

# Duterte's Tight Grip over Local Politicians: Can It Endure?



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## DISCLAIMER:

This article is part of a New Mandala series related to the ‘Supporting the Rules-Based Order in Southeast Asia’ (SEARBO) project, run by the Department of Political and Social Change, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, the Australian National University. The opinions expressed here are the authors’ own and are not meant to represent those of the ANU.

## COVER IMAGE:

President Rodrigo Roa Duterte administers the oath to the newly elected local government officials and party-list representatives during a ceremony at the Malacañang Palace on 25 June, 2019. Image credit: [Robinson Niñal Jr./Presidential Photo](#)

# Introduction

Although President Rodrigo Duterte has often offered rhetorical support for federalism and local autonomy, the major trend in central-local relations under his regime has been the capacity of the presidential palace to exert a very tight grip over local politicians—arguably the tightest since the martial-law dictatorship of

Ferdinand Marcos (1972-1986). Local politicians continue to rally behind the president, despite his administration's abandonment of the federalism agenda and delay in delivering a financial windfall to local governments as promised in a landmark 2019 ruling of the Supreme Court. The latter, relating to the primary national revenue sharing program, is the only major win for local politicians since Duterte came to power in 2016. Even this, however, will not be realised until the end of Duterte's term in 2022.

Why do local politicians remain beholden to a president who has done little to advance the reforms that so many of them have been keen to champion? The dynamics of central-local relations under Duterte are shaped by the president's predilection for authoritarian

rule and successful consolidation of political power at the centre. One of his mechanisms for exerting control over local politicians is the longstanding practice of dispensing large quantities of presidential pork to localities; these patronage resources, handed out with high levels of executive discretion, have been considerably enhanced during the Covid-19 pandemic. He combines this with other mechanisms that are largely unprecedented in scope and character: active intervention in local electoral politics, targeting those who dared oppose him; killings of mayors and other local politicians as part of his so-called "war on drugs"; reorienting funds for *barangays* (villages and urban wards) in support of a reinvigorated anti-communist counterinsurgency campaign; and issuances of 'Show Cause Orders' in a very substantial ramping up of national government supervision over its subnational units. With these mechanisms, the former mayor of Davao City has effectively centralized power in the presidential palace, undercutting local autonomy and rendering subnational politicians weaker than at any point since the martial law regime. Thinking toward the future, it is important to consider what effect all of this will have on the dynamics of the 2022 presidential election, and how much these patterns might endure into the next administration.

## 1. Duterte abandons the federalism agenda

In the lead-up to his presidential campaign in 2016, Duterte touted federalism as essential for regional development and for addressing insurgency and promoting peace in Mindanao.<sup>1</sup> Local government coalitions rallied behind him and pledged support for a campaign subsequently started up by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG).<sup>2</sup> Yet by mid-2019 Duterte made an about-face, declaring that he was no longer pushing the agenda.<sup>3</sup> Despite holding a supermajority in the House of Representatives, the administration never gave concerted attention to its stated goal of pushing through a shift to a federal system.

The project was fraught with controversy throughout the first three years of the Duterte administration. Duterte dithered for months before appointing a Consultative Committee to Review the 1987 Constitution

(Con-Com) in early 2018. Composed in part of constitutional experts, it was given six months to come up with a new constitution—after which their proposed new charter received little support from the palace. At the end of 2018, the House of Representatives under Speaker (and former President) Gloria Macapagal Arroyo then passed its own proposal for federal government,<sup>4</sup> a Resolution of Both Houses No. 15 (RBH 15) that was then opposed by many key members of the Con-Com.<sup>5</sup> No counterpart measure was filed in the Senate, which notably declared the House draft “dead on arrival.”<sup>6</sup> The “more lethal blow,” which hugely undermined the initiative, was the resistance coming from Duterte’s own political allies and economic advisors, including his own daughter, Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte. This reflects a failure to build a broad coalition to support federalism.<sup>7</sup> It did not help that, despite the president’s enduring popularity, federalism

<sup>1</sup> ‘Only federalism will bring lasting peace, says Duterte’. *Inquirer.net*, 30 November 2016. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/849221/only-federalism-will-bring-lasting-peace-says-duterte>

<sup>2</sup> ‘17,000 strong councillors’ league unite for PRRD’s federalism push’. *Department of Interior and Local Government*, 12 September 2018. Available at: <https://dilg.gov.ph/news/17000-strong-councilors-league-unite-for-PRRDs-federalism-push/NC-2018-1271>

<sup>3</sup> ‘Duterte abandons federalism, pushes for Charter change’. *CNN Philippines*, 25 June 2019. Available at: <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/6/25/Rodri-go-Duterte-Charter-change-Federalism.html>

<sup>4</sup> ‘House approves draft federal constitution’. *Rappler*, 11 December 2018. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/house-3rd-reading-draft-federal-constitution>

<sup>5</sup> ‘Duterte’s federalism agenda: Another of campaign vows off the table’. *Interaksyon*, 30 July 2019. Available at: <https://interaksyon.philstar.com/politics-issues/2019/07/30/152630/duterte-federalism-shelved-campaign/>

<sup>6</sup> ‘Dead on arrival: Senate leaders reject Arroyo’s draft charter’. *Rappler*, 9 October 2018. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/senate-leaders-reject-arroyo-draft-constitution>

<sup>7</sup> Teehankee, Julio C. ‘Duterte’s federalist project indefinitely on hold’. *East Asia Forum*, 24 July 2019. Available at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/07/24/duterte-s-federalist-project-indefinitely-on-hold/>

and charter change remain unpopular among Filipinos.<sup>8</sup>

“If you don’t want federalism, fine,” Duterte said to the new leadership of Congress in July 2019. “But change the Constitution, that would really change this nation.”<sup>9</sup> He also urged local officials to “at least try to propose amendments to the current Constitution.”<sup>10</sup> Duterte’s fixation with charter change, despite abandoning federalism, bolstered earlier suspicions that his federalism campaign was simply a “Trojan horse for other agenda”<sup>11</sup> or “a smokescreen to prolong his stay in power.”<sup>12</sup>

In his fourth State of the Nation Address in 22 July 2019, the President notably made no mention of federalism. When asked if he was still pushing for the shift, he replied in the affirmative but proceeded into a rather disjointed statement that revealed a great deal about his views on presidential power and local autonomy:

Federalism is good but there are certain things that you have to be very clear [about].... [It] devolves a lot of authority to the local government’s region....But it has to have a strong president to put together the country [because] federal is a very loose structure already [with].... a lot of power locally....So...until such time that we have perfected it, there has to be a strong president with the same powers now. [But as for me] I’m out of it because I think it will pass beyond my time.<sup>13</sup>

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Duterte again betrayed an underlying suspicion of federal structures, noting that the Philippines is better off than the United States in enforcing measures against COVID-19 because of its unitary form of government.

