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## Original Research Reports

# Cognitive Polyphasia in a Global South Populist Democracy: Mapping Social Representations of Duterte's Regime in the Philippines

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## Abstract

Prevailing scholarship on populism focuses on explaining polarized patterns of support and opposition for populist regimes. This paper extends this conceptualization to account for the fragmented politics of Global South democracies. Invoking the concept of cognitive polyphasia, we map the Filipino public's social representations of Duterte's populist regime in the Philippines. Utilizing a mixed methods approach, we uncover a representational field organized by the two dimensions of political alignment (support vs. opposition) and political frame (individual vs. system). Diversely embedded in this polyphasic field, supporters of the regime may construct Duterte's individual leadership in terms of paternalistic patriotism, or the broader government as a morally-bankrupt yet progressive technocracy. Opposition to the regime may frame the president as an oppressive tyrant, or his administration as a historical continuation of entrenched state violence. Our findings contribute to extant populism debates by describing unique representational processes of differentiation and annexation in unequal populist publics. We reflect on implications for democratic engagement in the Philippines and the broader Global South.

**Keywords:** populism, cognitive polyphasia, social representations, Global South, Duterte, Philippines, representational annexation

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Scholars characterize populist publics as polarized. We argued that in unequal democracies like the Philippines, simple categories of support (pro-populist) and opposition (anti-populist) do not fully capture the diverse ways that the public responds to populist leaders. By mixing quantitative survey data with qualitative open-ended text responses, we discovered that Filipinos who support and oppose President Duterte are further divided according to whether they represent his regime in terms of his individual leadership or a wider system of government. Past studies focused on how the public relies on simplified narratives which differentiate 'good' versus 'evil' in making sense of the populist leader. Building on this idea, we also show how citizens complicate their perspectives by connecting their worldviews to rich notions of governance and local histories. Moreover, we show how these

processes are impacted by social inequality, as it breaks Philippine society down into more fragmented groups which see the populist regime in clashing ways.

Extensive scholarship links populist democracies to polarized publics (Handlin, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018). Pursuing this view, past studies have sought to explain support and opposition to populist leaders' rhetoric and policies (McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018; Müller et al., 2017; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2019). While such findings illuminate crucial dynamics in populisms across nations, we argue that a binary focus on support and opposition can obscure the complex political contexts in which they are embedded. Utilizing a social representations lens (Moscovici, 1988), this paper extends the theorization of populist publics beyond a unidimensional support-opposition axis. More specifically, we investigate how such processes are complicated by the entrenched inequalities of democracies in the Global South (Kusaka, 2017; Montiel, Boller, Uyheng, & Espina, 2019; Thompson, 2010). Locating our inquiry in the context of Rodrigo Duterte's populist regime in the Philippines, we propose to examine how such representational pluralities may be understood in situating populist support and opposition.

We empirically engage this question by invoking the concept of cognitive polyphasia (Jovchelovitch, 2008; Provencher, 2011). We employ a mixed methods approach to map diverse processes of political social representation among the Filipino public. More specifically, we show how the public's alignment with the regime in terms of support and opposition is complicated by diverging political frames focusing on the populist leader's individual leadership versus broader government systems. We anchor our analysis in the Philippines' fragmented political context as a Global South democracy. Our findings contribute to a multidimensional understanding of political meanings under populist leadership, concluding with wider implications for current debates on populism, and reflections on deepened democratization in the Philippines and the broader Global South.

## Representing Populist Publics: Beyond Support and Opposition?

The concept of populism is richly debated across a range of disciplines. To focus our conceptual argument, we align ourselves with scholarship which views the relationship between populist leaders and their publics in terms of performative processes over ideological contents (Blühdorn & Butzlaff, 2019; Moffitt, 2016). Although commonly associated with extreme right-wing attitudes and policies (Rydgren, 2007), many scholars locate the emergence of populism less in substantive political beliefs and more in complex patterns of social interaction between populist leaders and the public (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Stanley, 2008). In line with this approach, prevailing analytic frameworks are organized according to so-called 'supply-side' and 'demand-side' factors (van Kessel, 2013).

