

# Perceptions of Rodrigo Duterte among his Filipino supporters living in Sweden and the Philippines

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## Abstract

This thesis draws on eleven semi-structured interviews with Duterte supporters. It analyses how the president is perceived by Filipinos, more specifically by those who support him and live in Sweden and the Philippines, in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the appeal of Duterte to his supporters. The thesis focuses on the main reasons for Duterte's popularity, the war against drugs and criminality, and the president's best and worst features. The empirical findings were analysed through the theoretical lens of the concepts of charismatic leadership and populism. The thesis supports the existing research that views Duterte as populist. The findings suggest that much of Duterte's appeal to the supporters is attributed to his charismatic leadership. Overall, this thesis finds that the appeal of Duterte to his supporters lies in his personality, which has a profound effect on the supporters, background, an overall image of a non-traditional politician, and ability to make people feel seen. Also, it lies in his decisiveness, as shown in his war against drugs and other crimes, the pursuit of game-changing initiatives, and the positive change he has been implementing.

*Keywords: the Philippines, Duterte, the war against drugs, charismatic leadership, behavioural approach, attributive approach, populism, penal populism*

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## 1. Introduction

Today's increasingly complex world faces unprecedented change. Leaders who are deemed to be populists, meaning those who claim to embody the people unified against a notion of elites/'others' (Galito, 2018), are taking the leading roles in governments enjoying significant popular support. Since the power in the populism scenario can be concentrated in the hands of a 'strongman', who may tend to disregard human rights and use authoritarian strategies in order to proceed with his agendas, some consider populism undesirable (Veloso Abao, 2017 in Curato, 2017, p.304). The appalling events of the last two and a half years in the Philippines exemplify this too well.

The Philippines used to be one of the most democratic countries in South East Asia. At the same time, it was economically backward primarily because of the leaders like Marcos<sup>1</sup> with their corrupt agendas and inability to effectuate change. Besides, the country's colonial past has left it dependent on its previous owners and led to a lack of national confidence, which had a negative impact on the economic development of the Philippines (Somjee and Somjee, 1995). All these have contributed to the cases of emergence of populist figures throughout the political history of the country<sup>2</sup>. They promised to solve the pressing issues of the Filipino population; however, failed time and again to bring about significant change. In 2016 presidential elections when populist Duterte started to run for the presidency, Filipinos warmly welcomed this charismatic individual with compelling rhetoric. For Filipinos, he sounded convincing giving pledges to fight crime in the country, and most importantly to eradicate the evil, drug shabu<sup>3</sup>, which, according to Duterte, prevented the Philippines from developing in a right direction. Filipinos, who have had enough of high crime rate, economic chaos, corruption, cronyism, poor infrastructure and absence of significant reforms believed then-candidate Duterte and voted for him. As a result,

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<sup>1</sup> Years in office: 1966-1986 (Somjee and Somjee, 1995)

<sup>2</sup> President Joseph Ejercito Estrada (1998-2001), candidate for the 2004 presidency Fernando Poe Jr., Vice president Jejomar Binay (2010-2016) (Curato, 2017b; Hedman, 2006; Thompson, 2010)

<sup>3</sup> Methamphetamine (Curato, 2017a)

this unorthodox individual has won elections by a landslide and became the president of the Philippines on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, 2016 (Curato, 2017a).

Since then, the country has been under international pressure. The reason for this is Duterte's unprecedented fight against drug dealers and addicts, so-called 'war on drugs', the death toll from which mounts to over twenty thousand people (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Although Duterte's methods are interpreted as with the signs of dictatorship by the foreign powers (Curato,2017a), Filipinos largely approve his performance<sup>4</sup>.

So how come that the individual, acting in a manner so controversial, manages to enjoy the support of the majority of the Filipino population? If one looks back at the past, world history has a few examples when country leaders disregarded human rights; however, they still had popular support. The thing is those leaders could influence people's minds, communicating with them on a deep emotional level. People bought into leaders' vision and somehow did not challenge their ideas. Most likely, it takes an exceptional kind of charisma to make people loyal to such an extent, that they accept risky projects. Curato (2017c) only mentions that populist Duterte is charismatic. However, to my knowledge, no study examines Duterte's charismatic leadership. Hence, through the interviews with the supporters, I will address this gap in the research and try to understand whether charismatic leadership may underlie Duterte's appeal to the supporters.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how Duterte is perceived by Filipinos, more specifically by those Filipinos who support him and live in Sweden and the Philippines, in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the appeal of Duterte to his supporters. Since supporters are located both in the Philippines and in Sweden, the study will also explore whether or not there is a difference in how they perceive the Philippine president.

The main research question of this thesis is **“How is Rodrigo Duterte viewed by his Filipino supporters from Sweden and the Philippines?”**

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<sup>4</sup> According to Pulse Asia Research, 81 per cent of the population approved Duterte's performance in December 2018

Sub-questions:

- What are the main reasons for Duterte's popularity among his supporters?
- Do the supporters consider his war against drugs and other crime justified?
- What do Duterte supporters consider to be his positive and negative features?

To answer these questions, I conducted eleven interviews with Duterte supporters. All interviews were done in Sweden. Interviews with the supporters living in the Philippines were done by Skype.

This thesis starts with a literature review that contains, firstly, previous research on how Duterte's phenomenon is understood and, secondly, theoretical concepts used when analysing empirical data obtained from the interviews. The method section will follow it. Next, I present selected quotes from the empirical data, combined with their analysis through the lens of charismatic leadership and populism. In the conclusions, I provide general research findings and my contribution.

## **2. Literature review**

This literature review consists of two parts. First, it explores the existing body of research around the issue of how Duterte supporters perceive him. It starts by presenting the historical overview of the emergence of populism in the Philippines. Next, it focuses on different interpretations of Duterte's popularity. This will be followed by a brief description of Duterte's first years in office. Second, it discusses literature on populism and charismatic leadership.

### **2.1 Understanding the Duterte Phenomenon**

### 2.1.1 Historical overview of the emergence of populism in the Philippines

Most scholars agree that the rise of populism in the Philippine post-colonial politics is often associated with the figure of Joseph Ejercito Estrada. This showbusiness personality became popular in the 1960s, in the times of political and socio-economic transformation of the country when mass migration of the poor rural population to metropolitan Manila took place. Cinemas were one of the key entertainments of those times and actors who played ordinary people gained high popularity among the masses (Hedman, 2001). Estrada's unprecedented popularity among urban poor was pivotal in his success as a politician. Filipinos saw him as one of them, a simple guy who was opposed to the ruling elite. Estrada first entered a political arena on a local level in 1968 becoming a major in San Juan (Manila suburb). Later on, in 1987 he got a seat in the Senate despite his loyal service under Marcos regime. In 1992 he stood for election to the vice-presidency and, ultimately, the presidency in 1998. Estrada was out of office in 2001 after impeachment, ousted by the upper class in the face of a coalition of big business, NGO activists, the Catholic Church and military (Hedman, 2006). It is noteworthy that Estrada did not lose the support among the poor voters even after various scandals related to gambling and financial embezzlement (Hedman, 2006). Overall, on his watch, he did not significantly improve the lives of the poor people. However, one must not forget his input regarding land reform and initiatives with government bonds to help those with smaller funds to gain a higher return (Thompson, 2016).

In 2004, Estrada's friend, actor Fernando Poe Jr. also used a narrative of pro-poor populism and was very close to winning the election, despite the absence of any political experience. However, he has lost to Gloria Macagapal – Arroyo, who, as it was revealed later on, manipulated the vote (Thompson, 2010).

In 2015 the central populist figure was incumbent Vice President Jejomar Binay. He was a mayor of Makati city for nearly 20 years before his high governmental position. While being a mayor, he used to advocate for the poor Makati. He was also good at building good relationships with the necessary people, which enabled him to succeed in his political career. However, like most Filipino politicians, he was accused of corruption. Binay sounded populist denying attacks



against him as proof of the elitist government's anti-poor agenda. Corruption allegations decreased Binay's chances to win the 2016 election (Curato, 2017b).

Grace Poe, another candidate for the 2016 presidency, used so-called "middling strategy". She presented herself as a populist and a reformist<sup>5</sup> at the same time. There were attempts to prevent Poe's participation in the Philippine election as she might not have had a natural-born Filipino status and in effect spent most of her life in the US. In response to them, she used the populist rhetoric, trying to present persecution as equal to the misery of everyday Filipinos (Curato, 2017b).

Rodrigo Duterte started to run for the 2016 presidency later than other candidates. While both Binay and Grace Poe began to lose support in the polls, Duterte was gaining more and more trust from the voters. Unlike previously mentioned populists, he did not utilise a narrative of pro-poor populism. Duterte was popular among middle and lower-middle-class voters, gaining the support of the most impoverished voters only at the end of the presidential campaign (Thompson, 2016). In April 2016 he was ahead and stayed in the leading position until the election in June. His suspicious bank accounts, numerous mistresses and insults towards the Pope did not affect the elections (Curato, 2017).