The only thing that’s going our way, in our favor, is that we are a unitary type of government. The hold of the central government is different from the United States. They have more freedom there... *Dito sa Pilipinas pag sinabing whatever department, pag*

<sup>8</sup> ‘Majority of Filipinos reject shift to federalism now – Pulse Asia’. *Rappler*, 16 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/pulse-asia-survey-charter-change-june-2018>. For a critique of the proposed shift to federalism, see Paul D. Hutchcroft, “Federalism in Context: Laying the Foundations for a Problem-Driven Process of Political Reform,” in Ronald U. Mendoza, ed., *Debate on Federal Philippines: A Citizen’s Handbook* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017). Available at: <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/161060>

<sup>9</sup> ‘Duterte: Federal or not, we have to change the Constitution’. *Philippine News Agency*, 9 July 2019. Available at: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1074403>

<sup>10</sup> ‘Duterte’s federalism agenda: Another of campaign vows off the table’. *Interaksyon*, 30 July 2019. Available at: <https://interaksyon.philstar.com/politics-issues/2019/07/30/152630/duterte-federalism-shelved-campaign/>

<sup>11</sup> ‘Is federalism a Trojan horse for other agenda?’. *Rappler*, 20 October 2016. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/federalism-trojan-horse-agenda-duterte-monsod>

<sup>12</sup> ‘Duterte bent on rewriting Philippine constitution’. *DW*, 2 January 2018. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/duterte-bent-on-rewriting-philippine-constitution/a-42401055>

<sup>13</sup> ‘Duterte on federalism: I’m out’. *The Manila Times*, 22 July 2019. Available at: <https://www.manilatimes.net/2019/07/22/news/latest-stories/duterte-on-federalism-im-out/588351/>



*sinabi niyang ganoon, ganoon talaga* [Here in the Philippines, when whatever department says one thing, that's really how it goes]. And you can enforce... Otherwise, [local officials] will be guilty of simple gross negligence...then you can be suspended and as a matter of fact, you can be terminated.... *Iba kasi, ayaw* [Other local officials tend to disagree]. That doesn't take place in the Philippines because everybody is [bound] by the national policy. *Itong atin naman* [What we have is], for the good of the people, for all. We do not have any qualms in arresting people.<sup>14</sup>

These statements recall former President Marcos' regard of local governments as subservient agents of an authoritarian executive. The major difference is President Duterte's penchant for voicing rhetorical support for autonomy alongside the reality of a tightening grip from the centre.

## 2. Duterte backpedals on the Supreme Court's Mandanas ruling

The Supreme Court ruling on the national revenue sharing program—known as the Mandanas ruling—is the single positive development for local politicians under Duterte. Yet its implementation has been

conveniently pushed out to the very end of his term.

In 2019, in what was a major windfall for local governments, the Supreme Court resolved with finality the main question raised in the Mandanas case (Mandanas vs Ochoa, Jr, GR Nos. 199802 & 208488, May 22, 2019): “how much share in the national revenue should local government units (LGUs) get?”<sup>15</sup> The Supreme Court ruled that the source of allotments for local governments should be from all national taxes, not just from those collected by the Bureau of Internal Revenue. To be more specific, it ruled unconstitutional the provision of the 1991 Local Government Code that limited the base amount of the 40-percent share to the national *internal* revenue taxes alone, saying instead that local government should be given 40 percent of *all* national taxes.

The landmark Supreme Court ruling was triggered by a petition from Batangas Governor Hermilando Mandanas, who was joined by many other local chief executives as well as some members of Congress. They saw themselves as championing “faithfulness to the spirit and letter of the 1987 Constitution on decentralization and local

<sup>14</sup> ‘Duterte: PH better off than US in enforcing COVID-19 rules because of unitary gov’t’. *CNN Philippines*, 21 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.cnn.ph/news/2020/7/21/Duterte-federalism-unitary-government-COVID-19.html>

<sup>15</sup> ‘How big is the LGU slice from the national pie?’. *Inquirer.net*, 3 June 2019. Available at: <https://business.inquirer.net/271903/how-big-is-the-lgu-slice-from-the-national-pie>

autonomy,” in the words of one analyst,<sup>16</sup> arguing that the national government should include the collections of the Bureau of Customs (i.e. customs duties, value-added tax, excise tax and documentary stamp taxes) in the computation of national revenue to be shared with LGUs. Citing Article X, Section 6 of the 1987 Constitution, which provides that the LGUs shall have a just share in the national taxes, they petitioned that the revenue sharing scheme must be calculated on all national taxes and not be limited just to national internal revenue taxes. With the Supreme Court’s decision, the LGUs’ Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) will now be called the National Tax Allotment (NTA).<sup>17</sup>

Mandanas et al. also demanded the payment of additional unpaid funds of around P500 billion (roughly USD10 billion) for the years 1992 to 2012, claiming that the computation of the formula for national revenue sharing has been incorrect since the inception of the Local Government Code in 1991. However, the Supreme Court struck down this

particular demand, citing the doctrine of operative fact and declaring that the application of its decision was prospective, not retroactive.<sup>18</sup> Mandanas and other local officials nonetheless pushed for the new NTA to be reflected in the 2019 budget, stressing that “with this jurisprudential declaration, the said Decision instantaneously becomes part of the law of the land which cannot be deferred to a later time pursuant to Chapter I, Articles 7 and 8 of R.A. No. 386, or the New Civil Code.”<sup>19</sup>

After the Supreme Court’s initial ruling in 2018, Duterte’s economic managers promptly warned that its implementation could create “a possible challenge to effective public finance management.”<sup>20</sup> Through the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG), the Duterte administration filed a motion for reconsideration claiming that the Supreme Court erred in its decision. While the high court denied the OSG’s motion questioning the expanded basis of the national revenue scheme, it also noted that the adjusted

<sup>16</sup> Romero, Segundo Eclar. ‘Shortchanging local government big time’. *Inquirer.net*, 3 February 2020. Available at: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/127102/shortchanging-local-government-big-time>

