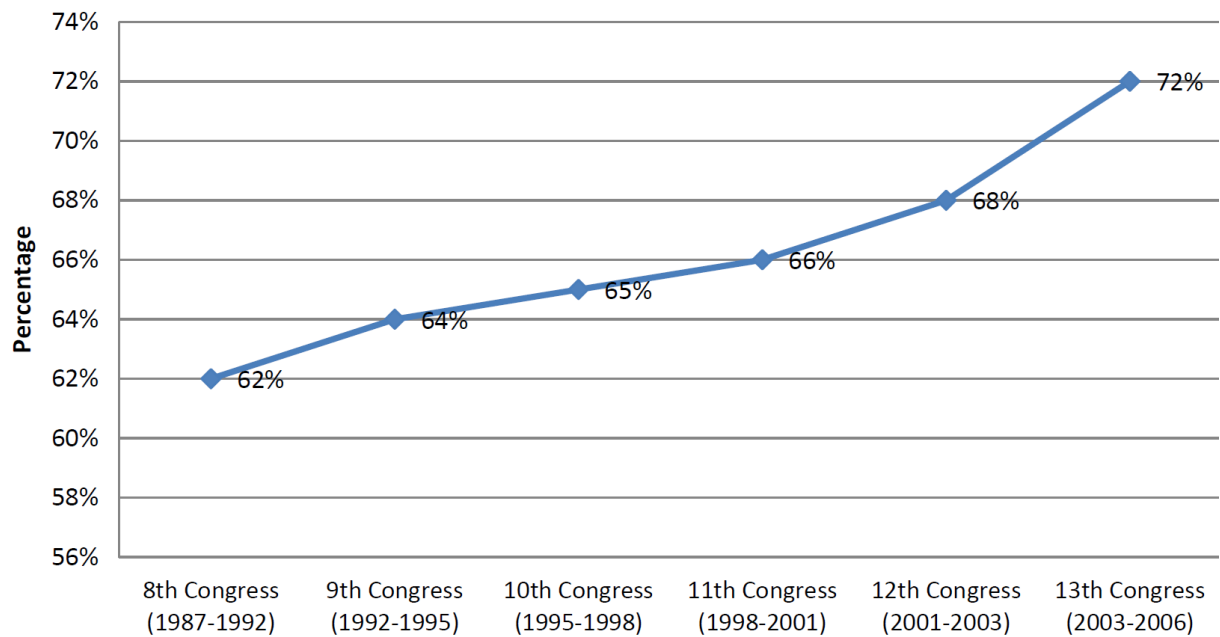


Figure 1: Dynastic presence in the Congress of the Philippines, 1987 – 2006 (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 363).

3.2.1.2 Feudal clientage and socio-economic status in the present

The study of clientelism (including political clientship) has yielded a range of definitions and descriptions from various academic sources. In reviewing the relevant literature, it will be shown that ‘clientage systems’, largely understood as ‘patron supremacy’, may also be associated with a reliance on adjectives such as ‘paternalistic’ or, especially, ‘feudal’. As with the ‘patriarchal-fatherly’ metaphor above, intended to circumscribe the superior rank of politicians vis-à-vis the electorate, “[f]eudalism is a method of government in which the essential relationship is not that between ruler and subject, nor state and citizen, but between lord and vassal.” (Coulborn/ Strayer 1956: 4)

In fact, numerous works on the Philippines adopt a similar viewpoint. From the early historical period to the present, Philippine political structures have been commonly construed as ‘feudal’, or at the very least, ‘semi-feudal’.

A recap of the early research will provide some preliminary evidence to support this claim. In the 1960s, Simbulan (1965) will have highlighted pre-colonial class stratification among the various indigenous communities found across the archipelago, describing them as feudally or-

ganized (Simbulan 1965: 110). In his writings, the author posited that both vassal and patriarchal societies existed long before the onset of Spanish colonialism, albeit “observers recognized that the [‘archaic’] Philippine dependency system ‘lacked the harshness and brutality of [the] European.’” (Simbulan 1965: 27)

The premise—feudalism functioned as an integral constituent of domestic governing matrices within Philippines’ social order and/or matrix, irrespective of whether imported from alien external forces or ‘intrinsic and endemic to the Filipino cultural fabric’—has received repeated attention in both academic and popular discourse.

Building on the existing line of thought, newer authors sought to interrogate the nexus—that is, the intersection—between the historical traditional feudal formation with the 21st century politico-economic environment and reality.

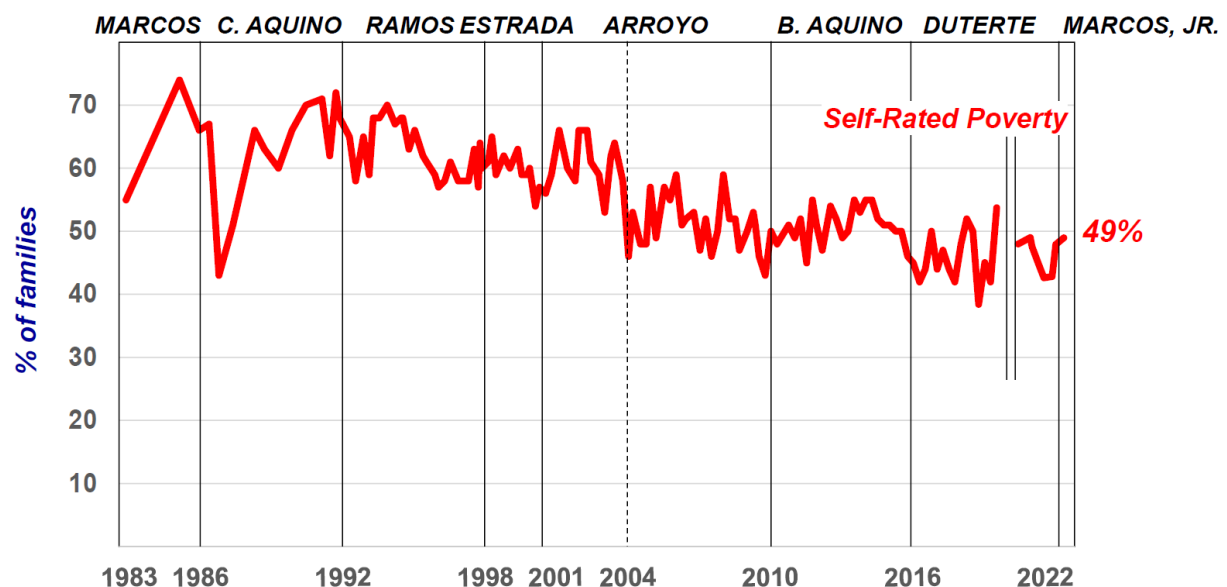
In a similar vein, Lindio-McGovern (2024) would put forth a direct correlation between the residual effects of colonial feudalism and the ‘concomitants’ purported to be attributable (inherent) to *neoliberalism*. These may include, but are not limited to, high incidence of poverty, privatization of commodities, social inequality or concentration of wealth, and most notably all-pervasive market-driven economy.

In his published work, Sonny Africa, an economic analyst and executive chair of the NGO (non-governmental organization) IBON, shall address “the structural weaknesses of Philippine semifeudalism” (Africa 2020) and make mention of “the country’s semi-feudal economy today.” (Africa 2023)

Africa and colleagues from IBON foundation expressed explicit skepticism about the unconditional support of the government of former President Duterte (and the incumbent Marcos administration) in pursuing a (free) market-oriented economic program and/or policy approach (e.g., trade and investment liberalization, privatization and deregulation) that would eventually manifest itself in practice and bear resemblance to a form of ‘bottom-up redistribution’ (IBON 2018). Once the foundational framework have been established, the imposition of the ostensibly “neoliberal ‘free market’ globalization policy regime” (IBON 2021: 1) came to dominate the Philippines’ national development-oriented strategy vis-à-vis economic growth. Consequently, neoliberalism as such was instrumental in shaping and directing the country’s overarching trajectory, culminating in the establishment of a firmly entrenched neoliberal core

(socio-economic and political) agenda that came to define the post-Marcos-1980s system to the present day (IBON 2022).