Curato (2017b) describes Duterte's type of populism as a "tricky" one. One can view it both as a movement towards the people and a step away from elitism, and on the other hand, it is a step away from the democracy as it is known in the Western world. McCoy (2017) writes that Duterte's populism has a tendency towards violence that forced a resumption of his 'war on drugs' after the 2016 election.

### **2.1.2 Different interpretations of Duterte's popularity**

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<sup>5</sup> 'Reformism' is a democratic regime. In this context, it involves a "discursive narrative committed to democracy and combating corruption in the name of 'good governance' that binds together key elite strategic groups (big business, the Catholic Church hierarchy, civil society activists, and the military brass) within the context of generally weak state institutions" (Teehankee, J.C., 2017, p. 44, in Curato, 2017)

Duterte is a lawyer by education, and he was working as a deputy prosecutor for seven years before becoming a Mayor of his hometown, Davao. During his 22 years in office as a Mayor, he eradicated poverty, crime and drug issues in the city. That was the main reason why residents of Davao supported Duterte for many years (Panarina, 2017). However, even then, some Filipinos simultaneously expressed concerns about the death toll throughout the ‘war on drugs’ campaign and stated that they would prefer arrests of drug suspects to killings (Kine, 2017).

Duterte was the first president in Philippine history who came from the periphery. He was the only candidate who did not have significant links with the elites. Filipinos voted for him by a landslide because they protested against the elitism of the rulers from the post-Marcos era. Duterte’s campaign promises included implementation of law and order, eradication of corruption and bringing the government closer to the people. Then-candidate assured Filipinos that these actions would lead to foreign investments and, consequently, to the prosperity of the nation (Casiple, 2016).

Further, importantly, Duterte made Filipinos believe in him because his actions have proven that he is a persona of “I will” and can act swiftly. For instance, in the aftermath of the devastating Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban City (2013), he assisted in relief operation by sending the Davao’s world-class rapid response team to the site. Moreover, he arrived there without any fanfare and gave attention to the survivors. This was in much contrast to traditional politicians who did not seem to care much and come to Tacloban primarily to take a picture for the media. After coming back to Davao, Duterte gave an emotional interview to the media stating that God must have been somewhere else. Such actions and empathy towards the people made him even more popular among the Filipinos (Curato, 2017c).

Much research on Duterte presidency has been done by Curato (2017a,b,c). Among other things, she tried to examine the reasons and the logic behind Filipinos’ support for the president. The scholar suggests that support is attributed to Duterte’s politics of anxiety and politics of hope. Both fear and hope are the drivers of Duterte’s penal populism, his political style. Fear relates to “tough on crime” rhetoric and actions. Hope is about an opportunity the people got by electing Duterte. It is them, and not the elites, who can control the future. They can do this by supporting

the president. Fear and hope are closely interrelated because better future heavily depends on the eradication of crime in the county. Overall, Curato portrays Duterte's populism not as demagoguery combined with one-way manipulations, but as a much deeper process such as "negotiated relationship between the populist and his publics" (Curato, 2017c, p. 106).

Filipino journalist, sociologist and public figure Randy David partly agrees with Curato stressing that Duterte's campaign played on the darkest fears of the voters. Duterte promised to deliver leadership and will in what was needed to be done, including killings (David, 2016).

McCargo (2016) comments on the unpredictability of today's politics in the Philippines. He writes that Duterte got votes from taxi drivers, academics, lawyers and doctors. Thompson (2016) has the same opinion on the matter and emphasises that Duterte's support is particularly strong among small shop owners, taxi drivers and overseas workers. Representatives of the middle class express support to the president as they want the government that would take actions. They demand public safety, infrastructure and the end of corruption. They also consider that economic achievements might be in danger if 'law and order' are not implemented (Teehankee, 2017 in Curato, 2017a).

Various scholars examined Duterte's image. McCargo (2016) describes Duterte as the one who has an image of a brutal personality fighting against crime, uses obscene language and shakes his fist, demonstrating masculinity and strength. Duterte's masculinity is accompanied by his authenticity. The politician speaks both English, Tagalog and Visayan<sup>6</sup> during his speeches. He strives to distance himself from Manila politicians in rhetoric and emphasises that he originates from Davao and has no connection to the mishaps of Manila elites. Quimpo (2017 in Curato, 2017) writes that the president's lifestyle stands in stark contrast with the lifestyles of previous presidents. The way he dresses, meaning the absence of formal clothes, eating with hands and simple accommodation raise his popularity rating.

### 2.1.3 Duterte's first years in office

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<sup>6</sup> One of the languages in the Philippines (Somjee and Somjee, 1995)

The Philippines has been under heavy debate since the 30th of June, 2016 when unorthodox Rodrigo Duterte became the president of the country. Duterte gives the world's community a cause for concern because of his unprecedented campaign against drug dealers and addicts, the so-called 'war on drugs', with a death toll of more than 20,000 people (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Since Duterte took office, his political decisions as the head of state did not differ much from the ones when he was a mayor of Davao. As well as during Davao times, many of the killings of drug suspects were carefully planned by the people from the government and executed by death squads (Panarina, 2017). It seems like Duterte strives to act in a manner of autocrat Marcos. Duterte praised him a lot even though Marco's twenty years in office were the most corrupt, economically ineffective, with the absence of any kinds of significant developments in the country (Somjee and Somjee, 1995). Duterte even positions himself as a successor to Marcos, and one can see that the president's methods used in the war against drugs have signs of dictatorship too (Curato, 2017c).

After Duterte has become the president, he kept emphasising that the key problem of the Philippines is not an ineffective political economy, corruption and cronyism, but methamphetamine - drug shabu. The drug problem, according to Duterte, leads to a high level of crime in the country and prevents it from successful economic development. Indeed, who would like to invest in a country with such a high level of crime? Duterte stresses that his mission is to clean Filipino society from drugs. Only after this problem is addressed, the Philippines has a chance for a better life (Curato, 2017c).

Further, Duterte has a reputation of a foul-mouthed personality who lacks tact and diplomacy. He publicly insulted Obama and other high officials for their intrusion into Philippines domestic affairs. Interestingly, but according to Duterte, his negative attitudes towards the United States are well-justified as they are attributed to the past actions of the US governments when they did nothing but exploited the Philippines, its colony<sup>7</sup>. So, in the opinion of Duterte, Obama's stands regarding human rights abuse in the Philippines are somewhat hypocritical in the light of his country's previous actions. As Duterte put it: "I am a president of a sovereign state. And we have

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<sup>7</sup> The Philippines was the colony of the United States from 1898 till 1946 (Curato, 2017c)

long ceased to be a colony. I do not have any master but the Filipino people” (Webb, 2017, p. 129 in Curato, 2017).

Overall, the United Nations and International Criminal Court (ICC) commented on the human rights issue in the country, criticising Duterte’s methods. ICC mentioned that Philippines high officials are engaged in killings, and they encourage civilians to be a part of the war on drugs. Duterte considered such interference inappropriate and threatened to leave these organisations. Another thing is that the domestic politicians who were opposed to Duterte in his brutal methods of dealing with drug problem got attacked continuously. For instance, Senator Leila de Lima was dismissed from the Committee on Justice and Human Rights for her critic of the regime and arrested (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

However, despite the facts presented above, the president’s rhetoric and game-changing initiatives have been warmly welcomed by the Filipinos. In 2017 Duterte made a bold move signing a law that granted free education in state universities. Economic managers commented that it would be hard to afford free education, which is around US2 million a year. However, Duterte stated that the policy needed to be implemented. This decisive step aimed at improving the lives of his fellow countrymen raised Duterte’s ratings (Curato, 2017c).

Apart from free education, Duterte’s political will is manifested in many reforms he initiated. The Official Gazette (2019) listed 78 Executive Orders (as of 15 March 2019) that he has signed<sup>8</sup>. Next, he has signed 133 laws (as of July 2018), 39 were national laws, and 94 are local laws (Kabiling, 2018)<sup>9</sup>. The latest signed laws as of February 2019, are Expanded Maternity Leave (Republic Act 11210), Universal Health Care (Republic Act 11223), and many more (Coloma, 2019)<sup>10</sup>. Duterte is also working at the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-

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<sup>8</sup> Official Gazette (2019). Executive Orders. [officialgazette.gov.ph](https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph). Retrieved from <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/section/executive-orders/>

<sup>9</sup> Kabiling, G. (2018). 133 Laws Signed by Duterte Since 2016. Manila Bulletin. Retrieved from <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/07/18/133-laws-signed-by-duterte-since-2016/>

<sup>10</sup> Coloma, A. (2019). List; New Laws Signed by Duterte this February. ABS-CBN News. Retrieved from <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/02/21/19/list-new-laws-signed-by-duterte-this-february>

2022<sup>11</sup>. Another his initiative is the Build Build Build Program, which is the country’s most ambitious infrastructure program in history<sup>12</sup>.