<sup>17</sup> The politics of the IRA are examined in Paul D. Hutchcroft, “Re-Slicing the Pie of Patronage: The Politics of the Internal Revenue Allotment in the Philippines, 1991-2010,” *Philippine Review of Economics* 49, no. 1 (June 2012): 109-134. Available at: [https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/28935/2/01-Hutchcroft Re-Slicing the pie of 2012.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/28935/2/01-Hutchcroft%20Re-Slicing%20the%20pie%20of%202012.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> ‘How big is the LGU slice from the national pie?’. *Inquirer.net*, 3 June 2019. Available at: <https://business.inquirer.net/271903/how-big-is-the-lgu-slice-from-the-national-pie>

<sup>19</sup> ‘LPP Prexy Presby requests PRRD: Implement SC decision on LGU share in national taxes soonest’. League of Provinces of the Philippines, n.d. Available at: <https://lpp.gov.ph/lpp-prexy-presby-requests-prrd-implement-sc-decision-on-lgu-share-in-national-taxes-soonest/>

<sup>20</sup> ‘Economic managers recommend motion for reconsideration vs SC ruling on source of LGUs’ IRA’. *Inquirer.net*, 31 July 2018. Available at: <https://business.inquirer.net/254867/economic-managers-recommend-motion-reconsideration-vs-sc-ruling-source-lgus-ira>

amount would be deemed effective only after the finality of its ruling—meaning, conveniently, that it would be delayed until the 2022 budget.<sup>21</sup>

In the view of the palace, “This postponement until fiscal year 2022 of the adjustment of the IRA of LGUs is in accordance with the ruling by the High Court that the expanded basis for calculating the share of local government units in the national taxes will be prospectively effective starting from the 2022 budget cycle pursuant to the doctrine of operative fact.”<sup>22</sup> In a meeting with the president and his economic team, the heads of League of Provinces in the Philippines and the League of Cities of the Philippines made a last-ditch push for hastier implementation of the Supreme Court ruling. Ultimately, however, the agreement reached was still to delay implementation of the Mandanas ruling until 2022, by way of automatic appropriations.<sup>23</sup>

Critics viewed the Duterte administration’s postponement of implementation as the shortchanging of local governments. Political scientist Segundo Romero asserted that “the Duterte administration seems to dodge the local autonomy harness that he himself advocated through his bold championship of federalism. He and his Cabinet are now stonewalling LGUs.”<sup>24</sup>

As federalism was abandoned and the financial windfall for local governments delayed, the Duterte administration simultaneously employed a combination of old and new schemes to ensure that it had an effective grip on local structures throughout the archipelago. As subnational politicians were enfeebled, they generally toed the line in support of Duterte’s broader agenda of political consolidation and centralisation.

<sup>21</sup> ‘SC affirms ruling that gives LGUs their IRAs based on all national taxes’. *ABS-CBN News*, 10 April 2019.

Available at: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/10/19/sc-affirms-ruling-that-gives-lgus-their-iras-based-on-all-national-taxes>

<sup>22</sup> ‘Palace sticks to SC ruling: No higher IRA for LGUs before 2022’. *Inquirer.net*, 5 September 2019.

Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1161319/palace-sticks-to-sc-ruling-no-higher-ira-for-lgus-before-2022>

<sup>23</sup> ‘OP firm: Bigger IRA due in 2022’. *Business Mirror*, 30 October 2019. Available at:

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2019/10/30/op-firm-bigger-ira-due-in-2022/>

<sup>24</sup> Romero, Segundo Eclar. ‘Shortchanging local government big time’. *Inquirer.net*, 3 February 2020.

Available at:

<https://opinion.inquirer.net/127102/shortchanging-local-government-big-time>. Promoting local autonomy, and thus decentralizing what is already a highly decentralized polity, has long been treated as the holy grail of Philippine political reform. For a critique, see Paul D. Hutchcroft, “Dreams of Redemption: Localist Strategies of Political Reform in the Philippines,” in Susan H. Williams, ed., *Social Difference and Constitutionalism in Pan-Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Available at: <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/24586>



### 3. Utilizing old schemes: Clientelism and patronage

As with many of his predecessors, Duterte clearly understands the value of using enduring systems of patronage as “political cement,” to forge coalitions and try to exert power from the centre.<sup>25</sup> Duterte’s grip over local politicians is thus anchored in part on how effectively he has utilized the longstanding, deeply entrenched clientelistic and patronage-based structures of Philippine politics.

The Office of the President controls very sizeable quantities of discretionary funds. In 2017, the Commission on Audit reported that P6 billion worth of funds (roughly USD120 million) were at the disposal of the Chief Executive.<sup>26</sup> Outside of automatic appropriations such as the IRA, discretionary disbursements from the executive to local governments constitute rich resources for

presidential pork and patronage. Many were shocked to learn that, within the P4.1 trillion (roughly USD82 billion) 2020 national budget, a staggering P1.7 trillion (more than 40 percent of the budget) was allocated to the Special Purpose Fund, a large portion of which was under the control of the president. While the amount includes automatic appropriations, critics describe the lump-sum and un-programmed appropriations, including calamity and contingency funds with no identified recipient agencies or programs, as presidential pork barrel due to the high degree of discretion enjoyed by the executive.<sup>27</sup>

Then there are the confidential and intelligence funds of the Office of the President, particularly significant since they are not subject to the usual auditing procedures of the Commission on Audit.<sup>28</sup> In its first budget in 2017, the Duterte administration quadrupled the funds

<sup>25</sup> Hutchcroft, Paul D. (2014). “Linking Capital and Countryside: Patronage and Clientelism in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines,” in Diego Abente Brun and Larry Diamond, eds., *Political Clientelism, Social Policy, and the Quality of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press). Reprinted in *Public Policy*, available at: <https://cids.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/ppj-16-17-hutchcroft-2017.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> ‘COA: Duterte has over 6 billion in discretionary funds’. *Rappler*, 12 July 2017. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/coa-duterte-discretionary-funds>