[B]eyond the sensational thuggishness and misogyny of the [Duterte] administration is the larger problem that the Philippines is degenerating into having the formal trappings of electoral democracy but with *an economy that is even more pro-elite and anti-poor*. Market-oriented policies have already gone far in controlling the poor and making it difficult for them to resist exploitation by putting their daily subsistence at stake. [...] The lines have long been drawn between elite biased State power and the people, certainly long before the Duterte administration. *It has however taken class war against the poor to a whole new level*. (IBON 2018: 39, emphasis by the author)



Notes: In 2020, Self-Rated Poverty was fielded only once because only in November 2020 was SWS able to resume face-to-face interviewing since the Covid-19 pandemic struck. Face-to-face interviewing is necessary for this question since it requires showing the respondents a card with the words MAHIRAP and HINDI MAHIRAP, separated by a LINE, written on it. The PSA figures, which compare income of the year to the official poverty line, are plotted on June of each year.

Self-Rated Poverty Question: Where would you place your family in this card? (Not poor, On the line, Poor)

Figure 2: Self-rated poverty among poor households, April 1983 – October 2022 (Social Weather Stations 2022).

As documented by the independently funded, non-profit research institution Social Weather Stations (SWS), with surveys conducted on a quarterly basis, poverty self-assessment among Filipino family units has historically demonstrated a prevalence in excess of 50 percent. The aggregate averaging shows well over half of Filipino families have consistently subjected themselves to categorization as ‘poor’ or ‘mahirap’³⁶ for each of the preceding four decades,

³⁶ In local Filipino language, the Tagalog word ‘mahirap’ translates to ‘poor’.

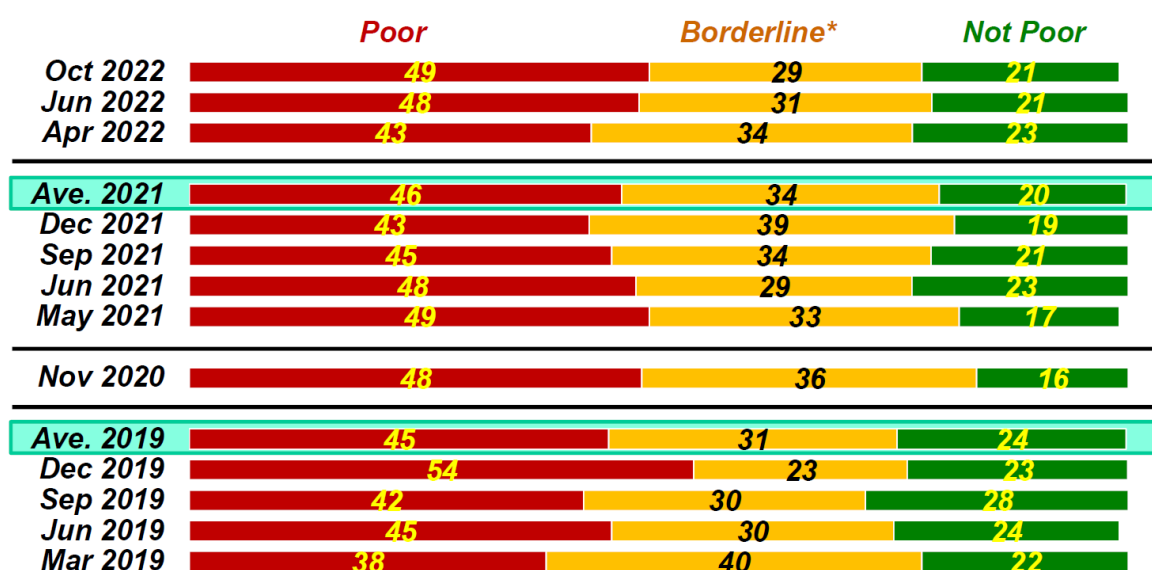
with the lowest recorded figure of approximately 40 percent and an anticipated deterioration (trending poverty) from 2022, as substantiated by Figure 2.

The most recent updated SWS Self-Rated Poor Family Index³⁷ may arguably confirm observed direction, with a poverty incidence of 58 percent as of July 1st, 2024, suggesting a worsening picture in terms of upward mobility of the poor from previous metrics (Social Weather Stations 2024). In comparison, earlier estimates for 2022 present a markedly lower mean income poverty ratio, with the numerical value on average below the 50 percent, shown in Figure 3. For instance, computations for the month approximating the commencing Marcos presidency in 2022 have yielded a share of merely 48 percent (June 2022). In theory, the combined discrepancy between the two data sets is equivalent to a divergence that may potentially account for a 10 percent relative increase in the incidence of self-rated poverty over the extended period of two years (precisely 25 months).

To translate (contextualize) the above scenario in a real-world setting, it may prove insightful to draw upon official census population counts. In light of the currently available enumeration for the Philippines, it can be inferred that the island nation will be home to some 115 million inhabitants by 2023, as reported by Statista.³⁸ Simulating a ten percent increase in household deprivation (Self-Rated Poor Family Index) across the spectrum of the Filipino community would, in a hypothetical (extrapolated) and non-representative scenario, add a cumulative 11.5 million poor family units at the existing burden of abject poverty (Statista 2023).

37 The index was developed by the NGO Social Weather Stations to quantify the proportion of deprived family units, delineated by subjectively perceived income shortages, as compared to the composite demographic listing recorded for the sum of Filipino households.

38 By way of illustration, the Filipino cohort is analogous to a population near-thirteenfold the size of the Austrian total, or a nationality that would surpass the German citizenry by a staggering 30 million.



Self-Rated Poverty Question: *Where would you place your family in this card? (Not poor, On the line, Poor)*

**Those who pointed to the horizontal line separating the options MAHIRAP (poor) and HINDI MAHIRAP (not poor) are classified as 'Borderline Poor.'*

Figure 3: Self-rated poverty among poor households (in percentage), March 2019 – October 2022 (Social Weather Stations 2022).

In the three years predating the 2022 national elections, between June 2019 and June 2022, the median household poverty indicator hovered marginally below 50 percent, while slightly more than 30 percent of respondents situated themselves at risk of deprivation. This may foreshadow the mean value for all ‘well-off cases’ just above 20 percent, as evinced in Figure 3.

Comparison with other figures might seem to confirm such a propensity. The World Bank estimates that the Philippines’ top forty business tycoons, who “tend to also control political parties and major media outlets,” (Heydarian 2021) have captured three-quarters of all the profits generated by the nation’s booming economy in the 2010s (Heydarian 2021).

A further reminder that the benefits from the growth episode of the 2010s have not been widely distributed in the Philippines is seen in calculations by Forbes Asia in 2012 [...], indicating that the increase in collective wealth of the 40 richest Filipino families accounted for about 77 percent of the country’s overall increase in GDP in 2010–2011. (Ramos 2021: 313)

The island state has manifested a prolonged deficiency in the implementation of anti-poverty policy and the reduction of income polarization and concentration, in juxtaposition to the majority of its Southeast Asian counterparts. World Bank data from 1981 to 2017 could evince that, contrary to Malaysia and Thailand, both of which practically ended absolute poverty by the mid-1990s, the Philippine Republic had the highest per capita poverty ratio in 2015. In this regard, the island nation surpassed Indonesia, which was documented to exhibit a higher incidence of poverty than the Philippines in the 1980s. Moreover, both Indonesia and Thailand are comparatively more effective in mitigating income polarization, notably since the turn of the millennium (Ramos 2021: 313).

With respect to the Philippines, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) may have documented a modest diminution in socioeconomic disparities between the 1980s and 2010s. In contradistinction to the global experience, this finding was an exception to the general trend observed in other parts of the world. However, the Filipino Republic's "was and remains the most unequal country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations." (Claudio 2023: 224)

	Decade Average Gini Coefficient					Decade Average Quintile Ratio				
	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	+ or -	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	+ or -
Indonesia	0.315	0.320	0.327	0.388	+	4.7	4.7	4.9	6.6	+
Malaysia	0.473	0.484	0.456	0.421	-	10.9	11.9	10.6	8.6	-
Philippines	0.409	0.442	0.422	0.401	-	7.4	8.8	8	7.2	-
Thailand	0.445	0.440	0.413	0.372	-	8.9	8.5	7.7	6.3	-
Viet Nam	...	0.356	0.363	0.361	+	...	5.6	6	6.4	+
PRC	0.282	0.354	0.420	0.406	+	4.3	5.9	8.6	8.1	+
India	0.323	0.317	0.349	0.357	+	4.8	4.6	5.2	5.5	+

... = not available; PRC = People's Republic of China; + = inequality increased; - = inequality declined.