Supply-side scholarship emphasizes the crisis narratives leaders deploy to consolidate the public's allegiance (Handlin, 2018; Moffitt, 2015). In the face of crisis, populists claim to champion 'the will of the people' while pinning threats to the nation on a designated 'other' (Brubaker, 2017; Laclau, 2005; Sakki & Pettersson, 2016). With the widespread disenchantment over a technocratic and globalized world order, populist leaders putatively re-center the collective agency of the citizenry-at-large by according primacy to national interests and identities (Appadurai, 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2017). From a social psychological perspective, such tactics have been tied to theories of social identity (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Schulz, Wirth, & Müller, 2018). As 'identity entrepreneurs', populist leaders acquire and exert their authority over public discourse by sharply defining group boundaries, which they powerfully mobilize through pronouncements and policies of selective inclusion and exclusion (Khan, Svensson, Jogdand, & Liu, 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018; Sakki & Pettersson, 2018).

From the demand-side, various studies associate populist support with anomie, low trust in institutions, and perceived group-level grievances (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Simon, Mommert, & Reininger, 2018; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016). Some scholars explain these factors in terms of economic disadvantage (Alwin & Tufiş, 2016; Gidron & Hall, 2017). More recent work, however, extends this view by showing that support for populist parties persists even among prosperous economies (Mols & Jetten, 2016). In this light, *relative* feelings of marginalization are hypothesized to be more important than *absolute* economic precarity (Pettigrew, 2017). Staerklé and Green (2018) illustrate how supporters performatively link their subjective experiences of deprivation to supply-side representations by positioning themselves as unjust victims of vertical (e.g., a corrupt elite) and horizontal (e.g., immigrants) assaults on the 'authentic' nation. Populist support is thus reinforced by in-group feelings of narcissism, shared anger against essentialized out-groups, and a collective sense of nostalgia towards imagined histories which legitimize their perceived moral ascendancy (Cheung, Sedikides, Wildschut, Tausch, & Ayanian, 2017; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, & Batayneh, 2018; Steenvoorden & Hartevel, 2018).

In both supply and demand accounts, prior populism research elucidates meaningful processes explaining the emergence of populist leaders and their widespread public support. As Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2019) note, however, scant work examines opposition to populist leadership. Some research considers philosophical foundations for anti-populist attitudes, such as technocracy and liberalism (Bickerton & Accetti, 2017). Others explore how opposition parties and media organizations undermine populists' totalizing rhetoric and redirect populist narratives of blame back to 'irresponsible' leaders who make 'false promises' to the people. (Heinze, 2018; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2019). However, while these studies examine *macro-level* resistance to populist regimes, we note that the *micro-level* demand-side dynamics of the populist public themselves remain relatively unexplored.

This paper attempts to address this research gap. We specifically propose that not only is opposition to populist leaders under-theorized; we also problematize the support-opposition axis which cuts across prevailing inquiries into populist publics. By highlighting the uniquely fragmented politics of Global South democracies, we aim to capture the contextual nuances which shape the meaning-making processes in which populist publics engage.

## Fragmented Politics in the Global South: Populism in the Philippines

Democracies worldwide adhere to diverse models of political systems and practice, especially in contexts of inequality and stratification (Schulz, 2015; Scoones et al., 2018). In contrast to the advanced democracies of Western nations, democracies in the Global South are typically marked by institutional fragility, exacerbated economic disparity, and highly stratified cultures, which complicate the rise of populist leaders (Montiel et al., 2019). For instance, Hadiz and Robison (2017) show how the classed politics of Global South nations like Indonesia can be so pronounced that they lead to competing models of populism. Instead of a single populism revolting against a corrupt elite order, the 2014 presidential elections pitted the secular populism brandished by candidate Joko Widodo against his opponent Prabowo Subianto's more religiously colored populism.

Similar dynamics motivate our proposed examination of populist publics in the Philippines. Paralleling the mainstream populist storyline, President Rodrigo Duterte's 2016 presidential campaign rode on a fevered wave of resentment and outrage against an entrenched political elite (Ordoñez & Borja, 2018). With promises to instill peace and order through an unforgiving stance toward corruption and criminality, Duterte putatively championed the interests of ordinary Filipino people. However, Duterte's regime has also engendered sharp criticism and controversy,

most notably for his violent war on drugs (Curato, 2017; Nerona, 2017). Like many populist democracies worldwide, the Philippine political sphere is sharply polarized (Handlin, 2018; McCoy et al., 2018).

However, the Philippine example also departs from the traditional populism model in significant ways. Duterte's ascent to power took place against the backdrop of ill-defined ideological divides (Teehankee & Thompson, 2016). While amplifying the 'cult of personality' surrounding Duterte's populist appeal, such weak partisan politics displace the conservative-liberal polarities invoked in studies of Western populist democracies (Jetten, Ryan, & Mols, 2017; Tappin & McKay, 2019). Furthermore, Duterte's administration has paradoxically been credited with advancing progressive reforms related to fiscal reform, infrastructure, healthcare, and education, thereby receiving acclaim from pundits despite sustained criticism over extrajudicial killings and undemocratic strongman politics (Sta. Ana, 2019; Yu, 2017).