Below Duterte’s trust and performance ratings from Pulse Asia Research will be presented to demonstrate how Filipinos assess president Duterte on his watch.

| month                      | July 2016 | September 2016 | December 2016 | June 2017 | September 2017 | December 2017 | June 2018 | September 2018 | December 2018 |
|----------------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| Trust (figures in percent) | 91        | 86             | 83            | 81        | 80             | 82            | 87        | 72             | 76            |

*Table 1. Duterte’s trust ratings, adapted from Pulse Asia Research*

| month                         | July 2016 | September 2016 | December 2016 | June 2017 | September 2017 | December 2017 | June 2018 | September 2018 | December 2018 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| Approval (figures in percent) | -         | 86             | 83            | 82        | 80             | 80            | 88        | 75             | 81            |

*Table 2. Duterte’s performance ratings, adapted from Pulse Asia research*

As illustrated in the table below, the work of the incumbent is very much appreciated in all regions of the Philippines. The highest level of support for Duterte is in Mindanao because he comes from the City of Davao and has a good reputation there.

| Month | July 2016      | September 2016 | December 2016 | June 2017 | September 2017 | December 2017 | July 2018 | September 2018 | December 2018 |
|-------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| Area  | Approval/Trust |                |               |           |                |               |           |                |               |

<sup>11</sup> NEDA (2017). Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022 Abridged Version. National Economic and Development Authority. Retrieved from [http://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Abridged-PDP-2017-2022\\_Final.pdf](http://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Abridged-PDP-2017-2022_Final.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Build Build Build website <http://www.build.gov.ph/Home/Projects>

|                   |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| PH                | -/91 | 86/86 | 83/83 | 82/81 | 80/80 | 80/82 | 88/87 | 75/72 | 81/76 |
| NCR <sup>13</sup> | -/92 | 80/81 | 79/79 | 80/81 | 76/76 | 79/79 | 83/79 | 72/63 | 69/67 |
| LUZ <sup>14</sup> | -/89 | 84/82 | 78/77 | 75/73 | 72/72 | 72/74 | 83/84 | 66/64 | 74/69 |
| VIS <sup>15</sup> | -/89 | 88/86 | 84/87 | 84/84 | 86/86 | 86/86 | 89/92 | 83/79 | 86/82 |
| MIN <sup>16</sup> | -/97 | 93/96 | 91/92 | 95/97 | 92/93 | 93/94 | 99/94 | 90/90 | 96/91 |

*Table 3. Duterte's trust and performance ratings broken down by regions, adapted from Pulse Asia research*

## 2.2 Theory

This subsection aims to introduce the concepts of populism and charismatic leadership that are relevant for the research and are used to analyse and interpret empirical data in this thesis.

### 2.2.1 The concept of populism

Populism is the word, whose popularity seems to increase on a daily basis, a word that is used throughout the world of politics, often in the pejorative sense or with a touch of pity. However, what does the word mean? Some scholars stress that it has different meanings to different people (Johnson, 2018). In 1967 during a conference at the London School of Economics, it was commented upon the fact that there was no doubt about the importance of populism, but that nobody knew what populism meant (de Vreese et al., 2018).

In the political realm, the term populism has been around over one hundred years. First, it was a positive concept, but then it got a negative meaning over the years (Elmgren, 2018; Kaltwasser et al., 2017). Scholars agree that the word (or the phenomenon) in the most general term has the meaning of "anti-establishment", and can be right or left with a clear message opposite to common elitist values. The opinions of the populist are considered to be extremist by the opponents and on the other hand, glorified by the supporters. As a consequence, the anti-

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<sup>13</sup> National Capital Region

<sup>14</sup> Luzon

<sup>15</sup> Visayas

<sup>16</sup> Mindanao

populists usually consider populism to be a threat to democracy, while the populist supporters see it as the true will of the people (Galito, 2018).

The people who vote for a populist leader are likely to be portrayed as angry and frustrated (Müller, 2016). Further, there is a difference in how populism is viewed in developed societies and developing ones. While developed societies mainly reject it, developing societies might see it as courageous and as a way out of corruption and elitism (Galito, 2018).

The populist leaders, according to Müller (2016), are anti-elitist and anti-pluralist. In campaigns, they tend to portray their opponents as corrupt elitists with low morale and as enemies of the people. They build their cases on clashes and polarisation, with rhetoric that is claimed to be "them and we", declaring themselves to represent the people. Their political speeches tend to be straight forward, and the language used can be easily understood by the masses (Galito, 2018).

The main reasons for the growth of populism worldwide are likely to be economic insecurity and cultural backlash (de Vreese et al., 2018). Lately, the increased economic inequity and massive flows of migration have boosted populism growth. Many types of crisis or problems within a society can give fuel to populist streams. It can be assumed that the populist view tends to exaggerate the negative themes that it is addressing (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014).

According to Galito (2018), the word 'populism' can be referred to as an ideology, a political style or a political strategy. First, as an ideology, populism distinguishes two political groups: rich and poor or 'we and them'. It separates the people who are considered to be good from the corrupt elites (Galito, 2018). Cas Mudde's (2004, p.543) definition of populism as an ideology is slightly similar: "...society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'... politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people". Second, it is a "political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalised support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers" (Weyland, 2001, p. 14 in Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). In regards to stylistic aspects of the strategy, populists use charismatic leadership and bypass set ways of doing politics. They tend to embody the popular will in their



personalities and mobilise their voters by playing on their feeling of discontent (Hellström, 2013 in Barr, 2018). Lastly, populism as a political style, according to Moffit and Tormey (2014), consists of the following elements: a) appeal to people; b) crisis, breakdown, threat; c) ‘bad manners’. The people are the primary audience of populists in this style. In contrast to Mudde (2004), Moffit and Tormey (2014) argue that populists are not always opposed to the elites and regard them as corrupt. They are distinct from the elites in how they perform to people. Because populists strive to be closer to the people and demonstrate that they are aware of their problems, their speeches can be deliberately politically incorrect and include slang and bad language. In general, they tend to disregard appropriate/set ways of acting. Finally, populists claim that they can overcome crisis and corruption, caused by elites’ actions, and to do this, they need to undertake immediate and decisive actions.

In this thesis, I employ populism as an ideology, political style and political strategy to explore Duterte’s brand of populism. Because the supporters view Duterte as one of ‘them’/ ‘the people’ in the fight against corrupt elites, populism in this thesis is viewed as an ideology. Next, Duterte’s bypasses set ways of doing politics, engages with the supporters directly, for instance, via Twitter and mobilises them. This enables to view populism in this thesis as a strategy. Lastly, in terms of political style, I will largely build the discussion drawing on the Curato (2017c) description of penal populism<sup>17</sup>. Moffit and Tormey (2014) description of populism as a political style does not entirely fit this research because they claim that elites in populism scenario are not necessarily viewed as corrupt and populists may not be opposed to them. And this is not Duterte’s case.

### **2.2.2 The concept of charismatic leadership**

The notion of charisma was first discussed by Weber (1947), the author of the theory of charismatic leadership. Charisma, according to him, is a distinctive characteristic of the personality, and it gives exceptional powers to a person. It is given to a few people, and these people are seen as leaders (Fiol et al., 1999).

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<sup>17</sup> See description of penal populism in subsection 2.1.2

According to Iszatt-White and Saunders (2014), there are three approaches to charismatic leadership, namely the behavioural approach, the attributional approach and the follower-centric approach. In this thesis, I will employ the first two approaches. The third approach will not be taken into account in this thesis since it is more relevant to the charismatic leadership within organisations (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014).

The behavioural approach, as written in Northouse (2013), was articulated by House (1976). He used the word charisma for a description of a special gift of certain persons and stressed that due to this gift, individuals are capable of doing extraordinary things. House (1976) emphasised the importance of the role of the followers in validating leader's charisma. Next, he stressed that the way the leaders act is unique, and this has a special charismatic effect on followers.

Charismatic leader, according to House (1976), has the following personality characteristics: he/she is dominant, self-confident, has a need for power. The latter motivates him/her to be a leader and exert influence on others. Next, he/she has a particular type of behaviours, such as setting strong role model, showing competence to followers, articulating goals, communicating high expectations, expressing confidence in the abilities of the followers to meet expectations in order to enhance the sense of self-efficacy and competence among followers, and arising task-relevant motives among followers. Furthermore, as stressed by House (1976), charismatic leadership has specific effects on followers, such as followers' trust in the ideology of the leader, similarities in the beliefs of the leader and followers, identification with the leader, leader's unquestioning acceptance, affection towards the leader, heightened goals, and increased confidence that the goals will be achieved. Besides, followers become obedient and emotionally involved in the goals of the leader.

The attributional approach to charismatic leadership is associated with Conger and Kanungo (1998). In contrast to House (1976), they concentrate not on the character and behaviours of the leader, but rather on the mechanism through which charismatic leadership works. According to them, a combination of behaviours of a charismatic leader and a certain situation affects the attribution of charisma by the followers. Five behaviours/situations can lead to the attribution of

charismatic leadership. The first behaviour/situation describes leaders advocating the vision that is different from the status quo. The second behaviour/situation refers to leaders who act unconventionally to achieve the vision. The third one is about taking risks as well as willing to sacrifice in order to achieve the vision. The fourth one is that leaders need to appear confident in themselves and the feasibility and success of the vision. Last but not least, the fifth behaviour/situation is related to leaders' use of compelling appeals aimed at engaging followers, instead of their reliance on participation and authority (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014).