Note: Malaysia data refer to per capita household disposable income.

Figure 4: Social inequality of per capita household income and consumption expenditure in select places, by Gini coefficient, 1980s – 2010s (Mercado/ Zhuang/ Park 2023: 1).

The decade average Gini coefficient³⁹ for the Philippines in the 1980s has been calculated at

³⁹ For those unacquainted with the index, the Gini coefficient may serve as a standard metric for quantifying the relative concentration of income (resource) allocation for a given population unit. The coefficient can assume values between zero and one, with zero representing perfect equality and one indicating absolute inequity (In-

0.409, as illustrated in Figure 4. In subsequent decades, there will initially occur an uptick (in the index) of socio-economic divergence, followed by a gradual downturn. On the basis of the Gini coefficient, which fell from a zenith of 0.442 (1990s) to 0.401 in the ensuing period into the 2010s, it would thus permit to extrapolate a modest decline in domestic (social) inequality by a total of 0.008 within the country between the 1980s and 2010s.

By 2023, the ADB reported the third-highest regional average for poverty incidence in the Philippines among all ASEAN member states. In a similar vein, the archipelago's human development index (HDI) was listed as the fourth lowest by the United Nations Development Programme, while its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) likewise occupied the fourth lowest position, as evidenced by World Bank statistics (Africa 2023).

In essence, this chapter sought to convey a general picture of the recent social and/or economic circumstances encountered by the millions of Filipinos as a matter of everyday life. It is further hoped the presented findings will inform the magnitude oft-invoked “failures of liberal democracy” (Garrido 2022: 676) and potentially elucidate why these could have been instrumental for BongBong Marcos to rise to power, a position advocated in many quarters (Garrido 2022).

ternational Monetary Fund n.d.).

4 The 2022 Unity Campaign—Marcos PR messaging and strategy

The Marcos campaign was indeed a campaign of unity: unity of the most powerful political clans in the country. The ticket was headlined by a Marcos and a Duterte. But this coalition was brokered by Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo—the person most responsible for unraveling the “yellow”^[40] narrative of post-ED-SA politics. Joining this Marcos-Duterte-Arroyo trinity were the Estradas (who have never left the national spotlight) and the Villars, the nation’s most successful rent-seekers. (Claudio 2022)

4.1 Bailiwicks and the Marcos-Duterte UniTeam tandem

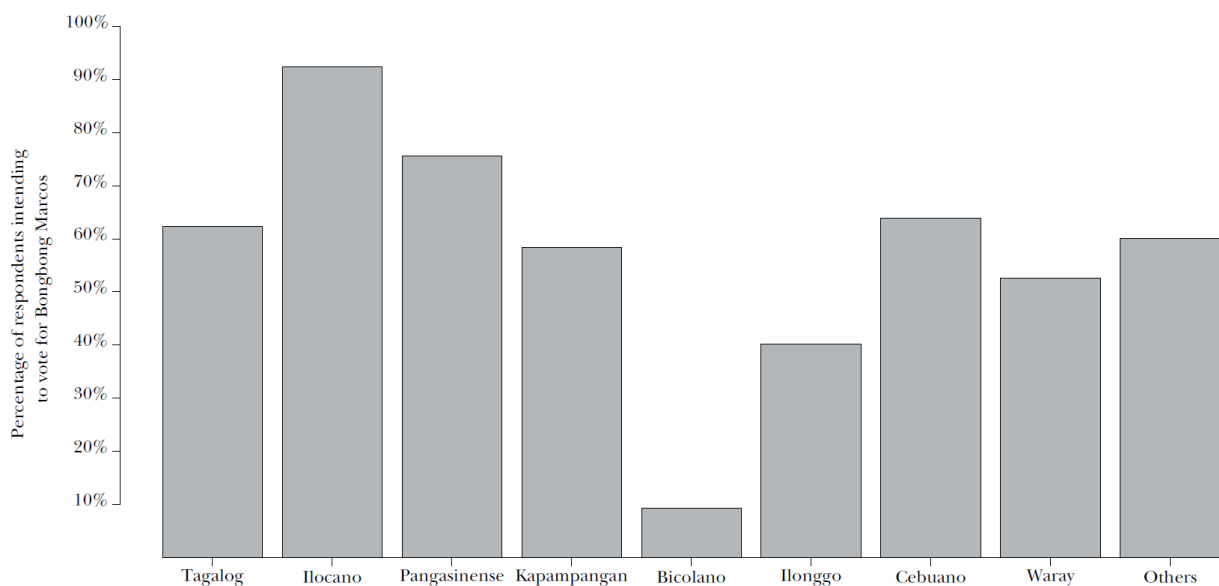


Figure 5: Voter support for President Ferdinand BongBong Marcos Jr (PBBM) by ethnic group, national 2022 election (Dulay et al. 2023: 93).

Several commentators have postulated ethno-linguistic vote casting from (factional) bailiwicks as a vital explanatory variable in presidential bid performances in the Philippines. As

40 The color yellow has become to be synonymous with People Power in the collective consciousness. Hence, the 1986 EDSA uprising may also be coined the ‘Yellow Revolution’. In its historical connotation, yellow, traditionally represented by a yellow ribbon, evolved to symbolize the Aquino legacy, personified by the iconic figure of Ninoy Aquino, who exemplifies the noble martyrdom of Filipino heroism. In the setting of today’s political discourse, however, it does indeed have the potential to manifest as a polarizing (divisive) force. While some identify with the color as a metaphor for the ideals they embrace (e.g., mainly those who would be inclined to oppose ‘the Marcos-Duterte faction’ and/or align closely with progressively oriented beliefs), others find it an emblematic embodiment of the perceived ills (shortcomings) of post-Marcos liberal democracy—including the purported false promises, lies, and propaganda—ostensibly fostered by the People Power movement and its allies (Cruz 2016).

Teehankee (2023) remarks, the phenomenon has become particularly prominent in the context of more recent campaigning, especially in the political contests waged in 2016 and 2022. Moreover, traces of same could be discerned in the electoral victories of Fidel Ramos in 1992 and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2004. In all of these cases, the ethnic and/or linguistic dimension was listed a critical key determinant in the evaluation of the observed ballot returns. The term ‘bailiwick’, or ‘baluarte’ (in Tagalog), means the territorial sphere of interest and influence that ‘naturally’ falls (typically by place of birth) under the purview of a respective candidate and is therefore geographically delineated by ethnic, linguistic, regional, or provincial identification. While the conceptualization (‘ideation’) of social affiliation was fostered by political marketing, the mobilization of traditional networks, including political machines, will allow officeholders to capitalize on this sense of belonging (collective identity) to win constituencies. Herein, the language part would perhaps signify the most integral element of voter-candidate or incumbency loyalty. Kurt Zeus Dizon, a member of the faculty in the Department of Political Science at Saint Louis University in Baguio City, Philippines, will henceforth describe the mechanism as “choice by ethnicity.” (Cimatu 2022)

In principle, ethno-linguistic allegiance may be considered the most reliable platform for aspiring actors to secure popular support in the domestic arena. Validated by empirical proof dating back to 1946, this has proven to be a reliable indicator in successive elections (Teehankee 2023: 5 f.).

In his political science research and as a professor at De La Salle University in Manila, Ronald Holmes asserted that electoralism in the region has been and continues to be guided by a clan-dominated, personality-centered, and media-driven environment (Holmes 2016: 17). Aggregate survey data from Pulse Asia Research, Inc. (PARI) suggested that “only about one-tenth of the Filipino population favour a particular political party.” (Holmes 2016: 16) This can be attributable, at least in part, to a proclivity for the choice of incumbents to be constrained by the character or persona of prospective candidates, rather than by the ideological viewpoint and/or policy agenda of the partisan organization (e.g., political party) with which he or she is associated (Tusalem/ Pe-Aguirre 2013: 362 f.).

As such, the Philippines’ “individual ballot structure” (Reyes Jr 2018: 250) would seem to reveal a distinct territorial related bias in voting behavior, i.e. the respective contestant’s “pre-

election preferences” (Holmes 2016: 20) (among a given electorate), which translates into the perpetual relevance of bailiwicks.