We posit that such complications lend fertile ground for examining meaning-making among the Filipino populist public that exceeds a binary of support and opposition. We contend that a Philippine case study exemplifies how the fragilities of Global South politics disrupt an uninhibited application of analytic categories in the populism literature (Epstein, Goff, Huo, & Wong, 2013; Sidel, 2005). Moreover, it signals the utility of a politico-psychological lens sensitive to the contextual complexities which nest the collective meaning-making engaged in by populist publics. We realize this framework using social representations theory.

### **From Polarization to Polyphasia: A Social Representations Approach**

Social representations theory describes meaning-making in society in terms of socially shared knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 2008; Moscovici, 1988). In contrast to static, individualist views of cognition, social representations foreground the dynamic nature of knowledge as constructed by communities. Social representations thus consist of common understandings of social objects tied to group memberships, social interaction, and collective behavior. As they propagate throughout society, different social representations may anchor across different groups (Howarth, 2001; Wagner et al., 1999). A society's 'knowledge' is thereby viewed not as consensual but as a 'representational field' featuring multiplicity and contestation, reflecting vital features of social structure such as hierarchy and inequality (Howarth, 2006; Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2015).

Cognitive polyphasia embraces these general properties of social representations with emphasis on the co-existence of multiple, possibly contradictory forms of knowledge in a single society. Highlighting its constructivist orientation, Marková (2008) argues that cognitive polyphasia captures the state of everyday thought, which does not rely solely upon rationalist standards of logic, but on a variety of different 'thinking styles.' Society's need for a plurality of meanings has been linked to its continuous engagement with emergent and complex realities, a task which individuals and groups undertake from a broad range of social locations (Aikins, 2012; Friling, 2012). Polyphasic analysis thus unpacks the ways different representational practices construct social objects and links them to their associated communities (Jovchelovitch, 2002; Provencher, 2011; Raudsepp, 2017).

Cognitive polyphasia captures diverse social representations of the populist Duterte regime through a politico-psychological lens. We go beyond a traditional model of political polarization by integratively apprehending the broader representational processes with which the Filipino public make sense of populist democracy. Therefore, we ask: What are the social representations of Duterte's populist regime? How do they constitute a polyphasic representational field in relation to populist governance in the Philippines?

## Method

Methodology in social representations theory is notably flexible and open to innovation (Lo Monaco, Piermattéo, Rateau, & Tavani, 2017; Wagner et al., 1999). This study employs mixed methods with a sequential design to analyze cognitive polyphasia in populist-led Philippines (Creswell, 2008). We apply a novel pipeline of quantitative and qualitative techniques to capture distinct conceptual features of social representations.

Our framework has two main steps: firstly, we *map the latent space of the representational field* using principal component analysis on quantitative survey responses; secondly, through interpretative readings of qualitative text responses, we *analyze polyphasic meanings of the populist regime* across the identified representational dimensions (Doise, Clémence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993). By integrating quantitative and qualitative analysis, we characterize polyphasic representations of Duterte's populist regime with both analytic breadth and depth.

### Survey Design and Participant Recruitment

Methodologies examining diversity in subjective meaning-making employ sampling and testing procedures informed by different theoretical principles than mainstream quantitative research. Following the exploratory sampling principles outlined by Watts and Stenner (2005), our approach prioritized theoretically informed diversity over size and randomness, noting similar studies in this vein often satisfy sampling requirements with as few as 40-80 participants (e.g., Dziopa & Ahern, 2011). Primarily noting the diverse geographic distributions of local political support (Teehankee, 2018), we recruited a purposive sample of participants from each major region of the Philippines ( $N = 148$ ). Demographic statistics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents (N = 148)*

Demographics	N	%
<b>Age</b>		
<i>M</i>	22.17	-
<i>SD</i>	4.29	-
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	77	52.03
Male	70	47.30
Prefer not to say	1	0.68
<b>Education</b>		
High school	25	16.89
College or higher	123	83.11
<b>Place of Origin</b>		
National Capital Region	60	40.54
Luzon	22	14.86
Visayas	52	35.14
Mindanao	14	9.46

After providing informed consent, participants filled out a questionnaire composed of structured and unstructured questions. Structured questions included 25 items related to the Duterte regime on a 7-point Likert scale. Items

were generated through a localization of key concepts in the populism scholarship (e.g., unconditional support for leader, rejection of previous government) and major political events related to the Duterte administration. Exact wordings were finalized through pilot studies with six cultural insiders. In the final survey, ten items expressed diverse statements of support and opposition for Duterte. Fifteen additional items represented subjective assessments related to five flagship policies of Duterte's legislative agenda. The final section of the survey asked participants to provide unstructured responses to open-ended questions in relation to his leadership, his policies, and his standing relative to the preceding administration.