<sup>27</sup> ‘Colmenares sees presidential pork in 2020 budget’ *Inquirer.net*, 27 August 2019. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1157875/colmenares-sees-presidential-pork-in-2020-budget> On the varieties and magnitude of “presidential pork” in the Philippines, see Ronald D. Holmes, “The Centrality of Pork Amidst Weak Institutions: Presidents and the Persistence of Particularism in Post-Marcos Philippines, (1986-2016),” PhD dissertation, The Australian National University, 2019, esp. pp. 8-14 and 371-76. Available at: <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/164238/1/Holmes%20Final%20Thesis%202019.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> ‘Gov’t spent double on confidential, intel funds in 2017 from 2016’. *ABS-CBN News*, 29 October 2018. Available at: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/10/29/18/govt-spent-double-on-confidential-intel-funds-in-2017-from-2016>

allocated to the executive for these sensitive activities, to P2.5 billion (roughly USD50 million). In 2020, this was doubled to P4.5 billion, constituting more than half of the entire P8.25 billion budget of his office.<sup>29</sup> With the same P4.5 billion allocation provided in the recently approved 2021 national budget, Senator Panfilo Lacson noted that it is “a bit too much” given that the President also controls the confidential and intelligence funds of the entire bureaucracy (P9.5 billion in total), above and beyond those directly in the hands of the Office of the President. On top of that, the executive has discretionary control over billions of pesos a year from the remittances of the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office and the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation.<sup>30</sup> In the closing days of 2020, Duterte vetoed a provision that would have required the executive to provide details to

congressional leaders on its spending of intelligence funds.<sup>31</sup>

During the pandemic, the already huge sums of discretionary funds enjoyed by the Office of the President have become even more extraordinary in their quantity. Funds effectively monopolized by the executive include not only the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) but also the ad hoc *Bayanihan* financial assistance to the county's 81 provinces (equivalent to half of their respective one-month internal revenue allotment).<sup>32</sup> In sum, toward the end of his term, the president has enjoyed discretionary control over a significant chunk of the state budget.

A noted ‘patron-strongman who delivers’,<sup>33</sup> Duterte also positions himself as a powerful patriarchal boss who proves decisive and unapologetic in shielding and vindicating those loyal to him, including those allegedly involved in high-level scandals.<sup>34</sup> The

<sup>29</sup> ‘Duterte’s office has highest confidential, intel funds in proposed 2020 budget’. *Rappler*, 28 August 2019. Available at:

<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-office-highest-confidential-intelligence-funds-proposed-2020-national-budget>

<sup>30</sup> ‘A bit too much:’ Lacson to scrutinize intel funds under Duterte’s office’. *Inquirer.net*, 11 September 2020. Available at:

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1334082/fwd-a-bit-too-much-lacson-to-scrutinize-intel-funds-under-dutertes-office>

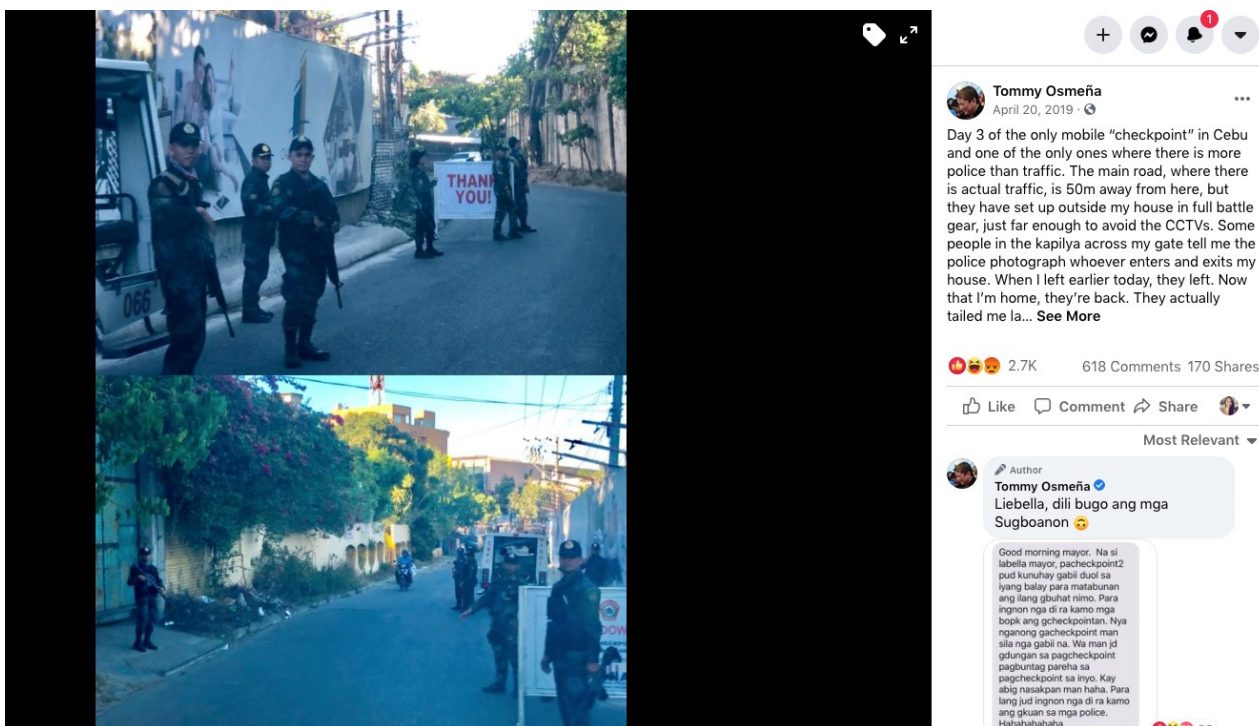
<sup>31</sup> ‘Drilon: Veto can’t stop oversight power of Congress’. *Inquirer.net*, 2 January 2021. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1378473/drilon-veto-cant-stop-oversight-power-of-congress>

<sup>32</sup> Gera, Weena. ‘Heightened contradictions: Duterte and local autonomy in the era of COVID-19’. *New Mandala*, 5 June 2020. Available at:

<https://www.newmandala.org/heightened-contradictions-duterte-and-local-autonomy-in-the-era-of-covid-1/>

<sup>33</sup> Kreuzer, Peter. ‘A patron-strongman who delivers: Explaining enduring public support for President Duterte in the Philippines’. *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt Report*, 1/2020. Available at: [https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk\\_publicationen/Prif0120.pdf](https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_publicationen/Prif0120.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Baladad, Raphael. ‘Selective transparency, inconsistent accountability: Unpacking Duterte’s anti-corruption campaign’. *Focus on the Global South*, 8 May 2019. Available at: <https://focusweb.org/selective-transparency-inconsistent-accountabilityunpacking-dutertes-anti-corruption-campaign/>



**Figure 1:** Then-Mayor of Cebu Tomas Osmeña's Facebook post detailing police surveillance of his activities prior to the May 13, 2019 elections. Image reproduced with permission.

guarantee of political protection, along with the dispensing of material benefits detailed above, creates a potent incentive for local politicians to curry favour with the president and seek to be included within his broad political coalition. Equally powerful is Duterte's propensity to demonise and attack those who have opposed him, including former allies who have fallen out of favour. And, contrary to what seemed early in his term to be prescient analysis anticipating the fragility of his rule,<sup>35</sup> Duterte's charismatic hold seems to retain very considerable potency well into the latter half of his administration.