[P]re-election surveys [for the 2016 presidential race] show that candidates often generated considerably more support from areas that they came from or the ethnolinguistic group that they belonged to. During the campaign, all the candidates highlighted their geographic origin or their ethnolinguistic affiliation. (Holmes 2016: 25)

Drawing on Holmes (2016), the virulent nature of bailiwick kinship was notably manifested in the emergence of Rodrigo Duterte in the 2016 electoral landscape. In view of the researcher’s study, it can be reasonably inferred that the most ardent Duterte loyalists will have shown a pronounced affinity for the shared socio-cultural spatial demographics ascribed to the Duterte candidacy itself. After all, it was the tremendous support of his native Mindanao and related ethnic and linguistically rooted factions that would overwhelmingly facilitate Duterte’s triumphant performance, Holmes stated (Holmes 2016: 15 ff.).

BongBong Marcos made a strategically astute decision to focus his campaign efforts on the southernmost ‘Filipino voting bloc’, namely “the vote-rich island of Mindanao—the Duterte family’s stronghold,” (Claudio 2023: 225) when he initially negotiated the so-called UniTeam Alliance with support of former chief executive Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA), thereby forming his relatively short-lived union (‘Marcos-Duterte tandem’)⁴¹ with Sara Duterte, daughter of the soon-to-be-retired President Rodrigo Duterte in 2022 (Claudio 2023: 225 f.).

The crux of this initiative would, at last, induce a sweeping consolidation of the bailiwick constituencies of Marcos and Duterte, with their concomitant voter bases amalgamating in favor of their individual canvasses. Indeed, the coalition was poised to play a formative role in securing a unified majoritarian victory, a feat unmatched in the post-Marcos days.

A further PARI (Pulse Asia) report, based on opinion sampling conducted prior to the election (in March 2022), will identify presidential candidates with similar ethno-regional backgrounds as the single strongest predictor of public approval at the 2022 election. Ultimately, polling would duly prove its worth/ validity as the events unfolded (Teehankee 2023: 5 f.).

41 On the 19th of July, 2024, Vice President Inday Sara Duterte relinquished her position in the Cabinet of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, a decision that followed a period of strained rapport between their respective families (Abanto 2024).

Campaigning via generic appeals to populism and authoritarian nostalgia, Marcos Jr. promised affordable basic goods, law and order, decisive leadership, and “unity”. Urbane and soft-spoken, the 64-year-old Marcos projected a “cool” image whose lack of rough edges came across well on social media. [...] Dominating across every major demographic, he did especially well with younger voters and with those who view the martial-law era more favorably as well as those who reside in northern Luzon, where the Ilocano language is widely spoken. With a huge mandate and support from all key players in the country, Marcos Jr. is now in position to build a new political order. (Heydarian 2022: 62)

To illustrate, 81 percent of responses from the Ilocano-speaking populace, which is primarily settled in the northern parts of mainland Luzon⁴², expressed intention to endorse Ferdinand BongBong Marcos Jr. Historically, this ethno-lingual fraction has consistently accounted for the demographic majority among the supporters of the family, as the Marcoses hail from the shared regional and/or cultural domain.⁴³ The Ilocano stronghold of pro-Marcos forces may be, consequently, also customarily referred to as the Solid North, encompassing the nine provincial subdivisions of the Ilocos Region (Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan, as well as La Union) and Cagayan Valley (Batanes, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, and Quirino) (Gavilan 2022).

In stark contrast, the vast bulk of Bicolanos, the indigenes of Bicol (Region) in the southeastern periphery of the Luzon landmass, have voiced their disapproval of BBM, whereas a mere 9 percent were inclined to side with his candidacy.

And, as might be expected from the foregoing, Marcos’ presidential ambitions were met with an overall positive rating from the Mindanao sample group, likely credited to his one-time rally ally Inday Sara from Davao City (Teehankee 2023: 5 f.).

42 Luzon is the northernmost of the three main island groups (along with the Visayas and Mindanao) that collectively constitute the Philippine archipelago.

43 The home province of the Marcos dynasty is Ilocos Norte.

■ Marcos ■ Mangondato ■ Pacquiao

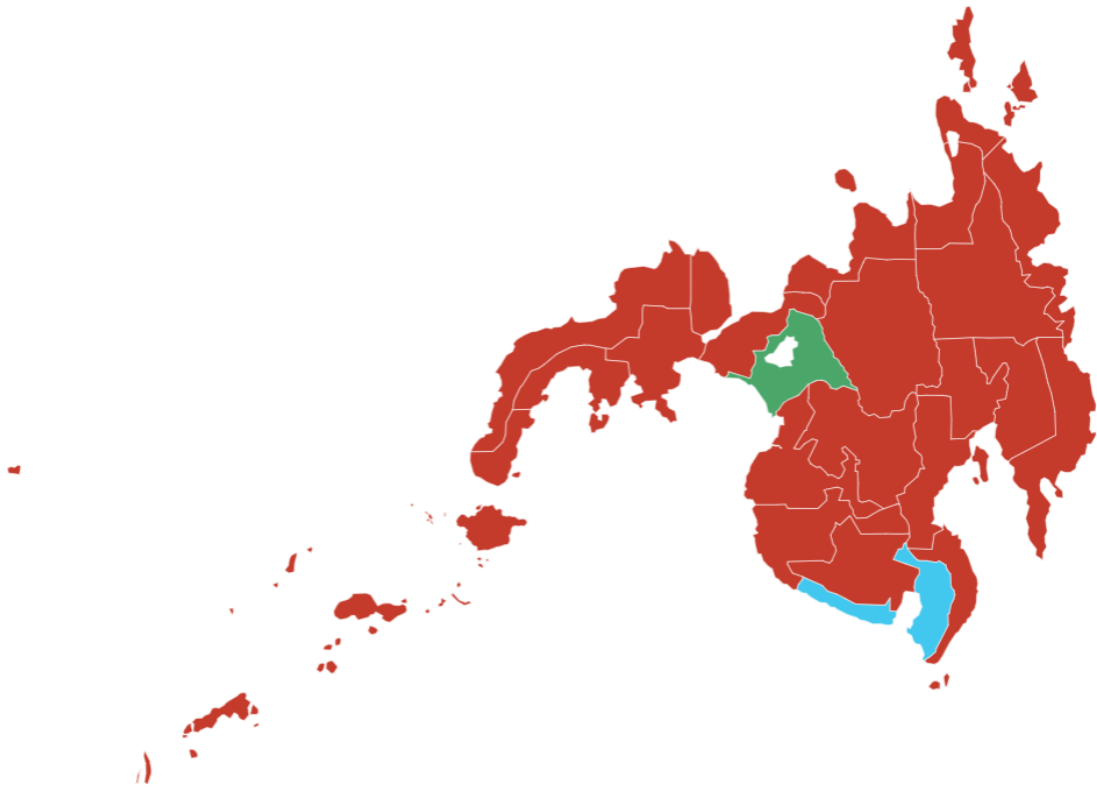


Figure 6: Winning presidential candidate per province in Mindanao, 2022 (Gomez 2022).

In a nutshell, the indigenous Ilocano cohort evinced a striking ninefold greater propensity to espouse a Marcos victory in the pre-election poll versus the Bicolano-origin participants across their circuit. The assessed divergence is plausibly indicative of Bicol (Region) as the homeland of Leni Robredo, a prominent Filipino political figure known both for her outspoken opposition to Marcos and his most formidable rival for the 2022 presidency (Teehankee 2023: 5 f.).

From 2016 to 2022, Robredo held the position of acting vice president under the Duterte administration, of which she was a vocal critic. As part of her term, she had initially challenged BongBong Marcos, then aspiring vice presidential nominee, whom she narrowly defeated in the 2016 campaign (Heydarian 2022: 63).

In return, BBM will receive nearly 59 percent of the popular vote on election day 2022, which represents a 31 percent excess of the total ballots cast (28 percent aggregate) for his lead adversary and archrival, Leni Robredo (Balita 2022).

Partial and unofficial results of Tuesday, May 10, at 12:30 pm.