## Mapping the Polphasic Representational Field

To map the representational field of the Duterte regime, we conducted principal component analysis on closed-ended survey responses. Principal component analysis projected both item scores and participants into a shared low-dimensional space that maximized explained variance. We determined the final number of principal components based on additional variance explained, using 10% as a threshold of added variance.

This procedure accomplished two key tasks: firstly, it surfaced the latent structure of the survey items, revealing interrelationships between individual statements and overarching patterns of meaning-making which structured participant responses. Such dimensionality reduction methods align naturally with social representations theory, which conceive of representational fields as structured according to 'organizing principles' (Doise et al., 1993) or 'themata' (Liu, 2004). We quantitatively analyzed individual item scores vis-à-vis their corresponding themata in describing the polyphasic representational field.

Secondly, we uncovered underlying communities among the participants utilizing their coordinates on the representational field. We systematically selected individuals belonging to each group for qualitative analysis of their responses to the open-ended survey questions (Robinson, 2014). Utilizing a 'theoretical' thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we reflexively engaged with participants' responses to capture shared patterns of meaning-making informed by our application of social representations theory. We further adopted a 'latent' perspective to identifying themes, noting that our cultural insider status offered privileged access to underlying meanings participants invoked in representing the Duterte regime's policies and pronouncements.

We familiarized ourselves with the transcripts and generated initial codes by reading responses in the order of their scores on each dimension (i.e., high to low). Taking advantage of our mixed methods framework, these scores provided direction to our reading process, as they showed gradations in meaning-making as established by our latent dimensions. Conversely, participants' personal narratives and subjective reasoning contextualized their quantitative scores and enriched our understanding of the representational field more broadly (Montiel et al., 2019).

Finally, we generated labels for our themes based on distinct configurations of meaning cutting across participants' responses, following qualitative principles of 'internal homogeneity' and 'external heterogeneity' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) while also accounting for participants' quantified locations on the representational field. By synergistically combining quantitative and qualitative methods, we thus obtained a rich and critical characterization of cognitive polyphasia in representing the populist Duterte regime (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Yanchar, Gantt, & Clay, 2005).

## Results

Our integrated analysis surfaced a two-dimensional polyphasic representational field which captures yet complicates patterns of support and opposition for a populist democracy. [Table 2](#) summarizes item scores along both dimensions while [Figure 1](#) visualizes them on a representational field.

Table 2

*Survey Items With Abbreviated Codes and Dimensional Scores*

Item Code	Full Text	D1	D2
Duterte_Hope	Duterte's leadership makes me feel hope for the country's future.	+10.68	-1.62
Duterte_KnowsDoing	The Duterte administration knows what it is doing.	+7.16	+0.24
Duterte_TheAnswer	President Duterte is the answer to our country's problems.	+4.60	-3.48
Duterte_Unconditional	I will support Duterte no matter what.	+6.52	-2.86
Duterte_VoteAgain	If it were 2016 again, I would vote for Duterte for President.	+13.40	-3.28
Admin_BetterOff	The Philippines was better off under the Aquino administration.	-23.17	-3.20
Admin_HumanRights	I am worried that leaders in this administration do not respect human rights.	-22.62	-2.22
Admin_IncrementalChange	Incremental change is better than the unorthodox methods of the present government.	-18.88	-1.38
Admin_Preference	I prefer the Aquino administration's approach to running the Philippines.	-23.16	-2.61
Admin_ReverseDamage	In 2022, I will vote for a candidate that will reverse the damage caused by Duterte.	-27.81	-4.24
BBB_BetterOff	The Philippines will be better off because of the Build, Build, Build program.	+2.83	+9.11
BBB_Happy	I am happy that the Build, Build, Build program is being implemented.	+3.94	+9.31
BBB_Necessary	The Build, Build, Build program is necessary for the country's progress.	+2.73	+7.99
DrugWar_BetterOff	The Philippines will be better off because of the War on Drugs.	+9.26	-4.98
DrugWar_Happy	I am happy that the War on Drugs is being implemented.	+11.37	-5.10
DrugWar_Necessary	The War on Drugs is necessary for the country's progress.	+10.09	-6.66
Federalism_BetterOff	The Philippines will be better off because of federalism.	+4.00	-2.36
Federalism_Happy	I am happy about the move to federalize the Philippines.	+7.04	-2.15
Federalism_Necessary	Federalism is necessary for the country's progress.	+6.21	-4.23
ML_BetterOff	The Philippines will be better off because of martial law in Mindanao.	+4.37	-3.49
ML_Happy	I am happy that martial law is being implemented in Mindanao.	+7.42	-3.66
ML_Necessary	Martial law in Mindanao is necessary for the country's progress.	+6.99	-2.97
TRAIN_BetterOff	The Philippines will be better off because of the TRAIN Law.	-1.42	+11.08
TRAIN_Happy	I am happy that the TRAIN Law is being implemented.	-0.42	+11.53
TRAIN_Necessary	The TRAIN Law is necessary for the country's progress.	-1.15	+11.25