## 4. Active intervention in local electoral politics

Aside from being a grandmaster in the allocation of patronage to local politicians, embellishing what is an old practice with augmented resources, Duterte has used a range of other means to exert his control over local politicians. These techniques, generally novel both in scope and character, included active intervention in the May 2019 midterm elections. As a rule, Duterte's enduring popularity meant that governors and mayors frequently scrambled to obtain

<sup>35</sup> De Dios, Emmanuel S. 'Charisma and its Limits'. *Business World Online*, 24 April 2017. Available at:

<https://www.bworldonline.com/content.php?section=Opinion&title=charisma-and-its-limits&id=144154>

his political endorsement.<sup>36</sup> This proved to be the most critical currency for winning the election, and most of his endorsed local candidates emerged victorious. As a result, the president was able to gain more allies from across different local government machines and coalitions (which tend to articulate very loosely and opportunistically with national political parties).<sup>37</sup>

In at least one critical location, however, Duterte and his allies faced an entrenched opponent who had apparently crossed the president and whom they seemed dead set to defeat. Cebu City Mayor Tomas Osmeña had been the dominant figure in his city for much of the past three decades; Cebu City sits within the country's biggest voting province, with three million voters, and is the pre-eminent jurisdiction of the country's second-largest metropolitan area. The full story of the enmity between Duterte and Osmeña is still to be written, but one source of conflict came when Osmeña blamed a spate of killings in the city on the then city chief of police, who was Duterte's handpicked

appointee. This earned the ire of the president,<sup>38</sup> and given the strength of the mayor's local electoral machine there were quite likely doubts as to whether Duterte's personal endorsement of his local allies would be sufficient to topple Osmeña.

Duterte's endorsement of mayoral candidate Edgardo Labella and incumbent Governor Gwendolyn Garcia came with the backing of a strong local ally, Secretary Michael Dino, his appointed chief of the Office of the Presidential Assistant for the Visayas (OPAV).<sup>39</sup> Dino, an archenemy of Osmeña, is the founder of the Cebu-based "*Bisaya Na Pud*" (Time for a Visayan) group that was instrumental in mobilizing 1.1 million Cebuano votes for Duterte in 2016.<sup>40</sup>

In the highly contested 2019 Cebu City mayoral election, Duterte's effective control of the police is believed to have influenced

<sup>36</sup> 'In the May polls, everyone wants to be by the Dutertes' side'. *ABS-CBN News*, 6 May 2019. Available at: <https://news.abc-cbn.com/spotlight/05/06/19/in-the-may-polls-everyone-wants-to-be-by-the-dutertes-side>

<sup>37</sup> See Allen Hicken, Paul Hutchcroft, Meredith Weiss, and Edward Aspinall, "Introduction: The Local Dynamics of the National Election in the Philippines," in Hicken, Aspinall, and Weiss, *Electoral Dynamics in the Philippines: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2019). Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv136c5vg>

<sup>38</sup> 'Cebu City at the crossroads: Keep or replace Tomas Osmena?'. *Rappler*, 11 May 2019. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/cebu-city-at-crossroads-keep-replace-tomas-osmena>

<sup>39</sup> Seares, Pachico. 'Non-politician Michael Dino just went through a tough election. And won'. *Sun Star Cebu*, 26 May 2019. Available at: <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1807256/Cebu/Opinion/Seares-Non-politician-Michael-Dino-just-went-through-a-tough-election-And-won>

<sup>40</sup> 'Michael Dino: President Duterte's man in the Visayas'. *Rappler*, 17 September 2016. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/michael-dino-duterte-man-visayas>





**Figure 2:** President Rodrigo Duterte shows a document containing the list of alleged narco-politicians during his speech at the Police Regional Office 13 Headquarters in Camp Rafael C. Rodriguez, Butuan City on 6 October. [Image credit: SIMEON CELI JR./PPD](#)

the results, with well-documented reports of police harassment of local candidates not aligned with the president. Osmeña publicly decried the presence of police checkpoints in front of his residence, and police allegedly harassed pro-Osmeña barangay captains in the mountain areas and also went house to house in vote-rich barangays.<sup>41</sup> Such police intervention may have played a critical role in the outcome, according to insiders, and Labella emerged the winner. While Osmeña appears to have been the most prominent target of the palace in the 2019 mid-term

election, it seems that targeted verbal attacks and public shaming tactics were not uncommon elsewhere. As one influential investigative journalist explained, “the pattern...of local officials getting killed weeks or months after being cited in the drug list or cursed by the President in his speech” can have a strong influence on electoral dynamics. “If the President doesn’t like you, it’s like the death sentence to your candidacy.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> ‘Osmeña, police clash anew: Why a checkpoint outside Cebu mayor’s house?’. *Rappler*, 28 April 2019. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/cebu-osmena-police-clash-anew-checkpoint-alleged-political-harassment>

<sup>42</sup> ‘Local campaigns start: Duterte, ex-mayor, sets the tone for 2019 polls’. *Rappler*, 29 March/1 April 2019. Available at: <https://r3.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2019/227126-local-campaigns-start-duterte-ex-mayor-sets-tone>