	MARCOS	ROBREDO
Ilocos Norte	355,730	10,037
Ilocos Sur	391,436	15,653
Pangasinan	1,372,666	278,797
La Union	425,244	24,559
Cagayan	553,965	47,294
Isabela	759,549	81,785
Quirino	84,373	8,124
Nueva Vizcaya	200,111	25,339
Batanes	4,358	5,195

Figure 7: Election returns—Vote tally for Ilocos and Cagayan Valley, 2022 (Gavilan 2022).

4.2 Networked disinformation and internet propaganda

The proliferation of digital communication and information systems will have incited discussion about the potentially disruptive (divisive) power of ‘new media’ over modern society, particularly in the shadow of heightened unease surrounding the malicious misuse of such technologies. In fact, empirical research has long corroborated the existence of state-sponsored and/or privately-orchestrated ‘misinformation practices’ on the internet, exemplified by the targeted distribution of ‘fake news’ and/or propaganda (Bradshaw/ Howard 2017: 5).

4.2.1 New media and the digital age of misinformation

In furtherance of the preceding debate, social media has come to occupy a prominent standing within the pertinent literature, warranting an integral role in the ‘disinformation nexus’.

On a macro level, some scholars might now even seem to attribute the supposedly booming

manifestation commonly thought of as ‘populism’⁴⁴ to the hype of digital social networks. Engesser et al. (2016), for instance, conceptualize online platforms as a convenient portal to a vast audience, a virtual space that is apt to facilitate the activation (rallying) of ‘populist forces’, bypassing ‘official’ (legitimate) gatekeepers who typically serve to uphold standards of accuracy and journalistic integrity in the production and conveyance of news information. The relative absence of fit regulatory constraints both on the world wide web and, moreover, on social media would appear to encourage the creation, sharing, and amplification of viral feed with minimal barriers, empowering ‘new populist politicians’ to “uncontestedly articulate their ideology and spread their messages.” (Engesser et al. 2017: 1110)

In any case, Sinpeng, Gueorguiev & Arugay (2020) advocated an affirmative statistical correlation between political candidacy, social media presence, and constituent support. At last, their undertaking has called into question the widely held view whereby the success of ‘web-based network canvassing’ for a running candidate was primarily driven by organization-led campaigning. Instead, it builds on the premise that the efficacy of social media canvassing may be most likely propelled by respective users, followers, and so-called (social media) ‘influencers’⁴⁵ (Sinpeng/ Gueorguiev/ Arugay 2020: 353).

In conducting research in the field of reported “social media elections” (Sinpeng/ Gueorguiev/ Arugay 2020: 353), as some are inclined to frame observed phenomena, findings from subsequent expertise might arguably contest this opinion. To this end, the following investigate set out to explore the role of commercial content creators and paid “troll armies” (Ong/ Cabanes 2018: 1) against the backdrop of internet-based electioneering in the Philippines.⁴⁶

44 It bears mentioning that ‘populism’ in contemporary debates tends often to be automatically equated with what is commonly referred to as ‘right-wing populism’, which has emerged as a generic synonym for ‘national populism’ or ‘right-wing nationalism’ (ECPS European Center for Populism Studies n.d.).

45 The term ‘influencer’, as used in the context of social media, typically refers to individuals whose input on a select area of interest has elevated them to a position of prominence. Influencers would routinely post on their preferred online channels and have amassed a sizeable audience of loyal ‘followers’ who may engage with their content and resonate with their views and/or vision (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 555).

46 For example, while Sinpeng, Gueorguiev & Arugay (2020) are somewhat oriented towards a ‘bottom-up’ (grassroot) perspective, Ong & Cabanes (2018) will tend to lean towards a ‘top-down’ approach. Nevertheless, while both models are undoubtedly useful in the field of analysis, it bears noting that abstractions, by their definition, will never fully do justice to the complexities and nuances of a given real-world scenario.

4.2.2 Fake news and social media electioneering in the Philippines

At last, massive ‘manipulation operations’ launching from online networking sites, including Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter, are among the most prominent expressions of deliberate strategic dissemination of false information through these mediums. Most importantly, it will point to the exploitation of social web technology by protagonists actively seeking to sway public discourse and political activity (voter behavior) that has become an especially troublesome evolution for contemporary-type democracies.

No technology has been weaponized at such an unprecedented global scale as social media. Diverse research approaches now attempt to decipher how laptop screens and smartphones around the world are used to manipulate public debate, hijack mainstream media agenda, and influence political outcomes. (Ong/ Cabanes 2018: 1)

This may be best illustrated by the Philippine case, as detailed by Jonathan Ong and Jason Cabañes in their compelling studypaper *Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines*. In probing the reasons behind Rodrigo Duterte’s victorious 2016 presidential bid, Ong & Cabanes (2018) will unveil the outreach tactics instrumental to his achievement. Indeed, they would confer, much of Duterte’s gain can be credited to a meticulously engineered online (social) media strategy employing intricate techniques of “networked disinformation.” (Ong/ Cabanes 2018: 2)

Maria Ressa, co-founder, CEO and president of Rappler as well as Nobel Peace Prize laureate who first garnered widespread attention in her fight for human rights and/or press freedom, echoed a similar sentiment (Ressa 2022: 140).⁴⁷

In the run-up to the 2016 election, we began seeing new distribution and messaging techniques for candidate Duterte on social media platforms. [...] In that same election, Ferdinand “BongBong” Marcos Jr., the son of Ferdinand Marcos, was running for vice president.[...] We observed over social media a distinct push to change the history of his family’s past, efforts to redefine and cleanse the Marcos family record. And we witnessed the strong presence of an “us-versus-them” worldview, which inspired anger and hate and helped polarize the electorate. (Ressa 2022: 128)

⁴⁷ In her role as a fearless antagonist of Rodrigo Duterte and his preceding administration, Maria Ressa would eventually become an internationally recognized personality. She was at the forefront of online news broadcasting through social media, and among the first to experiment with the idea of using Facebook to this end. Her enthusiastic vision of “Social Media for Social Change,” (Ressa 2022: 104) may have proved to backfire, however, and she finally established herself as a pioneering specialist in online media-driven disinformation (Ressa 2022).

In the Philippines, between 2016 and 2019, there was a discernible shift towards the integration of social media and related services by individuals seeking elected office and politicians in general. It is a trend that will only intensify in the coming election cycles (Arugay/Baquisal 2022: 551).

This development will have signaled a generic expansion of digitally-mediated communication and information-sharing in the ‘politics arena’. As such, the 2016 general (presidential) election would not merely have witnessed the augmented presence of digital networking in the sphere of promotional means, but also a gradual transition towards a methodology of more sophisticated and targeted utilization of these new media tools in the aggregate political domain.

Henceforth, the bulk of contributions (postings on the side of running candidatures) emanating from across the ‘platform community ecosystem’ will be subjugated to editorial curation by industry professionals with knowledge of implementing scalable messaging or storytelling in streamlined, cost-effective format. The veracity of said online (information) content—or, indeed, the lack or absence of any such quality—was eventually rendered secondary to ‘the appeal of the message’ in attracting the widest possible audience, who ultimately “became supporters or unwitting consumers of fake news and propaganda” (Teehankee/ Calimbahin 2020: 105) according to Teehankee & Calimbahin (2020).

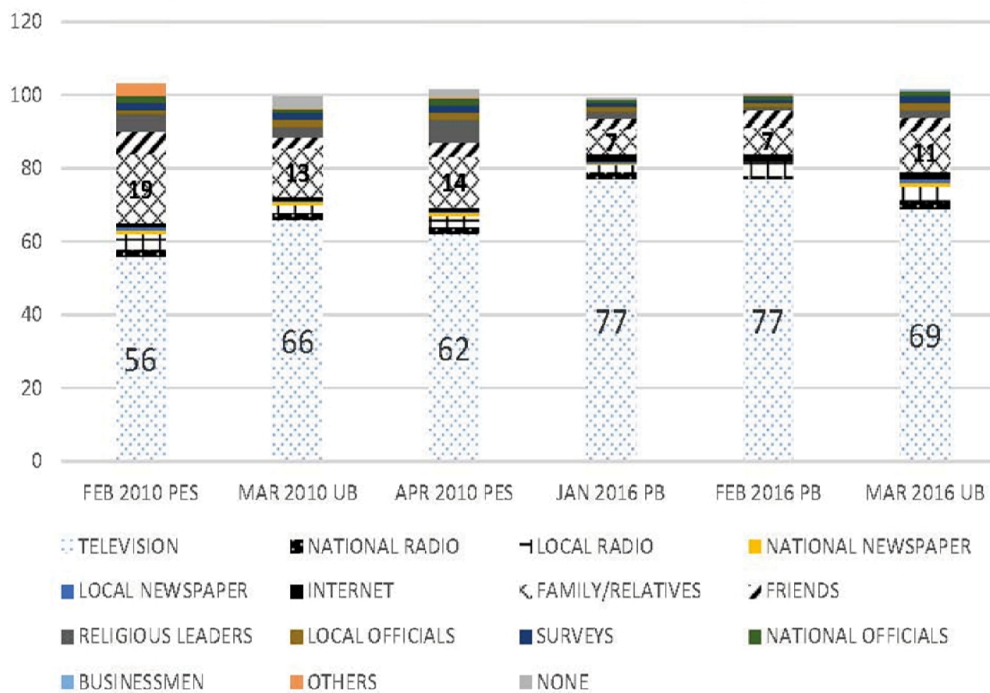


Figure 8: Top source of information in choice for president (in percentage), February 2010 – March 2016 (Holmes 2016: 37).