Charismatic leadership, according to Iszatt-White and Saunders (2014), includes formulating and communicating the vision that incorporates the picture of change. This change should be viewed by followers as challenging, worth trying and attainable. Leaders communicate the vision by utilising “rhetorical arts” whereby they sell their ideas to followers and the latter buy into them as their own. Rhetorical arts can be related to the following behaviours of the leaders. First, leaders communicate visions by adjusting the content to suit their followers. Second, they emphasise the vision's intrinsic value stressing that it represents ideas worth implementing. Third, leaders choose the right words and symbols in order to make the vision inspiring and motivating. Last but not least, they utilise inclusive language that is supposed to link people to the vision and make them feel that they participate in the process (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014).

Finally, it is worth noting that the emerging topic in the research on charismatic leadership is that charisma can have the “dark side”. This implies the creation of dependency relations, where followers can be hindered from challenging ideas and making suggestions. Also, this may lead to creating an illusion that the leaders are infallible and acceptance of risky projects by followers. Apart from the creation of dependency relations, the “dark side” of charisma is related to the fact that narcissists can attain the highest positions in the government/organisation and exert influence on others because they have a need for praise and adoration, which may often lead to catastrophe (Iszatt-White and Saunders, 2014).

### **3. Method**

To answer the research question “How is Duterte viewed by his Filipino supporters from Sweden and the Philippines?” I carried out qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews. In this section, I provide details on my general research approach, on how I collected and analysed the empirical data in the form of interview statements, and how I relate to criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity for qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

### **3.1 Information about participants**

I have interviewed eleven Filipinos regarding their perceptions of Rodrigo Duterte. Two project participants are my friends; the rest of the interviewees were found through the snowball technique. The majority of the participants got interested in politics after Duterte started to run for the presidency. All of them voted for him in the 2016 presidential elections and continue to support him till today. Four project participants have permanent residency in Sweden, two participants are Filipino students staying in Sweden during studies, and five interviewees are living in the Philippines. The latter represent all four main Filipino territories – Manila, Mindanao, Visaya and Luzon. The participants residing in Sweden are four women, Filipino students are a man and a woman, and individuals from the Philippines are four men and one woman. These eleven persons have the following occupations: a nurse, a cleaner, a teacher, three students, an NGO employee, an administrative assistant, a salesperson, a taxi-driver, and a government official. Participants’ age varies from 22 to 65.

### **3.2 General research approach**

This study uses a qualitative approach, whereby I conducted eleven interviews with Duterte supporters. The qualitative approach focuses on how individuals perceive and interpret their surroundings and how they create and reshape their social reality. I chose semi-structured interviews, meaning that I could change a sequence of questions from the interview guide and pose further questions to my interviewees in case they saw some additional necessary information can be revealed (Bryman, 2012).

This thesis used an abductive approach to theory. According to Bryman (2012), abductive research approach starts with a problem that should be explained. The process can be described as “a dialectic pendulum movement”, where the researcher moves between theory and empiricism to let the understanding grow progressively. I started my research with a theory of populism in mind to understand how supporters view Duterte. However, after conducting the interviews, empirical data gave me another perspective. Because of this, I added the concept of charismatic leadership to help me analyse the material.

### **3.3 The process of collecting and analysing data**

Before the interviewing, I had prepared an interview guide with ten questions related to participants’ perceptions of Duterte’s personality and politics. However, I was open also to add follow-up questions or take the interview in new directions that the interviewees pointed out. In this regard, open-ended questions would allow the interviewees to answer my questions in their ways and come up with their thoughts on the topic (Bryman, 2012).

All interviews with participants from Sweden were held in the place they chose themselves. Local Filipinos chose to be interviewed in cafes while exchange students preferred university libraries in Lund and Malmö. This, according to them, enabled them to feel comfortable and more opened. The interviewees from the Philippines, as mentioned earlier, were interviewed via Skype. They decided on the date and time for the interviews.

The interview sessions lasted approximately 20 to 45 minutes. Before the interviews, I asked for participants’ permission to record them in order to act in line with Bryman (2012), who writes that recording is required to be able to capture the interviewees’ answers in order to gain a detailed analysis when applying the interviewees’ own words. Overall, six interviews were recorded, and five were not. Bearing in mind the sensitivity of the topic, I was not surprised that some participants did not want to use a recorder. Further, as stressed by Bryman (2012), when conducting qualitative research, it was interesting to see not just what participants said, but also in what way they commented on things. Local participants and students were emotionally involved in the conversation as their body language revealed that.

Next, interviews were transcribed and carefully analysed. This was followed by coding of the transcripts. The first themes were created, such as reasons for Duterte's support, 'war on drugs', international criticism, changes in the Philippines since Duterte took office, Duterte's strengths and weaknesses. Further, the initial themes were categorised into broader themes, namely the main reasons for Duterte's popularity, justification of the war against drugs and criminality, the best and the worst features of Duterte. These themes were aimed at presenting research in a coherent and comprehensible way in order to get a reasonable and trustworthy answer to the research question – "How is Rodrigo Duterte viewed by his Filipino supporters from Sweden and the Philippines?"

I followed the Swedish Research Council's guidelines (Swedish Research Council, 2017) regarding informed consent and protection of anonymity of project participants. Since the topic of the research was a delicate matter, I paid particular attention to the issue of anonymity. In the next pages of this thesis, the interviewees are given false names.

### 3.4 Trustworthiness and authenticity

As recommended by Guba and Lincoln (1994) in Bryman (2012), criteria of *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* were applied to assess research quality. Trustworthiness includes *credibility*, *dependability*, *transferability* and *confirmability*. Firstly, the author of this study ensured that research was done following the canons of best practice. This established the *credibility* of the findings. Secondly, the criterion of *transferability* was addressed by keeping in mind the importance of context when presenting a detailed description of data collection and interviewees' viewpoints. It is possible to assume that the research findings can be applicable to similar individuals being interviewed in a similar milieu. Thirdly, bearing in mind Bryman's advice (2012, p.149) that a researcher has to stay neutral and not reveal personal opinions when investigating politics, I did my utmost not to let my personal preferences have an impact on the interview processes and the study as a whole, hence, ensuring *confirmability*. Fourthly and lastly, *dependability* was ensured when I kept records of different phases of the research process in an accessible format. Furthermore, the criterion of *authenticity* was reached through interviewing

individuals who reside in different provinces of the Philippines, are of various age groups, educational background, and social class.

#### **4. Empirical findings, analysis and discussion**

This section presents selected empirical findings collected through the interviews and their analysis through the lens of the concepts of charismatic leadership and populism. It is divided into the following three subsections:

- Main reasons for Duterte's popularity
- Justification of the war against drugs and other criminality
- The best and the worst features of Duterte

These subsections stem from the interview guide questions. They allow grasping how the supporters view the president and, in particular, in-depth understanding of the appeal of Duterte to his supporters. At the same time, the issues, described in the subsections, enable to explore Duterte's charismatic leadership and his brand of populism.

The empirical data from the first subsection 'Main reasons for Duterte's popularity' will be analysed through the lens of the concepts of charismatic leadership and populism. In the rest of the subsections, I will apply solely the concept of populism to interpret and analyse the empirical data.

As stated above in the Method section, most of the interviewees are educated people who are either studying or working. They all have been supporting Duterte since the moment he started to run for the presidency. Interesting enough, my interviewees stated that he made them more interested in politics. Those who did not care about politics at all started to read blogs, follow the news about Duterte and got active on Twitter. Some interviewees emphasised that interviews on the topic at hand were possible because they liked Duterte so much that they wanted to share their opinions on the matter explaining me, the outsider, what is going on in the Philippines. As Helena put it:

*“I am happy to be interviewed because I like him so much... Before, when I was in the Philippines, I never watched news about politics, I never cared. There was nothing interesting because it was all the same. But when Duterte said he was going to run for the presidency and said all those words which were very new for us, Filipinos, words like ‘too good to be true words’. And Duterte, when he says something, you can see that he really means that, he uses even foul words, he swears, because he really wants to do it”- Helena.*

Helena’s opinion is not unique. All my participants mentioned more or less the same, stating that for the first time in their lives, Duterte made them curious to follow what was going to happen in the country. Bearing in mind the background of my participants, meaning that they are educated individuals, their support for Duterte might seem a bit strange knowing who he is and how he is often portrayed in the media.

## **4.1 Main reasons for Duterte’s popularity**

### **4.1.1 Duterte as a charismatic leader**

According to my participants, Duterte is very popular in the Philippines. This is because Filipinos have witnessed a leader who is one of a kind, acts decisively and is fully determined to implement reforms and real change that will make Filipino society more law-abiding and peaceful and Filipino economy more inclusive for all Filipinos, - as what Duterte had promised during the 2016 presidential campaign.