## 5. Climate of fear: Drug war and killings of mayors

Duterte's tight grip on local political structures is also advanced by his effective deployment of intimidation. The centerpiece of his presidency is the so-called "war on drugs" campaign, which—based on official figures—has since 2016 seen around 256,000 arrests and 6,000 people killed in government operations (deaths which Duterte recently claimed as his direct responsibility).<sup>43</sup> The Philippine Commission on Human Rights puts the toll far higher, estimating at least 27,000 deaths as of mid-2019.<sup>44</sup> Human rights groups have collected extensive evidence of extrajudicial killings, whether by police in uniform, off-duty police, or guns for hire.<sup>45</sup> Most victims have been suspected illegal drug users and peddlers from urban poor communities, but the killings have also targeted activists, judges, lawyers, journalists, military personnel, police

officers, and local politicians. Soon after coming to office in 2016, Duterte publicly released a list accusing around 150 public officials of involvement with the illegal drug trade; some of those on the list, he said, were personal acquaintances.<sup>46</sup> Ahead of the 2019 mid-term elections, Duterte released another "narco-list" of politicians allegedly involved in illegal drugs, including 45 incumbent officials (33 mayors, eight vice mayors, three congressmen, and one board member) as well as one former mayor.<sup>47</sup> Known to be vindictive against his critics, Duterte does not hesitate to spew violent threats in front of local officials; speaking to a March 2020 assembly of the country's municipal mayors, for example, he declared that "It is my job to scare people, to intimidate people, and to kill people."<sup>48</sup> As Mayor Duterte became President Duterte, explains Nathan Quimpo, his "exaggerated claims on the drug problem" have "played the key role" in his shift from "boss rule in Davao City" to "national boss rule."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 'I'm the one': Philippines president takes responsibility for drug killings'. *The Guardian*, 20 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/20/i-m-the-one-philippines-president-takes-responsibility-for-drug-killings>

<sup>44</sup> 'Duterte's drug war: Philippine fathers mourn sons in silence'. *Aljazeera*, 2 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/02/dutertes-drug-war-philippine-fathers-mourn-sons-in-silence/?gb=true>

<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch. 'World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Philippines'. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/philippines#>

<sup>46</sup> 'Rodrigo Duterte, Philippine President, Links 150 Public Servants to Drugs'. *The New York Times*, 7 August 2016. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/08/world/asia/duterte-philippine-president-links-150-public-servants-to-drugs.html>

<sup>47</sup> 'Duterte releases drug list ahead of 2019 election'. *Rappler*, 14 March 2019. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/duterte-releases-drug-list-ahead-of-2019-elections>

<sup>48</sup> 'Duterte: It is my job to kill'. *Rappler*, 10 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-says-job-to-kill>

<sup>49</sup> Quimpo, Nathan Gilbert. (2017). "Duterte's 'War on Drugs': The Securitization of Illegal Drugs and the Return of National Boss Rule," in Nicole Curato, ed., *A*

One of the latest local officials to be a victim of Duterte's war on drugs was Caesar Perez, the long-serving and well-loved mayor of Los Baños, a university town south of Manila. The National Police Commission had removed Perez's authority over the local police in 2017,<sup>50</sup> but he was nonetheless said to have maintained the trust of his townsfolk.<sup>51</sup> He had been on Duterte's narco-list<sup>52</sup>, and when he was felled by unidentified gunmen in the municipal hall one evening in December 2020 he became the 24<sup>th</sup> local official to be killed since 2016. Earlier the same year, two other town mayors tagged by Duterte as narco-politicians had also been killed. Both were from Mindanao: the mayor of Sto. Niño, South Cotabato was killed in July by gunmen riding-in-tandem on a motorcycle (a common *modus operandi* in the drug war),<sup>53</sup> and the mayor of Talitay town of Maguindanao province was gunned down in February.<sup>54</sup>

This climate of fear under Duterte's regime has reshaped power dynamics between the centre and localities, with far less room for manoeuvre at the subnational level.<sup>55</sup> For nearly five years, local politicians have had to confront fearsome examples of what happens to those who fall out of favour with the presidential palace.

## 6. Wooing the military and dangling of funds to barangays based on anti-insurgency criteria

Duterte's political machinery is further bolstered by his huge influence over the country's security forces. Aiming to secure the loyalty of soldiers and police, one of his first orders as President was to increase the combat and incentive pay of members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) via Executive Order No. 3, while also increasing

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*Duterte Reader, Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press), pp.145-166, at 151, 157.

<sup>50</sup> '4 more Calabarzon mayors stripped of police powers'. *Rappler*, 15 December 2017. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/calabarzon-mayors-removed-police-powers-napolcom>

<sup>51</sup> 'Shock, rage in Los Baños over mayor's slay'. *Inquirer.net*, 5 December 2020. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1368203/shock-rage-in-los-banos-over-mayors-slay>

<sup>52</sup> 'Los Baños mayor dies after shooting inside municipal hall'. *Rappler*, 3 December 2020. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/los-banos-laguna-mayor-shot-december-3-2020>

<sup>53</sup> 'Mayor in Duterte drug list shot dead in South Cotabato'. *Rappler*, 10 July 2020. Available at:

<https://www.rappler.com/nation/sto-nino-south-cotabato-mayor-pablo-matinong-killed-july-10-2020>

<sup>54</sup> 'Philippines: Town Mayor on Duterte's Drug List Shot Dead in Manila'. *Benar News*, 11 February 2020. Available at:

<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/mayor-killed-02112020142326.html>

<sup>55</sup> This parallels an earlier observation of how Duterte's drug war has far-reaching consequences for subnational politics, defining shifts in local government priorities and programs. See David G. Timberman, 'Philippine Politics Under Duterte: A Midterm Assessment'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 10 January 2019. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/01/10/philippine-politics-under-duterte-midterm-assessment-pub-78091>

budgets for weapons, gear, and facilities.<sup>56</sup> In 2018, Duterte signed Joint Resolution No. 1, authorising an increase in the base pay, allowances, benefits and incentives of all military and uniformed personnel under the Departments of National Defense (DND), DILG, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA).<sup>57</sup> The top ranks of the bureaucracy have also become increasingly militarised: by the end of 2018, a third of Duterte's cabinet was occupied by retired

military men.<sup>58</sup> The chief implementer of the country's National Task Force against Covid-19 pandemic is a former chief of staff of the AFP.