In the presidential term of Rodrigo Duterte, an independent Silicon Valley-led enquiry culminated in the suspension of social media accounts linked to the president’s then-campaign manager. Upon due diligence, the suspicious profiles proved to be inauthentic. Prior to their deactivation in 2020, they had spent years pushing falsehoods to discredit Duterte critics, while sharing material conducive to the now-former leader’s agenda (Teehankee/ Calimbahin 2020: 105).

“The accounts broadcast[ed] content supportive of the Philippine president and his daughter’s possible presidential aspirations,” (Strangio 2020) headlined an article in *The Diplomat*, a digital news outlet on current-affairs for the Asia-Pacific region (Diplomat Media Inc. 2024).

In due course, Meta Platforms, Inc. (Facebook) would terminate numerous fictitious user accounts and pages in contravention of its policy prohibiting ‘alien or government intrusion’, encompassing a transnational network operated from China that promulgated ideologically biased propaganda and lies directed at ‘netizens’ in the Philippines. That instance alone triggered the US company to remove 155 Facebook accounts and eleven pages, as well as six In-

stagram profile addresses connected to the very same Chinese-powered networking (Strangio 2020).

Loreben Tuquero, a journalist with training in fact-checking and misinformation reporting, has accused erstwhile President Duterte of being the initial ‘mastermind and main architect’ believed to have spearheaded the hypothesized ‘institutionalization’ of ‘agitprop’ disinformation into the core of democratic institutions. This infiltration, citing her work at Rappler’s editorial section on fake news, which she was previously assigned to research and author, will in the final analysis pave the way for a Marcos victory (Tuquero 2022).

On social media, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. needed to have all pieces in place to stage a Malacañang comeback: he had a network of propagandist assets, popular myths that justified his family’s obscene wealth, and narratives that distorted the horrors of his father’s rule. He had even asked Cambridge Analytica to rebrand his family’s image. The living component among these pieces was Rodrigo Duterte—an ally who, when elected president, normalized Marcos’ machinery, painting over a picture of murders and plunder to show glory and heroism instead. (Tuquero 2022)

4.2.3 BongBong Marcos and 2022 social media campaign

From the beginning of his attempts to gain a foothold in national politics, BongBong Marcos—and indeed, the entire Marcos clan (the Marcoses)—have come under fire for their purported harnessing of social media platforms to influence narratives and mobilize voter support along a trajectory that would benefit personal family interests. In the run-up to 2016 and/or 2022 elections, critical voices will be pointing to signs that

BongBong Marcos and his family proceed to work behind the scenes to update the decades-old disinformation efforts they have been promoting. Facebook sites, YouTube channels, and influencers reinforce assertions that change the public’s perspective of the Marcos family, typically downplaying or denying the kleptocracy and human rights crimes that occurred during the Martial Law era. Marcos’ campaign has been chastised for ‘whitewashing’ his father’s cruel reign as a ‘golden moment’ for the Philippines, while also spreading myths and exaggerations about the Marcos family dating back to the 1960s when the older Marcos was president. (Sierra/ Yanuaria 2022: 9)

Social media platform	Percentage of respondents who used the platform
YouTube	97.2
Facebook	96.8
Facebook Messenger	92.1
Instagram	73.4
Twitter	62.7
TikTok	48.8
Pinterest	39.1
Viber	36.9

Figure 9: Filipinos’ most popular social media channels, 2021 (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 553).

Today, the Philippines is among the most digitally savvy consumers of the World Wide Web in the global population, “with about 99 percent of its population online.” (Teehankee 2023: 9) And as part of a sweeping phenomenon, the region is undergoing a transition in which digital network communications appear to be taking on paramount importance relative to traditional print and broadcast media, ushering in the formation of a novel information ecosystem characterized by an abundance of nonfiltered and highly accessible data. To quote political scientists Aries Arugay and Justin Baquisal, “Filipinos are now more than ever connected with social media applications (or apps), spend more time with them than before, and use them to get political information and cues for their voting choices.” (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 552 – 561)

In a DataReportal release from 2022, the national average of time (logged) online per day has been found to exceed ten hours⁴⁸, surpassing the average for any other country on the planet.

⁴⁸ The aggregate daily per capita time committed was ten and a half hours according to DataReportal (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 550).

This projected the Philippine median share of daily web(-surfing) activity devoted to social media engagement to 38.7 percent in 2021, as displayed by DataReportal. Prior to the introduction of smartphones and other portable connectivity devices, the insular republic was already widely known for the ubiquity of short messaging services (SMS), which had positioned the Philippines as the ‘global epicenter of texting’ (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 550 – 553). Survey sampling has illuminated wherein the islands will be leading the international community in terms of follower density for (social media) influencers by a considerable margin as of 2022. In comparison to the global aggregate at 22.6 percent, the trust placed in influencers as a credible informative source among Philippine society would exceed the corresponding world(wide) ratio by more than twofold, amounting to 51.4 percent. Likewise, comparable statistics apply to the terrain of polity and electioneering. Additional analysis shows an affinity among subscribers in receiving news feed or commentary specifically focused on entertainment (celebrities, movies, etc.) via influencers, with 53 percent falling into this category; 24 percent of followers sought influencer-provided updates relevant to electioneering, while 41 percent ‘were following’ for general coverage of government and policy-related issues (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 555).

Such proclivity (towards influencers) may thus be seen as an expression of Filipinos’ general preference for “personalities and individuals” (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 555) over established networks such as traditional ‘mainstream’ media, the academic community, and even NGOs as (social media) ‘middlemen’. Consequently, those who hold celebrity influencer status may avail themselves of the capacity to circulate politicized content with ease to vast, potentially ‘opportunistic’ audiences through readily ‘prepared’ platforms. In the absence of stringent monitoring and verification standards, as Arugay & Baquisal (2022) contend, the proliferation of disinformation is well encouraged (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 555 f.).

“This shift to subscribing to influencers and vloggers as sources of news and information [was] part of the trend of the growing distrust in mainstream media” (Tuquero 2022) that BBM pivoted on in his bid for the presidency, says Fatima Gaw, researcher on the mediation of platforms, algorithms, and new technologies in cultural production, politics, and public discourse in the Philippines (and the Global South).

4.2.4 Online strategic meta-narratives

A variety of research studies have affirmed the existence of a sophisticated networked propaganda apparatus—a web of cross-platform digital operations—with the express purpose of advancing Marcos’ (or the Marcoses’) ambitions, whilst simultaneously eroding the standing of political rivals (Buan 2022).

For example, research by FEU (Far Eastern University, Manila) has investigated the role of YouTube in the 2022 national elections. The findings disclosed BBM to have been the candidate single most frequently featured in ‘alternative videos’⁴⁹ designed to discredit opponents, foster positive sentiment for the late dictator’s son and respective supporters, as well as create division among fellow contestants (Tuquero 2022).

The range of said exertion (referring to the propagandistic machinery) appears to span a diverse array of online media channels and tools (including, but not limited to, Facebook as well as FB Messenger, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube) but also a plethora of communication and/or discursive stratagems, such as both disinformation and rebranding initiatives.