In the sections that follow, we first present an overview of the quantitatively derived representational field and its organizing dimensions, namely: political alignment (support vs. opposition), and political frame (individual vs. system).



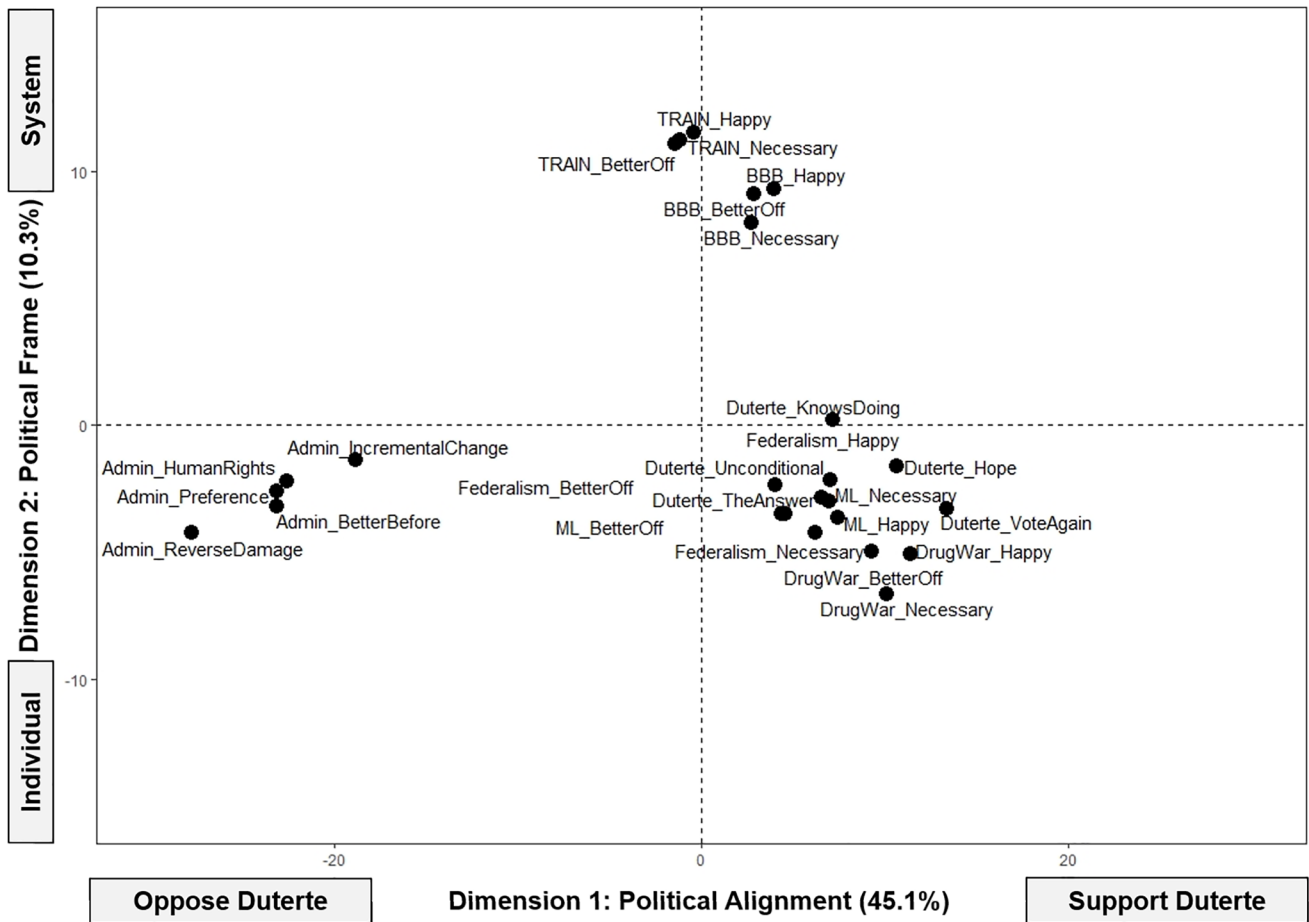


Figure 1. Polyphasic representational field of the Duterte regime.

We follow this up with specific social representations adopted by participants across different locations on the representational field, which we have divided into four quadrants in Figure 2. Based on this segmentation, we qualitatively characterize four social representations of the Duterte regime: (a) as fatherly patriot (support, individual), (b) as a morally-bankrupt yet progressive technocracy (support, system), (c) as oppressive tyrant (opposition, individual), and (d) as historical continuation of entrenched state violence (opposition, system). These politico-psychological meanings embody cognitive polyphasia among the Filipino public in representing the Duterte regime.