What was particularly emphasised by the supporters throughout the interviews is that their political leader has charisma. As Chesa put it:

*“I think Duterte has become popular because of his iron fist leadership style and his charisma. I somehow believe him when he talks, but he does not just talk, he actually does a lot” - Chesa.*

Another participant Pedro said:

*“He is a charismatic president, the leader. We did not have someone like him before. A large portion of the population trusts him, that is why he won by a landslide in 2016. I think only Duterte can implement changes. There is nothing impossible for him” - Pedro.*



Pedro stated that ONLY Duterte could change the country for better. He perceives the president as a charismatic leader, someone special, gifted, not like everybody else, and this gift enables Duterte to do extraordinary things, such as, for instance, eradication of drugs within six months, as promised by then-candidate Duterte during his presidential campaign. It does not seem to be a big deal for Pedro that after two and a half years, the drug problem is far from being eradicated. Pedro still trusts the president stating: *“yeah, the drug issue appeared to be bigger than Duterte initially estimated”* and that this is a reason why still there are drug addicts and suspects in the Philippines. The perception of Duterte as a charismatic leader by his supporter, Pedro, can be related to House’s (1976) behavioural approach to charismatic leadership when followers see the leader as the one with exceptional powers capable of doing wonders. Another interviewee, Vincent also perceives the president as someone unique, and, therefore, able to bring about change:

*“Duterte is a fearless leader. He is not afraid of anything or anybody. He is one of a kind. His campaign style, how he talks, how he presents himself, he is kind of politician who is not cliché for me. Most of Filipinos like his style, the grassroots kind of style. I believe our country will have a better future with him”* - Vincent.

Duterte’s followers seem to trust in his ideology, show affection towards him and are confident that the goals set by Duterte are achievable. As stated by Helena:

*“I like the way he talks, what he promises and how he promises, and this is not a promise, he is a doer, and he will do all those things. People think that because he is hard, he talks very straight to the point, very strict, so I think it is awakening of the Filipinos”* -Helena.

As described by House (1976), those who support a charismatic leader become obedient and emotionally involved in the leader’s goals. Empirical data collected for this study seem to prove this. Indeed, not many Filipinos question the president’s methods regarding ‘war on drugs’. Somehow, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems for them quite normal to disregard human rights and justify the killings of thousands of people. This is because they believe that addressing the drug problem will make the country safe and prosperous.

Further, the president’s leadership style so beloved by my interviewees can be analysed with the help of attributional approach to charismatic leadership by Conger and Kanungo (1998). First,

just as charismatic leaders tend to do, Duterte advocated the vision that was different from status quo when he, a Manila outsider, has won the presidential elections and stated he would be the one to effectuate change and fight the drug problems in the country. As noted by Adrian:

*“Compared to previous presidents/candidates, he is very nontraditional in many senses, especially the fact he is not from Manila/Luzon area where previous Filipino presidents come from. He promised to implement changes and has been doing these successfully”* - Adrian.

Duterte has broken down a general pattern of things because the power in the country used to belong to the elites from the capital city. He inspired his supporters, who started to believe that things are going to improve in the country:

*“He has given us hope that the Philippines still has a future. He influenced not just me but also my family to be still positive in life, and all will be well at the right time”* - Rodrigo.

Next, Duterte is famous for his unconventional methods to address problems and this all to achieve his central vision – implementing ‘law and order’ primarily by promoting ‘war on drugs’ for the sake of preserving new generations of the Filipinos. This vision seems to be appealing to Duterte’s followers. Duterte’s actions in this regard stand in line with Conger and Kanungo’s (1998) attributional approach to charismatic leadership, more specifically with their description of the scenario when a leader acts unconventionally in order to achieve the vision. Since the leader manages to present his vision to the followers in an appealing way, they seem to buy into it, without thinking about the consequences. Overall, data obtained through the interviews indicated that participants sincerely believe and share Duterte’s vision and strive to be its part in terms of obeying the rules. However, what if any of my participant’s family members would become the victim of Duterte’s foul play? Would he/she have the same opinion on the ‘war on drugs’? I did not ask my participants this question, though I wanted to.

Moreover, Duterte, just as a genuine charismatic leader, described by Conger and Kanungo (1998), is willing to take risks and make sacrifices for achieving his vision. He admitted from the very beginning of his campaign that the war against drugs could be bloody, and there would be persons who reject his methods of fighting the drug problem. However, according to the president, in order to save the many, it is necessary to sacrifice a few. This might seem shocking, but my interviewees support these ideas of Duterte. As mentioned by Rodrigo: *“The end justifies*

*the means. You really need to be strong to act so decisively. Sure, there can be somebody who protests against his actions. But he is strong and can deal with anything, that is why I like him” - Rodrigo.*

Furthermore, another thing about Duterte is that he is famous for using compelling appeals aimed at engaging followers into his visions and plans. This is also well in line with Conger and Kanungo (1998) characteristics of the situation created by the charismatic leader. When appealing to the audience, Duterte is confident and charming; at least Filipinos characterise him as such. As a result, they seem to like and support his rhetoric about many controversial issues including ‘war on drugs’, and it looks as if Duterte enabled them to see the bigger picture and that is the drug-free and prosperous society.

Finally, Duterte’s charismatic leadership has features of what Iszatt-White and Saunders (2014) call ‘dark side’ of charisma. This is manifested in that Duterte’s followers largely view him as infallible and accept his visions as the only possible way to address drug problems in the country. One can argue that this, in turn, fuels his narcissism, making him think he can do whatever he wants, even break the law by enabling extrajudicial killings of individuals who are involved in the drug business.

#### **4.1.2 Duterte as a populist**

Besides being a charismatic leader, Duterte can be labelled a populist, meaning the one who is seen by his supporters as ‘their representative’ in the fight against elites (Galito, 2018) which did nothing but rob the Filipino people throughout the years. The supporters viewed him as one of them, and this is the reason why he is so popular in the Philippines.

Though Duterte stated in 2015 that he had no intentions to run for the presidency, already then he was introduced to the public as “the People’s Call for Change” (Abao, 2017, p.305 in Curato, 2017), which implies that he wanted to be seen by his countrymen as one of ‘the people’, the person who acts in their interest. So, it is likely that he, together with his political advisers, could read the general mood of the people, and then develop a plan of action of how to win people’s

attention and support. One can view Duterte's populism as a political ideology. This is when a political figure plays on distinction between two political groups: rich and poor or 'we and them' (Galito, 2018), and stresses that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2014). And since 2015 Duterte has been effective in utilising 'we and them' scenario, positioning himself as the one of the 'we/people', expressing the will of Filipinos. This finds support in the quotes of my project participant:

*"Duterte seems to be different from the politician people have used to vote for. People become sick and tired of the usual chain of events or people getting elected. Those before Duterte proved to care about themselves and not the people. So, they were very excited when Duterte decided to run for the presidency. People enjoy his rhetoric because, for them, it is a signal that he is not like others before him; he is more like one of us. And he had already shown that he stood for the people when he was a Mayor of Davao"- Adrian.*

The fact that Duterte did not originate from the capital city like other presidents before him only strengthen his image of the representative of the people:

*"He is not normal what we normally have elected. People trust him more than others. His primary appeal factor, primary strength that unlike previous presidents, he comes from completely different background, this makes him more approachable and gives him a bit different perspective on things"- Rodrigo.*

Duterte's positioning himself as a man of the people goes beyond his origin and rhetoric. His supporters view him as one of them by the way he lives his life, acting as a simple guy:

*"People think he is much more down to earth, for instance, he drove a taxi once in a while when he was a mayor of Davao, and he continues doing that after he was elected as a president. He is very different from what we consider traditional" – Kati.*

Next, as stated by the supporters, they could influence the course of events in the country by being active in social media.

*"For the first time, Filipinos at home and even those who work abroad were active via social media in supporting Duterte. They thought they could influence the future by electing him"-*

Rosa

This seemed to be important for my participants. It gave them a strong sense of self-sufficiency and optimism. Indeed, things changed for them. Before Duterte, elites were decision-makers in the Philippines. But now, it is them, ordinary people, who, by giving their active support for their representative Duterte, can change the future. After I got this particular statement from the interviewee, it became clearer for me why Duterte is so popular. Indeed, if individuals would like others to like them, they should make them feel seen. It is not rocket science; it is common sense.

From a theoretical viewpoint, it is possible to argue that Duterte's populism can be viewed as a political strategy. This is when "(...) a leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalised support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers" (Weyland, 2001, p. 14 in Moffit and Tormey, 2014). Empirical findings imply that Duterte got popular by engaging with followers directly. In this, he does not act like traditional politicians. He bypasses set ways of doing politics, engages with supporters via Twitter, and mobilises them. He enables them to think that their voices are heard and they, by being active, can be a part of the change. These tactics seem to be quite successful in the sense that they let him proceed with his agendas and gain popularity.