Notwithstanding evidence to the contrary, the incumbent president (BBM) has remained unwavering of any direct involvement with so-called cyber trolls (or trolling)⁵⁰. This is despite those who have criticized the president, including members of the press, regularly facing online attacks even ‘red-tagging’⁵¹ (Buan 2022).

Christian Esguerra, who is a political reporter, asserted that BongBong Marcos “gets away with it, in large part, because of this massive disinformation infrastructure he has built around himself. Even if he evades real journalists, his vloggers can easily do damage control, mainly by gaslighting and attacking journalists.” (Buan 2022)

Arugay & Baquisal (2022) propose four macro-thematic blocs, i.e., ‘meta-narratives’ (or ‘blueprints for sequencing’), which they believe encapsulate the full contentual range of messaging dispersed through the 2022 presidential canvass but also beyond, with social media as

49 Videos produced and distributed by private third-party content creators.

50 The term ‘internet troll’ is perhaps best understood as ‘online bully’ and denotes actors who may deliberately seek to offend, disrupt, or directly attack people by provoking emotional reactions or conflict through derogatory (virtual) content on social media.

51 In the Philippines, the practice of red-tagging refers to the act of branding individuals or organizations as adherents of communist rebel groups, subversive elements more broadly, or terrorists, irrespective of their genuine ideological or partisan orientations. This strategy of intimidation can take a devastating toll (even death) on those who fall victim to it.

the principal medium of dissemination. Taken together, these may be grouped under the following headings: *authoritarian nostalgia*, *conspiracy theory*, *strongman leadership*, and *democratic disillusionment*.

As the authors put forth, each of said constructs was deliberately fabricated with the intention of distorting the established ‘historical truth’, conclusively altering ‘social reality’ outright, and interfering with democratic discursive processes, thereby contributing to “the erosion of the socio-political consensus.” (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 551)

In essence, they collectively cast a glorified portrayal of martial law (1972 – 1981) and the Marcos autocracy in general, engender a climate of distrust towards ‘the mainstream media’, and cultivate an atmosphere of anti-establishment, illiberal (anti-liberal) sentiment.

Over time, the reach of these accounts and/or fictions into civil society will have, in turn, empowered sections of the domestic elite, particularly those associated with the Duterte and Marcos lineage, to mobilize and capitalize on popular discontent with the established post-Marcos democratic order (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 562 – 567).

4.2.4.1 Authoritarian nostalgia

In the course of preliminary analysis, an examination of relevant material identified this factor most frequently in conjunction with the critical discussion surrounding the 2022 presidential race. The ‘subject area of narration’ is encompassed by a spectrum of descriptive terminology. However, concise yet comprehensive representation of its conceptual essence (central meaning) may be suitably articulated through the lens of ‘historical revisionism’.

[Teacher:] “What do you read, what do you hear about the martial law? About President Marcos?”
[Student:] “During Marcos’ time all the people were disciplined. I also heard the Philippines became rich. I think martial law made the Philippines better. During martial law the life of people became peaceful.” (Greenfield 2019: 01:14:40 – 01:15:12)⁵²

52 A schoolteacher in the Philippines engages her pupils in a discussion on their views and knowledge regarding the martial law regime under President Marcos. The excerpt originates from the 2019 documentary *The Kingmaker* by Lauren Greenfield. To inform her work, the filmmaker undertook a personal investigation into the lives of the Marcos family, which afforded her the opportunity to become acquainted with Imelda Marcos and conduct face-to-face interviews. With a focus on the late dictator’s widow, the film explores her perspective on the Marcos autocratic rule and her deceased husband’s political legacy. To provide a multifaceted understanding, Greenfield has incorporated divergent viewpoints drawn from various personalities throughout the film (Greenfield 2019).

The Marcoses are said to have pursued—through a strategy of ‘networked collective amnesia’—the rehabilitation of the dynasty’s reputation. In the corpus of related literature, the term ‘whitewashing’ appears likewise used to describe this strategy. In fact, Bongbong Marcos will have adopted a habit of denial vis-à-vis his father’s culpability for human rights violations, political mismanagement and embezzlement of public treasury, climaxing in the bankruptcy of the Philippine state, leaving untold people destitute. In addition to disregarding and refuting well-documented instances of malpractice attributed to his father’s authoritarian rule, BBM has instead lauded the dictatorship’s bygone reportedly ‘golden era’ ascribed to Marcos Sr, while discrediting the veracity of conflicting perspectives deemed to be deliberately distorting the truth (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 562 – 567).

Upon assuming the presidency, Marcos Jr was swift to justify the martial law regime overseen by his parent(s) half a century earlier, resurrecting the same logic to that employed by the then-ruling autocrat: The imperative of fighting communist insurgency amidst the auxiliary threat of subversion. In BBM’s account, the drama of the time demanded inevitable but tough action—in the best interest of the Filipino people, the “government had to defend itself,” (Reuters 2022a) with a capable strongman at the helm of the country, so the argument goes. In conclusion, “[m]artial law was declared because of the wars, the two wars we were fighting on two fronts” (Reuters 2022a), the new president-elect was to insist. In the meantime, activist groups (NGOs), many of them led by martial law survivors, were preparing for the 50th anniversary commemoration of its proclamation, to take place days later .

Narratives possess a multitude of dimensions and can be conveyed in a multitude of forms. In this context, the narrative was conveyed through the use of idealised representations of authoritarian governance, as evidenced by the presentation of achievements.

‘Strongman leadership’ may yet be identified as another meta-narrative closely related to the present. The focus here is on the characteristics of a strong leader, although this may exist separately from the late dictator Marcos. The burial of Ferdinand Marcos as a national hero and the leadership style of Rodrigo Duterte are often cited as examples in this context. Indeed, the election of Duterte is seen by some as a kind of precursor to BBM’s victory, so it need not be a narrative in the literal sense, but rather a meta-narrative (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 562 – 567).

4.2.4.2 Conspiracy theory

The Tallano Gold myth comprises a series of interrelated conspiracy theories that are essentially based on the same plotline, albeit with some differences in their nuances. One account posits that during his lifetime, long before he assumed the presidency, Ferdinand Marcos Sr had received substantial quantities of gold from the fictitious Tallano clan, purportedly descendants of the Philippines' pre-Hispanic kingdom of Maharlika. The gold was ostensibly a reward for his services as a lawyer, his previous profession. The funds have since been deposited with the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

The discourse primarily concerns justifying the (ill-gotten) wealth of the Marcoses. According to some sources, Marcos Jr is even planning to invest the funds in the Philippine economy in order to stimulate economic growth. Those who challenge this assertion are discredited as individuals driven by greed, seeking to profit from the gold (Mendoza et al. 2023).

4.2.4.3 Democratic disillusionment

The deficiencies of political and institutional structures in adapting to contemporary challenges, the shortcomings of existing law enforcement and judicial systems, combined with the ongoing severity of (socio-)economic injustices—oft-invoked under the ostensible “broader failure of liberal democracy” (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 563)—have all come to be blamed on People Power, that once had challenged the horrors of dictatorship. (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 562 f.).

It follows the propaganda which has been in continuous circulation/ diffusion (certainly for several years, but likely decades) may have fulfilled its desired end, as the accompanying Figure 10 (next page) would seem to imply. In 2022, Pulse Asia opinion polling arrived at the rather striking realization whereby less half of Filipinos surveyed harbored negative opinion vis-à-vis the martial law regime governing the 1970s. Indeed, a nearly analogous trend in negative appraisals was to be documented in response the identical query posed in relation to the 1986 EDSA People Power uprising, with figures approaching full 40 percent (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 569) (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 567 – 571).