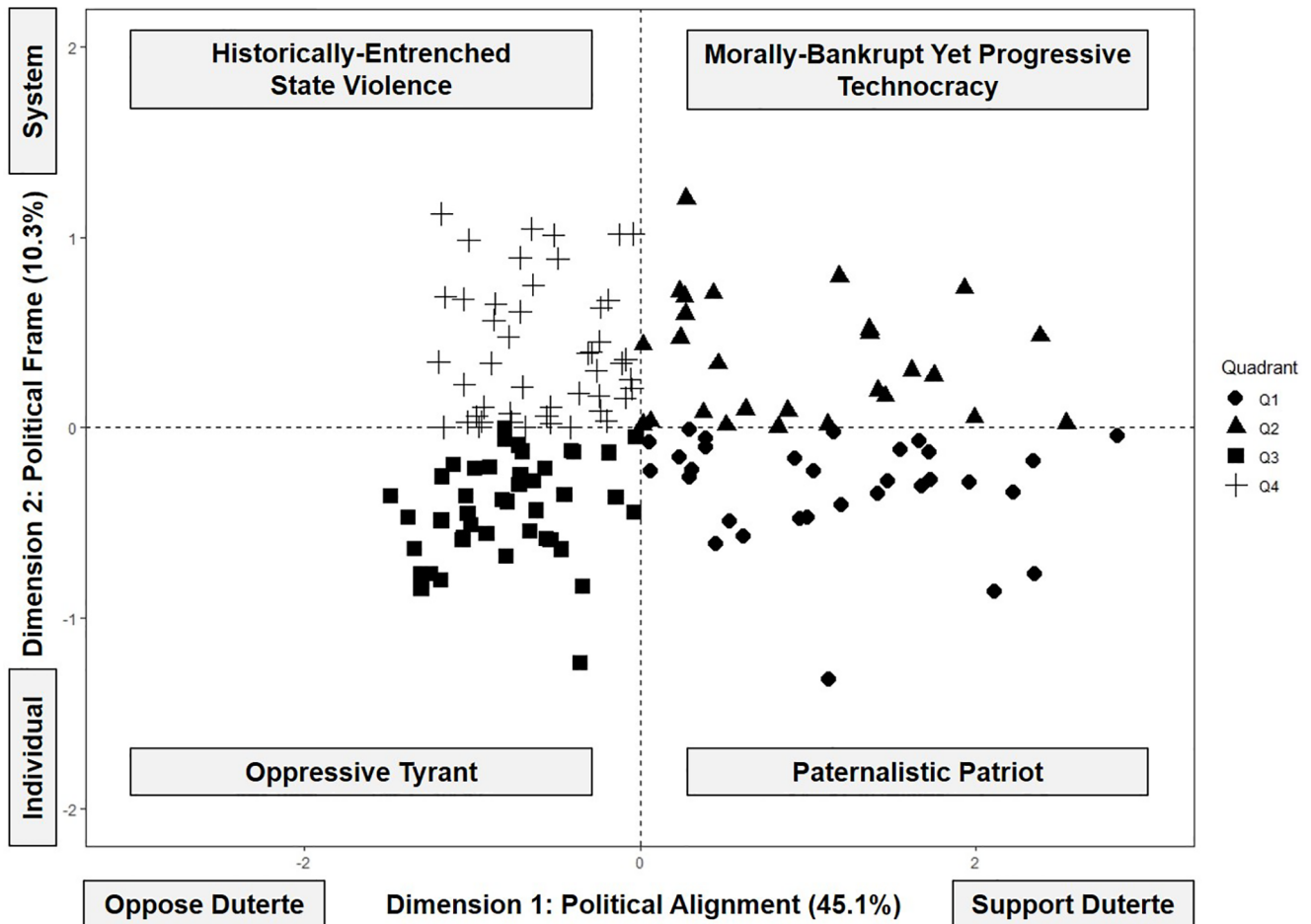


Figure 2. Participant anchoring in polyphasic representational field.

## The Representational Field of the Duterte Regime

Because succeeding factors each contributed less than 10% of the total variance, only the first two principal components were retained in our analysis of the representational field. By triangulating item scores with participants' qualitative responses, we argue that the first axis of this latent space captures a given representation's political alignment in terms of support or opposition to the populist regime. On the other hand, the second axis expresses the political frame of a representation in its relative emphasis on Duterte's individual leadership versus broader government systems. In the results that follow, we present participants' and items' locations on the representational field in terms of these two dimensions (D1 and D2).

### Political Alignment: Support vs. Opposition

Explaining 45.1% of the variance in the data, the first dimension corresponds to political alignment with or against the Duterte regime. Items on the right represent Duterte in a positive light, encompassing affirmative constructions of his competence as a president ('Duterte\_KnowsDoing', D1: +7.16; 'Duterte\_TheAnswer', D1: +4.60), the hope his leadership brings ('Duterte\_Hope', D1: +10.68; 'DrugWar\_Happy', D1: +11.37), and the concrete actions of

support he inspires ('Duterte\_VoteAgain', D1: +13.40; 'Duterte\_Unconditional', D1: +6.52). Alex and Anna, who had high positive scores along this dimension, explain:

*Duterte's means seem harsh, but they are effective. He gets the job done, unlike the Aquino administration which ruined the country. (Alex, D1: +2.35, D2: -0.77)*

*For me these are all necessary to make the country better. Duterte is just being a strict parent to the country and as any strict parent he is willing to reform and teach the people even though he will look bad. For me no administration is perfect. What matters to me is the outcome and the improvements made at the end of each administration. Although the Duterte administration may have its violent actions but I deem it necessary to reform and discipline the country. (Anna, D1: +2.54, D2: +0.02)*

Alex and Anna support Duterte's leadership by anchoring it in his ability to 'get the job done' and 'make the country better' in contrast to the 'Aquino administration which ruined the country.' Such meanings embody support for the populist leader with an appreciation for his strongman policies and a rejection of a previous elite government, echoing robust findings in the populism literature (Laclau, 2005; Moffitt, 2016). We note that Alex and Anna contextualize their support by acknowledging that some may see Duterte as 'harsh' and 'violent' which may 'look bad.' Anna suggests that these negative meanings belie a parental drive to 'reform and discipline the country,' thereby specifying meanings of populism in the context of a highly collectivist, family-oriented Philippine culture (Alampay & Jocson, 2011; Church & Katigbak, 2002).