To summarise, the discussion above shows that Duterte acts as a charismatic leader and a populist. The supporters view him as a man of great charisma and one of 'the people'. According to them, he is a man of action, the one who brings about change and transforms the Philippines into a safer place. His tactics seem to be successful because the supporters buy into the picture of change he portrays. Also, the supporters think they can influence the course of events, and they view this in a positive light. This is because they get a feeling of self-efficiency, thinking that they, together with their representative Duterte, and not the elites, can change the country for the better. All these make the incumbent popular among the supporters.

#### **4.2 Justification of the war against drugs and criminality**

A majority of my interviewees agree that Duterte's war against drugs and other crime is justified. According to them, drugs and criminality are the issues of concern to Filipinos living in the

Philippines and overseas. Therefore, Duterte's campaign vow of decisively addressing the drug problem was a critical factor that led to his victory in 2016. As stated by Kati:

*"His main plan was to stop drugs because they can ruin many people. As for me, I agree with Duterte's strategy, who says that it is better to kill a person who can ruin later 500 people, including children with drugs. He has the right for this"- Kati.*

Daniel has the same opinion on the matter. According to him, Duterte cares about Filipino population, and that is why he wants to overcome a drug problem. If this issue is solved, the future of the Philippines will be better:

*"If it is for the masses, people, it is justified, because for me, if you do not kill the root of this problem, it can spread. People who are involved in drugs can do much crime. Also, it is the future of the country, and young people can get engaged with that vice. Somebody needs to prevent this"- Daniel.*

It was mentioned that the drug problem existed in the Philippines for quite a while, and somebody had to take actions. However, Duterte's methods used against drug pushers seem to be too hard for one of the interviewees. According to him, only time will tell whether Duterte's war against drugs has a positive impact on the situation in the country.

*"There is a drug problem in the Philippines, and it is not something new. Much stuff has been uncovered since he has approached the war on drugs. Something has to be done with the drug issue. It is not just a local thing, there have been cases of drug pushers and drug cartels that are international, and they decided to make the Philippines a solid base of operations or a least where a lot of drugs may pass through. I would prefer more understanding and compassionate attitude. And they are attempting that, at least with people who have been using drugs, they have been really harsh on the drug pushers. But it is a very complicated issue because why would they go into drugs, to begin with, because where could they find the money, why do you start using drugs? So is the 'war on drug's justified? The answer is it is good that actions being done. I will reserve my judgments until a couple of years and see if it has actually been effective and made the country better"- Adrian.*

So, Duterte, in pursuance of his vision of transforming the Philippines into a prosperous state, accorded the highest priority to addressing a particular issue, - the eradication of crime and drugs

in the Philippines. By utilising his compelling rhetoric and charisma, he made Filipinos believe that the problem is of a high priority and Filipinos have to be united in combating it. It can be assumed that Duterte deliberately exaggerates the drug problem and that it needs to be addressed at all costs, hence, acting in line with de Vreese et al. (2018) description of how populists tend to exaggerate negative themes in the society.

The actions of Duterte in regard to addressing the drug issue can be viewed through the lens of penal populism, a specific political style. This is when a political figure does the politics of anxiety and politics of hope. Both hope and fear were and continue to be the drivers of Duterte's penal populism generating and maintaining support for him by the Filipinos (Curato, 2017c). By his tough on crime rhetoric, populist Duterte keeps in fear his countrymen, telling them stories that drugs are the evil, they lead to crime, and, thus, prevent the country from a happy future. In order to have a better life, drugs must be eradicated. As one of the supporters put it:

*"During the elections, one of his major themes was that he wants to eliminate drugs in the country, because they are very bad and actually are the main problems. This agenda made him more popular; people voted for him because they want a better life"* - Kati.

Acting within the frames of penal populism, Duterte deliberately separates 'the people' and 'the dangerous other' (Curato, 2017c). The former are upstanding citizens, whereas the latter are criminals who, according to him, are the dregs of society. From the beginning of his presidential campaign, Duterte's rhetoric foregrounded the necessity to resolve the crisis caused by drugs and crime.

Duterte's idea to focus on the drug issue on the national level was not arbitrary. There was a latent anxiety/ shared sense of distress among Filipinos regarding the level of criminality in society. Before 2016, the communities tried to solve the drug-related problems themselves, or with the help of NGOs; however, they never managed to address them adequately. And these issues have not come to the fore until Duterte started his campaign (Curato, 2017c). It can be argued that Duterte took advantage of the situation when he translated the crime issue at the national level. At that moment, his penal populism made him very appealing to his countrymen. Since the public has already identified 'the dangerous other' in the face of criminals, his populist rhetoric

regarding the separation of ‘dangerous other’ from the rest of the people was welcomed by Filipinos. The public felt that they were finally heard and that he could solve their problem. Duterte also acts as a populist when he blames previous administrations for being passive in addressing the crime issue. This is because he needs to distinguish himself from the elite, show he is not like them.

The answers of the supporters suggest that Duterte made them believe that problems caused by criminals are more important than respect for human rights. Thus, it can be deduced that Duterte’s politics of fear works quite well. My interviewees do believe that the drugs are the evil that needs to be eradicated, and Duterte is the one who is able to tackle the problem. And for his pursuits, they are willing to ignore that he does not comply with the law.

Also, the supporters justify Duterte’s war against drugs and criminality because they see that the Philippines transforms into a safer place. Before Duterte, the country was notorious for having a high level of crime. Now, the situation is much better. The empirical evidence below suggests that Duterte has managed to make the country safer. As stated by Kati:

*“He reduced the criminality significantly. The country has changed so much. For instance, when you went to the airport before, there were a lot of thieves. But not anymore, there are no criminals. Before Duterte, people who worked at the airport could put a gun in your bag so that they would like to ask money from you; it was like a business. Also, before Duterte, it was very dangerous to travel to the Philippines, but not anymore. Now it is so much better because criminals are afraid of Duterte” -Kati.*

Another interviewee Vincent confirmed that it has become much safer:

*“It is safer, although in the mainstream media they say that it is a lot of killings. If you could observe those communities with a high rate of petty crimes before, so it is safer now compared to what it was, there is a lot of police visibility around. Most of the people feel safe” -Vincent.*

Interviewee Chesa knew about the horror of drugs firsthand so that she could compare things before and after Duterte took office in 2016:

*“My place of residence, Pasig City, has a lot of drug users and drug dens. I even have relatives who are users. Since his campaign for drugs started, significant changes happened. Drug users in our barangays were gone, stopped, hid or even killed. I even witnessed a guy hit by a riding in*



*tandem right before my eyes while I was going home from work which I suspected to be the drug lord's doing” – Chesa.*

The interviewee Helena said she could walk at night during her visit back to the Philippines, which never happened before:

*“After 2 years he is in office, all my friends in the Philippines say that it is much better to walk in the streets than before when no one walked in the streets alone. So they feel safer now. I did feel safer too when I was there in 2017, going around the streets with my kids at night, I did not feel that I needed to go home because it was dark”, - Helena.*

The statements above imply that that the supporters felt the difference since Duterte took office. It has become much safer in the country. This is also a sufficient reason why his actions regarding ‘the war on drugs’ and other crimes are seen in a positive light. Filipinos hope for a better future and this future hinges on Duterte and his efforts to combat the criminality and drugs. According to Curato (2017c), another driver of Duterte’s penal populism is his politics of hope. This means that ‘the people’ can control the future. They can do this by giving their support for Duterte, who is their representative in the fight with ‘the dangerous other’. Duterte’s promise to eradicate criminality within a short time together with his ‘I will’ politics enables Filipinos to see a bigger picture with a better life for them in the foreseeable future.

For instance, as one of the supporters put it:

*“Before, I never planned to invest in the Philippines because there were so many bad guys, drug addicts, thieves. By investment, I mean to buy a property there, like an apartment or a house. But after he became the president, I have changed my mind because I have hopes that the economy is going to be good in the Philippines, so it is good to invest in something”- Helena.*

The above implies that the supporter got an idea to invest in her motherland because she saw a better future and many opportunities. This, according to her, would not be possible without Duterte on his watch. And she can control the future by supporting him.

Finally, when discussing the ‘war on drugs’ with my interviewees, I just had to ask them what they make of international criticism regarding this issue. Surprisingly, not even one of them admitted that the criticism is reasonable. For them, it was slightly irritating and seen as interference in the internal affairs of their country:

*“Being targeted by international criticism started when he campaigned his war against drugs. There are also other criticisms, and I will not be surprised if there will be more international criticisms to come. I just feel annoyed with the intervention of the foreign countries when they are not actually here and seeing the real situation” - Chesa.*

Another supporter reminded me that back in the days the Philippines was a colony and the root of many problems the country faces nowadays can be traced back to the colonial times. Instead of leaving the Philippines alone and let it develop in its own way, foreign powers still think that they can instruct Filipinos what to do:

*“You have these rich, economically developed western nations that built their economic developing through other less developed countries, the Philippines included. Now that we are trying to develop ourselves and we have our own problems that we try to sort out in our own way, we get this criticism. They tell us that what we do is wrong and it should be done differently, though a lot of our problems can be traced back to the fact that we were colonies of those countries” –Rosa.*

Interestingly, my interviewees blamed local Filipino media for the fact that the international community has been criticising the president. The thing is, media tends to portray him in a negative light since *“it is mainly owned by pro-liberals, who are supporters of previous administrations who are against Duterte”* (Helena). When foreign politicians and members of various international organisations watch or read news about the Philippines, their assessment of the situation is based on what they have drawn from the news and not on reality.