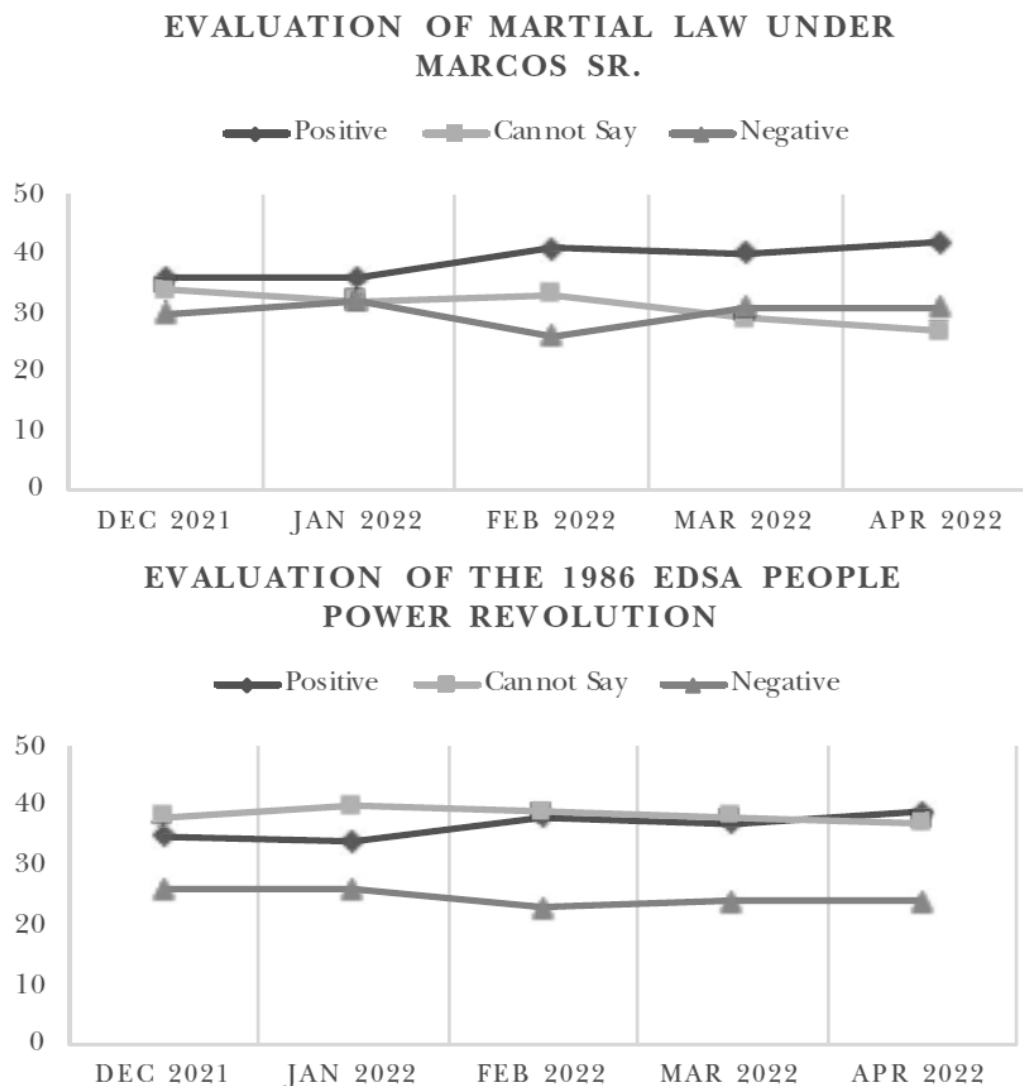


Figure 10: Comparing perceptions of Marcos Martial Law and People Power Revolution (Arugay/ Baquisal 2022: 569).

The demographic profile of the Philippines, which is notably young with a median age of 24.08 in 2020 and 25.71 by 2024, may likewise merit consideration in contributing to the phenomenon in question (Statista 2024). Today, sizeable segments among eligible voters are born post-dictatorship and, hence, have known relative freedom and stability. Never did they succumb to the repression nor even terror that their parents and grandparents may have endured under Marcos. Perhaps, as such, the ‘shared collective historical memory’ of the Filipino community was ought to be all the more reliant thus vulnerable to external inputs.

In a similar vein, political analysts have underlined the constituency’s age structure as advan-

tageous for BongBong Marcos in 2022. With 56 percent of the combined electoral base aged between 18 and 41, it was said to be characterized by a lack of personal recollection of both the dictatorship and People Power (Dela Cruz/ Morales 2022).

It is commonly assumed young cohorts to constitute a most active demographic in the virtual domain, being exposed from infancy due to the proliferating nature of new media in contemporary life. In contemplating such a scenario, and taking into account youth's dominant presence commensurate with the local Filipino citizenry, elaborate online misinformation in the Philippines can be expected to achieve proportionally even greater and more powerful impact than elsewhere. At the end of the day, as reported with Reuters, the 2022 electoral "outcome demonstrates the huge impact of a sophisticated social media operation aimed at younger Filipinos born after the revolution, and a proliferation of misinformation challenging historical accounts of the Marcos martial law era." (Lema/ Morales 2022)

5 Conclusion

The investigation into the circumstances that led to the presidential election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr as president of the Philippines in 2022 was too diverse to offer straightforward, definitive answers. Rather, this section will briefly elaborate on the multiple factors and perspectives identified.

The inquiry will first elucidate the topic's historical dimension, commenced with the year 1965, because it marked the ascendance of Marcos and his proclamation of a purported new era of hope and prosperity for the Filipino people. However, such vision failed to materialize for a majority, with the exception of a small ruling elite.

It is thus pertinent to inquire as to the socio-economic ramifications of the Marcos dictatorship on the local population. Despite the sustained expansion of the economy during the initial years of the the administration, growth eventually decelerated and ultimately reversed course, culminating in a profound economic crisis.

The economy would not fully recover until the early 2000s. Indeed, the Philippines was on the verge of national bankruptcy due to the ruling elite under Marcos prioritizing personal gain over the country's well-being. It has been documented that foreign loans from international donors, which were originally allocated for public expenditure, have in fact been divert-

ed to private offshore accounts. This ultimately benefited the Marcos family, who amassed considerable wealth on the back of such arrangements. Moreover, the act of borrowing was linked to the fulfilment of pre-determined conditions, which in turn led to the implementation of liberalization policies aimed at reducing trade barriers. This has also been described as the advent of neoliberalism in the Philippines.

Given that the initial loans were to be repaid at some point in the future, this was only realized with the use of state financing over the following decades. Consequently, the obligation was placed on the civilian population. The opening of local domestic markets to global trade resulted in the destabilization of the production sector. Inevitably, this was accompanied by an escalation in poverty and unemployment (IBON 2022).

Despite optimistic projections, reality demonstrates that a sizeable proportion—indeed, a great many—of Filipinos continue to live in abject poverty, despite an upturn in business-related growth. The country's economic growth model has been critiqued by some as “exclusionary” (Heydarian, 2021), whereby a small elite thrives at the expense of the masses, thereby widening the gap amongst income strata and further entrenching inequality. The repercussions of mounting disparities might be far-reaching, prompting concerns from analytical perspectives. The potential for social unrest and political instability looms as a consequence of eroding faith in the democratic process, underscoring the gravity of such developments.

In an environment beset by economic difficulties and a concomitant erosion of public trust in the government, a departure from the liberal-democratic, post-Marcos era, as espoused by both Rodrigo Duterte and Bongbong Marcos Jr, may therefore have been perceived by many as a political shift and a harbinger of tangible improvements in living standards.

Ultimately, the investigative process has demonstrated a lack of accountability for criminal acts perpetrated during the Marcos regime, along with the continued presence of unresolved consequences to the present day. Those culpable have never been held to account, resulting in the impunity for human rights violations. Similarly, the ill-gotten wealth amassed during the Marcos dictatorship has never been fully recovered.

It has then engaged with the historical development of class formation in the Philippines, discussed the contemporary ‘dynamics of societal organizational patterns’ (social power rela-

tions) and offered a critical evaluation of the status quo. The following section will present two of the most prominent paradigms in the field of political science, with a particular focus on their relevance to the context of Philippine local politics. In the wake of the events that have transpired in 2022, theoretical constructs such as ‘patronage’ and, above all, ‘elite democracy’ appear to be undergoing a resurgence in relevance.

The latter part of this study is centred on the election canvass of BongBong Marcos Jr for the 2022 presidential race. A detailed account will elucidate the messages and strategies that were instrumental in securing his victory. The online brand and social media presence of BBM will be given particular emphasis. This has been complemented by an enquiry into the strategic partnership between BongBong Marcos Jr and the daughter of the former President Duterte, Sara Duterte-Carpio.

Overall, the “rise of digital disinformation in the Philippines must also be understood in light of the unprecedented increase in the intensity of resentment against the political establishment.” (Corpus Ong, Jonathan/ Cabañes, Jason Vincent A. 2019: 8)

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