In what was viewed as "pork for the generals", the 2021 budget allocated a staggering P16.44 billion (roughly USD342 million) for Duterte's National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). Notably, the funds for this anti-insurgency task force were lodged under the P28.82 billion Local Government Support



**Figure 3:** President Rodrigo Duterte and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Special Assistant to the President Christopher Lawrence Go, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Ricardo Visaya, Army chief Lt. Gen. Eduardo Año, and Air Force chief Lt. Gen. Edgar Fallorina prior to a boodle fight with airmen at the Villamor Air Base in Pasay City on 13 September, 2016. [Image credit: KING RODRIGUEZ/ PPD](#)

<sup>56</sup> 'Duterte gives soldiers, cops huge pay hike'. *Inquirer.net*, 4 October 2016. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/821504/duterte-gives-soldiers-cops-huge-pay-hike>  
<sup>57</sup> 'Duterte approves pay hike for soldiers, policemen'. *CNN Philippines*, 9 January 2018. Available at: <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/01/09/joint-resolution.html>

<sup>58</sup> 'In 2018, Duterte turns to military for (almost) everything'. *Rappler*, 12 December 2018. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-turns-to-philippine-military-year-end-2018>

Fund allocated to barangay projects. The NTF-ELCAC, created by the president in 2018 (via Executive Order No. 70), will now manage the funds, and those barangays deemed infiltrated are only able to access the fund once they secure a certification from the task force that their jurisdictions are cleared of insurgency.<sup>59</sup> With the task force's direct intervention in barangay affairs, this fund is seen as a tool not just to try to end the insurgency but also to control barangay leaders. The resources controlled by the new task force, warned Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon, will allow it to "play God to the requests of the barangays."<sup>60</sup>

## 7. New mechanisms of local supervision: 'Show Cause Orders'

The DILG, acting on behalf of the executive, is mandated to conduct general supervision and strengthen the capability of local governments in the promotion of local autonomy. It also has the capacity to assist presidents in keeping tabs on localities. To its credit, the DILG has helped both to capacitate

local innovations and to monitor abuses of local politicians (a longstanding problem, given the prevalence of local dynasties and bossism throughout the archipelago).

Under the Duterte regime, particularly since retired Philippine Army General Eduardo Año took the helm of DILG in 2018, the enhanced use of particular mechanisms of supervision seems to have effectively kept local politicians on their toes. Secretary Año has regularly issued 'Show Cause Orders' (SCOs) against local officials facing accusations or complaints of having acted improperly or illegally.<sup>61</sup> Within a given deadline, they must explain why no administrative cases should be filed against them. Failure to do so will lead the Office of the Ombudsman to file an automatic administrative case against the local officials concerned. Criminal charges may also be filed as appropriate by the National Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice.

The DILG's penchant for issuing SCOs began in September 2018, when the injunction was used against 16 mayors who were reported

<sup>59</sup> 'The generals' pork? Duterte eyes P16.4-B fund for anti-communist task force'. *Rappler*, 5 September 2020. Available at:

<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-eyes-fund-for-anti-communist-task-force>

<sup>60</sup> 'COA: Hard to trace how Duterte intel funds and anti-communist task force money were spent'. *Rappler*, 16 September 2020. Available at:

<https://www.rappler.com/nation/coa-difficulty-auditing-duterte-intel-funds>

<sup>61</sup> While we are not aware of any study detailing the number of SCOs issued by the DILG under Duterte as

compared to previous administrations, anecdotal information suggests that this legal instrument is being used against local governments at a level far exceeding anything in recent memory. In one campaign that took place in 2019, involving 1516 LGUs, the DILG reported that '101 LGUs received a failed rating and were issued show cause orders by the Department'. This represents nearly 7 percent of the total. See 'DILG issues show cause orders to 99 Manila villages'. *Philippine News Agency*, 22 October 2019. Available at:

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1083846>



to have been absent from their respective jurisdictions during the onslaught of Typhoon Ompong. The department cited this as a violation of their directives for all mayors to be physically present in their respective areas during a calamity, in accordance to the *Oplan Listo* (Operation Quick Response) protocols and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010.<sup>62</sup>

The legal basis for the DILG's issuance of SCOs, as well as the investigation and recommendation of appropriate sanctions

and the filing of cases, comes from the 1991 Local Government Code, which mandates that, "An elective official may be disciplined, suspended or removed from office" on various grounds including gross negligence, dereliction of duty, or misconduct in office. DILG officials also cite the doctrine of qualified political agency, where the DILG as the alter ego of the President has the power to sanction erring local chief executives.<sup>63</sup>

The increasingly assertive stance of the DILG is not without its critics. The brother of the governor of Cebu, likewise an ally of the



**Figure 4:** President Rodrigo Roa Duterte strikes his signature pose with newly-appointed Interior and Local Government Secretary Eduardo Año following the oath-taking ceremony at the Malago Clubhouse in Malacañang Park on November 5, 2018. [Image credit: KING RODRIGUEZ/ PPD](#)

<sup>62</sup> 'DILG issues show cause orders against 16 mayors'. Department of Interior and Local Government, 21 September 2018. Available at: <https://dilg.gov.ph/news/DILG-issues-show-cause-orders-against-16-mayors/NC-2018-1284>

<sup>63</sup> 'DILG mulls issuance of show-cause orders to absentee mayors during Typhoon Ompong'.

Department of Interior and Local Government, 18 September 2018. Available at: <https://dilg.gov.ph/news/DILG-mulls-issuance-of-show-cause-orders-to-absentee-mayors-during-Typhoon-Ompong/NC-2018-1279>



president and himself a congressperson, complained last year about how LGUs are being “dictated and ordered around” by the DILG on how to exercise their powers. This, he argued, is a violation of the constitutional grant of local autonomy. “LGUs are partners in implementing national policy,” said the congressman, “not miscreants one threatens with punishment at every turn.” Because governors and mayors fear raising these questions, he further explained, it is important for members of Congress to speak out in support of local autonomy.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the issuances of SCOs have been intensified by the DILG on various violations of quarantine protocols and directives issued by the national government, particularly the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-MEID) and the DILG itself. “As directed by the President himself,” Secretary Año explained, “we will not go easy on local government officials who violate the prescribed directives during the [Enhanced Community Quarantine], that’s the mandate of the DILG—local government supervision.

Therefore, we have no choice but to issue show cause orders and file the necessary charges against them, when necessary.”<sup>65</sup>

Armed with emergency powers during the pandemic, Duterte has issued a series of warnings to local government officials who set their own rules and standards: “There is only one republic...and therefore, you should abide by the directives of the national government....I am ordering all LGUs that are doing this to stand down and to abide by the directives of the IATF.” He then ordered the DILG and the DOJ to closely monitor LGU compliance and file administrative and criminal cases, as appropriate, against “wayward” officials.<sup>66</sup>

## 8. LGU ‘clamour’ for Charter change

The DILG has put itself at the forefront of the push for charter change with its DILG-CORE (Constitutional Reform) campaign. This includes efforts to “institutionalise” the Mandanas ruling by making it explicit in the Constitution (something that most local politicians would presumably already be keen to support) as well as to lift restrictions

<sup>64</sup> ‘Lawmaker questions DILG orders on LGUs’. *Sun Star Cebu*, 10 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1847958/Cebu/Local-News/Cebu-Representative-Pablo-John-Garcia-questions-DILG-orders-on-local-government-units>