This is in stark contrast to the left side of this axis, wherein items correspond to negative representations of Duterte, citing opposition to his strongman political style in favor of incremental change ('Admin\_IncrementalChange', D1: -18.88) and rejection of his violent policies in favor of principles of human rights ('Admin\_HumanRights', D1: -22.62). This side of the support-opposition axis expresses a preference for Duterte's predecessor ('Admin\_Preference', D1: -23.16) and longing for the next elections to reverse the damage Duterte has done ('Admin\_ReverseDamage', D1: -27.81). Brent and Britney share such sentiments, arguing:

*I think they made it look good on paper or based on a quick glance to take advantage of the common masses who do not really think of the implications of such projects/laws especially in the long run. I honestly had a little bit of hope that maybe the country would change, but it's gotten worse. (Brent, D1: -1.18, D2: -0.49)*

*There is some thought and form of planning to developing the country, but the cronyism, corruption, and abuse of power have been so blatant and embarrassing that it seems as if we are just being played as fools. It is sad that the Aquino admin has been the best in the last two decades, arguably Ramos might have been the most effective post-Martial Law era. (Britney, D1: -0.71, D2: +0.61)*

Whereas Alex and Anna place faith in Duterte's actions, Brent and Britney express disillusionment with the populist leader's promises of change. Brent notes that developments in the Philippines have dampened any initial 'hope' Duterte's leadership might have kindled in him, while Britney is forthright in indicting the administration as full of 'cronyism, corruption, and abuse of power.' Referencing Duterte's putative championing of the people, Brent and Britney agree that Duterte merely 'took advantage' of the masses and 'played' the nation 'as fools.' These accounts demonstrate how populist opposition may challenge the populist narrative directly, re-presenting the populist leader's championing of the people's interests as a disingenuous ploy for tyrannical power. These findings resonate with prior findings among anti-populist parties and the media (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2019), which we now link directly to the Filipino public at large.