To summarise, the drug and criminality issues have been in the country for quite a while and never been addressed properly. However, according to my participants, after Duterte took office, he made proactive and consistent efforts to bring about positive change in the life of the ‘the people’. Since the Philippines is safer now than before, the majority of the supporters continue to support the war against drugs and other criminality, considering it to be justified. They also think that the criticism from the international community on the topic at hand is unreasonable. Overall, Duterte’s politics of fear and politics of hope that constitute his penal populism seem to generate support for his regime.

### 4.3 The best and the worst features of Duterte

The supporters said that Duterte's best features are decisiveness, as shown in his war against drugs and other crimes and his political will/pursuit of game-changing initiatives, such as tax reform, free education, wage and pensions increase, and building of infrastructure. As Rodrigo said:

*“His political will is his best feature because there were a lot of presidents before who did not have the political will. The Philippines was always a leading country in Asia who had the biggest number of published laws, but there always was a problem with their implementation. But with Duterte, he engaged law enforcement officers to do their job, because of his political will. Also, some tourists spots like Boracay Island were closed for rehabilitation for 6 months, after rehabilitation the job is back, it is cleaner, more beautiful, and it is like a domino effect, people from other provinces see that and want to do the same, so it is an example of political will”-* Rodrigo.

Another bright evidence of Duterte's political will was brought by another supporter. She characterised it as his best feature.

*“Last year I went back to the Philippines for vacation, I have seen a lot of changes, huge difference to how it was before. I lived in a small town which is close to Davao. It has grown so much; they have built malls and infrastructure. Before, five years ago, there was nothing. But now his government has this plan to build more infrastructure and businesses. For me it was a shock when I went back home. So, people in the Philippines understand that it is not just talking; they see real actions. After he was elected, within two years, they have built bridges, and the economy is getting so much better. It is not perfect, and it does not have to be perfect, but there are changes”* – Cliopatra.

Duterte's decisiveness, as the supporters revealed, is manifested in combatting drugs and crime. They also noted said that it is not that he just kills the people. He, in effect, tries to help them:

*“Millions of addicts have surrendered, went to rehabilitations, and he even built rehabilitation centres for those who want to have a good life. He is trying really hard, and this is what is good about him”-Pedro.*

From all being said above, it is obvious that Duterte is not passive on his watch. Some of his initiatives are worth applauding. However, it seems that the participants ignore the death toll from the war against drugs, which mounts to over twenty thousand people (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Knowing the Philippine realities and keeping in mind that it is quite a poor country, it is understandable that it is next to impossible to cure all those who are affected by drugs. However, Duterte’s deliberate appeal to kill the people involved in the drug business is something that one may find difficult to justify. So, again, it is possible to argue that politics of fear and politics of hope that fall within his penal populism are very effective in a sense that the supporters have a fear of ‘dangerous other’, they do not want criminality and drugs to be part of their lives. Thus, they think that Duterte’s decisiveness manifested in the ‘war on drugs’ is his positive feature. At the same time, his pursuit of overcoming the drug problem gives them hope for the better. Because they already see positive changes with safety issues, they associate a better future with Duterte.

Further, Duterte’s what-you-see-is-what-you-get persona is what has made him an unorthodox leader who is the opposite of the image of traditional politicians and endeared him to my interviewees:

*“He is very authentic; he is what he is, not playing someone else. He still uses his old car, does not want to buy new. He is stuck to his values, very honest, fearless, has a good heart and wants the best for the Philippines. He loves the country and wants to improve it, which is different from other presidents who were corrupt, wanted to make money. But he makes good things from the money”- Cliopatra.*

Alternatively:

*“He may look tough and strong, but he is an honest and soft-hearted person, a president who has love and compassion for his country people”- Chesa.*

It can be argued that Duterte's personality/image underpins much of his success. The supporters portray him as a simple guy, the one whose lifestyle does not differ a lot from the lifestyle of many of them. They view him as a person, who, just like them, has emotions. It is hard to know for sure if Duterte is truly that authentic, or he just wears a mask of 'the man of the people' in order to get more support. In any case, his personality and overall image of a non-traditional politician enable his supporters to perceive him as one of them. Since they simultaneously view him as strong and fearless, they believe he can represent them in the fight against the 'others', which are elites and criminals/those who are involved in drugs.

At the same time, as brought up by the participants, Duterte's what-you-see-is-what-you-get persona has a negative side. *"His candid unembellished statements have rubbed some sectors the wrong way, believing that some of his pronouncements are unpresidential on the basis of traditional norms"* - Diosdado.

However, some of the supporters emphasised, there may be misunderstandings, meaning that sometimes people can misinterpret Duterte's words. This is because he is coming from the South and uses a different language, and the type of jokes many of his countrymen do not understand.

As stated by Helena:

*"The worst feature of Duterte is his swearing; he does not care if he is in front of the TV, media or whoever. That is shocking because Filipinos did not see this during past presidents, who never swore. But for me it is not a problem because I come from the South, so we have the same language. We do not use the national language of the Philippines; we have different humour from the North. I understand the way he talks; it is the humour of Bisaya (Visaya). The people from the South who understand the language, they actually know that it is humour, but people from the North misunderstand it, when he is throwing jokes, they misinterpret it as like "you really mean that". And yes, Duterte has a lot of humour. When he says something in Tagalog (national language), the meaning is not the same. When you translate something, the humour and the meaning can be lost. And I think he has hard times speaking in Tagalog because he comes from the South. So, yes, I think swearing is bad, but not really bad, because sometimes you have to, and all the people swear. So, swearing can be bad and good at the same time, and for those who do not understand the humour, those are against him."* - Helena.

Another interviewee said that swearing makes sense since he has a lot on his plate:

*“He used to curse that is why he is being criticised, but this is because of the frustration he feels, and it is understandable. He is sometimes abrupt with his words, but he does not care. I cannot tell that this is the worst” – Rosa.*

Oddly enough, interviewee Kati stated that Duterte’s obscene language enables him to gain popularity:

*“He is disrespectful, he can curse a lot. But that is why he is also so popular, because of his manners. Of course, it is not a big issue. I like him so much as a president. Another thing, he has lots of women (lovers). I do not know if it is ok if you are a president” - Kati.*

Only one out of eleven participants characterised Duterte’s rough methods of combating crime and drugs as his worst feature:

*“He addresses criminals and drugs pushers with very harsh punisher’s stands on crime and drugs. This is both his strength and weakness because there are those who support these actions, but also there are those who do not approve because they got used to different approaches” – Adrian.*

According to Moffitt and Tormey (2014), populists tend to disregard appropriate/set ways of acting. They do this in order to separate themselves from the elites, who are serious, sensible to the position of others, behave logically, do not lose their composure, and use a technocratic language. Hence, to look differently from the elites and seem ‘closer’ to the people or even be the ‘one of the people’, populists deliberately swear, use slang, and overall are politically incorrect. Galito (2018) writes that populists’ political speeches tend to be straight forward, and the language used can be easily understood by the masses. Rodrigo Duterte’s manners, rhetoric, and behaviours in public exemplify this too well, thus, portraying him as a populist. As empirical evidence showed, the supporters do not regard his political incorrectness and all the cursing as something very negative. One of the interviewees even stated that his bad manners make him popular. It is possible to argue that the supporters had enough of corruption, high level of crime and economic instability, which they associate with the previous administrations/elites. They do not want to be left neglected and only observe how politically correct individuals rob their country and do nothing to improve people’s lives. Therefore, Duterte’s image of a simple,

authentic, brutal, not politically correct president, which is so different from what they had before, looks so appealing for the supporters. And together with his decisiveness and ability to effectuate change, Duterte is viewed by the supporters as some kind of hero.

To summarise this subsection, the findings suggest that the supporters regard Duterte's political will, decisiveness, and his image of a non-traditional politician as his best feature. Overall, his personality seems to have a profound effect on the interviewees. His worst feature is that he is a foul-mouthed person, which, nevertheless, is not viewed by the supporters as a fatal flaw. Overall, Duterte fits the pattern of populist, who, by utilising the image of a not politically correct individual, is viewed by the supporters as the opposite of the elites/previous administrations.

## 5. Conclusions

This thesis addressed the research question "How is Duterte viewed by his Filipino supporters from Sweden and the Philippines?" by drawing on qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with the president's supporters. I have explored how Duterte is perceived by Filipinos, more specifically by those Filipinos who support him and live in Sweden and the Philippines, in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the appeal of Duterte to his supporters.