<sup>65</sup> ‘DILG issues show cause orders against 3 governors, 2 mayors for violating national quarantine policies’. *Department of Interior and Local Government*, 15 April 2020. Available at: <https://dilg.gov.ph/news/DILG-issues-show-cause-orders-against-3-governors-2->

[mayors-for-violating-national-quarantine-policies/NC-2020-1094](https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1847958/Cebu/Local-News/Cebu-Representative-Pablo-John-Garcia-questions-DILG-orders-on-local-government-units)

<sup>66</sup> ‘Don’t make quarantine more difficult, follow nat’l gov’t standard on lockdown, Duterte warns LGUs’. *Manila Bulletin*, 20 March 2020. Available at: <https://mb.com.ph/2020/03/20/dont-make-quarantine-more-difficult-follow-natl-govt-standard-on-lockdown-duterte-warns-lgus/>

on foreign investments in industries currently limited to Filipinos (a proposal long favoured by many constitutional reform advocates).<sup>67</sup> The League of Municipalities of the Philippines (LMP), composed of 1,489 town mayors mostly allied with Duterte, has been part of a purported 'clamour' among local governments for "cha-cha" (charter change) on the pretext of strengthening local autonomy.<sup>68</sup>

Critics argue that the LMP proposal is suspect, as constitutional change is not needed to accommodate their demand for greater access to national revenues.<sup>69</sup> Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon cautioned lawmakers against heeding the supposed clamour from LGUs, as some quarters may just be interested in undertaking constitutional reform with the ultimate goal of lifting term limits. He argued that there is no need for "cha-cha" if only to institutionalise the Mandanas ruling, because Supreme Court decisions already form part of the law of the land. Drilon expressed his concern that there is a hidden agenda behind the "cha-cha" scheme, namely to "abort the 2022 election....and if they push through, to remove the term limit."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> 'Cha-cha drive alive amid health crisis'. *Inquirer.net*, 17 May 2020. Available at: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1276313/cha-cha-drive-alive-amid-health-crisis>

<sup>68</sup> 'House panel sets Cha-cha meeting on LGU 'clamor''. *Business Mirror*, 21 July 2020. Available at: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/07/21/house-panel-sets-cha-cha-meeting-on-lgu-clamor/>

## 9. Prospects

In surveying the many ways that President Duterte wields his power, it is clear that he has greatly entrenched his control over local structures and that many subnational politicians seem to be acquiescing in their own subjugation under strongman rule. The president has proven to be highly adept not only in the standard game of dispensing patronage resources but also in offering political protection to those who are loyal to him and in demonising and attacking those who have opposed him. As long as he maintains his high levels of popularity, assisted as well with threats of coercion (both implicit and explicit) against those who dare cross his path, Duterte will continue to be able to reach into local bailiwicks throughout the archipelago to tamp down any significant threat of opposition—while also offering valuable support to those who have flocked to his camp. Such a grip on local powers could be a potent weapon in Duterte's efforts to "anoint" his successor. But can this tight grip on local politicians endure?

As he confronts the prospect of prosecution for alleged human rights violations and

<sup>69</sup> 'A Duterte second term comes into view'. *Asia Times*, 22 July 2020. Available at: <https://asiatimes.com/2020/07/a-duterte-second-term-comes-into-view/>

<sup>70</sup> 'Cha-cha not needed for Mandanas – Drilon'. *Business Mirror*, 20 July 2020. Available at: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/07/20/cha-cha-not-needed-for-mandanas-drilon/>

extra-judicial killings, including potentially by the International Criminal Court, Duterte has strong incentives to usher in a successor who will be protective of his interests<sup>71</sup>—and, conversely, to ensure that he will not be replaced by an opposition figure. Facing heightened tensions and factionalisation among his allies in Congress,<sup>72</sup> Duterte must decide which of his allies has the best shot at succeeding him. As Mark Thompson explains, however, the historical odds are not in his favour: “Philippine presidents have a poor record of getting their preferred successor elected.”<sup>73</sup>

All the more, as the May 2022 elections fast approach, Duterte will want to ensure that his current grip over local politicians can be sustained and that they will support his chosen candidate for the presidency. Given the absence of a strong liberal democratic alternative from the opposition, subnational officials currently have a clear incentive to maintain their alliances with the president. But because “allegiances” of local politicians to national leaders can become quite fickle in the lead-up to Philippine elections, there is

no real guarantee of their support next year. The historical pattern is that governing coalitions start to splinter as elections approach and the leader is unable to satisfy all those who have earlier joined his or her camp.<sup>74</sup> Whether Duterte’s combination of charisma and coercion is able to change these dynamics remains to be seen.

Regardless of how the president calibrates his strategies toward the goal of regime continuity, the high stakes of the endeavour mean that we can anticipate particularly intense politicking over the next fifteen months. And if Duterte succeeds in getting his anointed candidate elected, it is quite possible that many of his extremely effective strategies of presidential control over local politicians could endure into the next administration.

<sup>71</sup> As Quimpo explained as early as 2017, Duterte “will have to see to it that after June 2022, he will not be arrested and prosecuted for human rights violations, crimes against humanity, or other crimes. This means that either he stays on, or he makes sure that his successor is of the same mould and backs him (p. 161).”

<sup>72</sup> ‘Highlights: House Speakership fight between Cayetano and Velasco’. *Rappler*, 20 October 2020. Available at:

<https://www.rappler.com/nation/house->

[representatives-updates-speakership-fight-alan-peter-cayetano-lord-allan-velasco](https://www.rappler.com/nation/house-representatives-updates-speakership-fight-alan-peter-cayetano-lord-allan-velasco)

<sup>73</sup> Thompson, Mark R. (2020). ‘Explaining Duterte’s Rise and Rule: ‘Penal Populist’ Leadership or a Structural Crisis of Oligarchic Democracy in the Philippines?’. *Philippine Political Science Journal* 41(1-2): 5-31.

<sup>74</sup> Thompson, Mark R. (1995). *The Anti-Marcos Struggle: Personalistic Rule and Democratic Transition in the Philippines* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 21. Available at:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bsgx>



**Figure 5:** President Rodrigo Roa Duterte interacts with some of the guests during the oath-taking ceremony of the newly elected local government officials and party-list representatives at the Malacañang Palace on 25 June, 2019. [Image credit: SIMEON CELI JR./PRESIDENTIAL PHOTO](#)