In the first section of this thesis, I addressed the research sub-question: "*What are the main reasons for Duterte's popularity among his supporters?*"

The thesis finds that the main reasons for Duterte's popularity are his charismatic leadership, determination to implement reforms, and the positive change he has been implementing. The empirical findings in this subsection were analysed through the theoretical lens of the concepts of charismatic leadership and populism.

Having employed House (1976) behavioural approach and Conger and Kanungo (1998) attributional approaches to charismatic leadership (1976), the thesis illustrated that Duterte's personality and actions have a profound effect on the supporters. They see him as a unique individual who is capable of effectuating change and even to do wonders, for instance, to eradicate drugs and criminality issues within six months. The fact that he did not deliver his promises in the sense that the drug issue is still relevant does not affect the president's reputation; the supporters do not view him as a demagogue. The interviewees seem to ignore or even justify Duterte's incompetence because, according to them, he did not know that the drug problem was so big. Overall, they regard Duterte as infallible because he made them believe in him and his vision. Bearing in mind the methods he uses in combatting the drugs, his popularity among the supporters is difficult to understand, to put it mildly. This thesis argues that Duterte's appeal to the supporters is largely attributed to Duterte's charismatic leadership. It looks like a mixture of the 'right' personality, need for power, his intense feeling of self-efficacy, willingness to take risks, ability to make compelling appeals aimed at engaging the supporters into his plans, and, importantly, his ability to use a situation and inspire the people by articulating a compelling vision combined with unconventional acting made the president highly appealing. As a result, the supporters buy into his ideas, stay loyal to him, show affection towards him and are confident that the goals set by Duterte are achievable.

Further, the thesis supports the existing research, which labels Duterte a populist. In the first subsection, Duterte's populism was viewed as a political ideology and strategy. The thesis finds that Duterte is popular among the supporters because they view him as one of them, as 'their representative' in the fight against corrupt previous administrations/elites. According to the supporters, they express their will through Duterte. Overall, he utilises 'we and them' scenario quite successfully. His origin/background, meaning that he, unlike previous politicians, does not come from the capital city, rhetoric, and quite a simple lifestyle, strengthen his image of the representative of the people. Next, the findings show that Duterte is popular because he engages with followers directly. In this, he does not act like traditional politicians. He bypasses set ways of doing politics, engages with supporters via Twitter, and mobilises them. He enables them to think that their voices are heard and they cause change by being active. As a result, the



supporters get a sense of self-sufficiency and optimism. It is them, together with their representative Duterte, are decision-makers. It is not the elites like it was before Duterte.

In the second section of this thesis, I addressed the research sub-question: *“Do the supporters consider his war against drugs and other crime justified?”*

A majority of the supporters justify Duterte’s war against drugs and other crime. Only one supporter said that the methods used in this war seem to be too harsh, and only time will tell whether Duterte is doing the right thing. The supporters reveal that there was a high crime rate in the Philippines, and somebody had to take actions to address the problem. However, for outsiders, it is still not clear how the supporters view Duterte in a positive light after his pronouncements to kill the people involved in the drug business. Is not Duterte’s solution too unconventional?

The logic behind the support of the war against drugs and Duterte’s popularity in this regard were analysed through the lens of penal populism, a political style, which consists of the politics of fear and the politics of hope. So, Duterte exaggerated the negative theme existing in the society just as populists tend to do, and separated ‘the people’ and ‘the dangerous other’. The former are upstanding citizens, and the latter are the dregs of society/people associated with drugs. Second, by his tough on crime rhetoric, populist Duterte keeps in fear his countrymen. Indeed, my interviewees do believe that the drugs are the evil that needs to be eradicated at all costs. Third, the supporters have hope for the better, meaning that they can influence the course of events by supporting Duterte’s agendas, and contribute to their country’s prosperous future, which, according to Duterte, is possible only if they overcome the drug problem. In addition to all this, the president acts as a populist when he blames previous administrations for being passive in addressing the crime issue. This is because he needs to distinguish himself from the elites, show to the public that he is not like ‘them’/elites, meaning that the latter did nothing to sort out address the problem, and he, in contrast, is fully determined and, most importantly, has a political will to implement change.

Another reason why the supporters justify Duterte's war against drugs and criminality is that they see that the Philippines under Duterte transforms into a safer place. According to them, it is Duterte who was able to reduce the criminality level. Since the situation with safety is significantly better than before 2016, they appreciate Duterte for the efforts made.

Finally, the criticism by the international community of the president's politics is considered unwarranted by the supporters. They also think the international powers do not have a clear picture of what is going on in the Philippines since they mainly draw their judgements on what they see in Philippine media. The latter is owned by previous liberal administrations and tend to portray the president in a negative light.

In the third subsection, I addressed the research sub-question: "*What do Duterte supporters consider to be his positive and negative features?*"

This thesis finds that for the supporters, Duterte's best features are his decisiveness, as shown in his war against drugs and other crimes and his pursuit of game-changing initiatives, such as tax reform, free education, wage and pensions increase, and building of infrastructure. Further, Duterte's image of a non-traditional politician is regarded as his best feature too. The findings suggest that Duterte's personality/image underpins much of his success. The supporters portray him as a simple guy with a lifestyle similar to their own. They view him as a person, who, just like them, has emotions. Overall, Duterte's personality and overall image of a non-traditional politician enable his supporters to perceive him as one of them. Since they simultaneously view him as strong and fearless, they believe he is their representative in the fight against 'them'/elites and 'dangerous other'/criminals/the dregs of society.

At the same time, Duterte's what-you-see-is-what-you-get persona has a negative side because some of his statements can be considered unpresidential. Overall, the supporters think that his obscene language is his worst feature. However, in this regard, some of the supporters emphasised that, since Duterte is coming from the South and uses a different language and the type of jokes many of his countrymen do not understand, people may misinterpret Duterte's words. Finally, only one out of eleven participants characterised Duterte's rough methods of

combating crime and drugs as his worst feature. Overall, the interviewees do not regard Duterte's political incorrectness as a fatal flaw. One of the interviewees even stated that his bad manners make him popular. The empirical evidence suggests that Duterte, as populists tend to do, opts for politically incorrect behaviour and bad language in order to be distinguished from the elites and seem closer to the people, thus, more appealing.

From all the above, it can be deduced that *the appeal of Duterte to his supporters lies in his personality, which has a profound effect on the supporters, background, an overall image of a non-traditional politician, and ability to make people feel seen. Also, it lies in his decisiveness, as shown in his war against drugs and other crimes, the pursuit of game-changing initiatives, and the positive change he has been implementing.*

Drawing on the findings, Duterte's brand of populism includes:

- the bid on 'we and them scenario' where he represents the people;
- in connection with the above, the image of the 'man of the people', including looks, manners, behaviours, language that is in sharp contrast to the elites and enables the people to view him as one of them;
- politics of fear through which he plays on the fears of the supporters together with politics of hope, which makes the supporters believe in a better future.

### *Contribution*

The findings suggest that much of Duterte's appeal to the supporters is attributed to his charismatic leadership. Even though he uses very unconventional and even violent methods to fight the drug problem, the supporters view him as an exceptionally effective and infallible leader. This is because he managed to present them a picture of radical change in a very appealing way.

Also, this thesis finds that the supporters residing in the Philippines and Sweden view Duterte similarly. The supporters from Sweden, in fact, were less critical of Duterte's actions. This suggests that the place of residence in a democratic country does not affect the political perceptions of individuals.

In the end, it is necessary to emphasise that the findings of this thesis are based on the interviews with eleven Duterte supporters. They cannot be generalised, meaning we cannot assume that all Duterte supporters view him in a similar light. However, it is likely that if interviews are done with similar participants in similar contexts, similar findings could be obtained.

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## Appendices

### **Interview guide: Perceptions of Rodrigo Duterte among his Filipino supporters living in the Philippines and Sweden**

The main research question: “How is Rodrigo Duterte viewed by his Filipino supporters from Sweden and the Philippines?”

Sub-questions:

- What are the main reasons for Duterte’s popularity among his supporters?
- Do the supporters consider his war against drugs and other crime justified?
- What do Duterte supporters consider to be his positive and negative features?

Questions for semi-structured interviews:

Biographical info (age, occupation, place of residence (city), political interest (big or small))

1. Did Rodrigo Duterte make you more interested in politics?
2. Why do you think Duterte has become so popular?
3. What is the main difference in the country since Duterte has become the president?
4. What are the best features of Rodrigo Duterte?
5. What are the worst features of Rodrigo Duterte?
6. What do you think is the reason that Duterte became the target of international criticism?



7. Do you consider Duterte's war against drugs to be justified?

8. Do you think Duterte should change something in the way he rules the country, and if so, what?

9. How would you rate Duterte's presidency so far on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is very bad, and 10 is excellent)

10. Has Duterte's presidency affected your life? How did you notice Duterte's influence on you, your family?