### Political Frame: Individual vs. System

The second principal component captures 10.3% of the variance in the data, corresponding to the political frame of a given social representation. We invoke political frames in line with Goffman's (1974) seminal notion of 'schemata of interpretation' with which individuals and groups 'locate, perceive, identify, and label' social objects and events in the world. In the political sphere, relative focus on various features of a political phenomenon, such as a populist regime, have been observed to saliently shape the public's sentiments and actions toward it (Montiel & Shah, 2008; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986).

In this case, complementary to the primary political alignment axis, the political frame axis distinguishes between representations focusing on Duterte's individual leadership versus his broader administration as a system. This secondary axis draws a salient distinction between items linked to complex economic policies about tax reform (TRAIN) and infrastructure development (Build, Build, Build [BBB]), in contrast to the rest of the items which discuss Duterte personally (both positively and negatively) and policies more closely linked to his electoral campaign and pronouncements (e.g., the Drug War). Thus, it appears that while meanings of the Duterte regime diverge primarily based on political alignment, such evaluations are grounded in likewise divergent representational frames vis-à-vis distinct features of the populist regime.

To unpack this distinction further, we note how Carlos and Carissa, who obtained negative scores on the second dimension (i.e., individual political frame), express their assessments of Duterte's leadership:

*Overall, I think he is more productive compared to Aquino, who had good intentions but was too corrupt. (Carlos, D1: +1.00, D2: -0.47)*

*Duterte isn't helping. I don't think he's thought about his choices for this country very thoroughly. (Carissa, D1: -0.36, D2: -1.24)*

Carlos and Carissa vary in their representations of Duterte as boon or bane to the Philippines, but they share a common focus on individual leadership. Expressing well-documented contrasts between the populist leader and the liberal governments they succeed, Carlos expresses support for Duterte by emphasizing his greater 'productivity' over his predecessor Aquino. Personality-based framing extends to Carlos's representation of the prior regime, which he judges in terms of the president's good 'intentions' thwarted by 'corruption.' On the other hand, Carissa demonstrates how personality-based framing may also inform populist opposition for Filipinos located closer to the individual end (bottom) of the individual-system axis. She rejects the regime by framing it in terms of Duterte's personal 'choices' as a leader, which she finds unhelpful to the country because they are not 'very thorough.'

In contrast, Debbie and Danny, who scored positively on the second dimension (i.e., systemic political frame), share their evaluations of Duterte's administration:

*The war on drugs is highly ineffective. The idea behind Build-Build-Build is noble but the means of carrying it out hasn't been good. So much more infrastructure projects could have been awarded these two years to willing local parties who most definitely have the nation's best interests in mind rather than obscure foreign parties. (Debbie, D1: -0.64, D2: +1.05)*

*Although I have some issues with the war on drugs, I can at least see that our taxes are going somewhere because of the Build Build Build program. (Danny, D1: +2.38, D2: +0.48)*

Though Debbie and Danny occupy different positions along the primary axis, their diverging views of the Duterte regime are not based on the president's personality or promises. Instead, they frame their evaluations based on whether the regime's policies are 'ineffective' or 'have issues.' Whereas Duterte rose to power in line with prevailing populism models, Debbie and Danny show how support and opposition may be engendered along criteria separate from the personality politics and intergroup conflict emphasized in past scholarship. For Filipinos closer to the system pole (top) of the representational field's secondary axis, political divisions may instead be grounded in economic and infrastructure programs linked to the broader administration, while populist measures like the drug war may be conditionally nuanced even among Duterte's supporters due to their policy implications.

## Polyphasic Representations of the Duterte Regime

Whereas the foregoing analysis characterized broad themata of the representational field of the Duterte regime, we now deepen our analysis of the diverse social representations adopted among his supporters and detractors. Each participant occupies a unique location on the representational field corresponding to distinct patterns of shared and unshared meanings of the Duterte regime. Invoking the four quadrants on our quantitative map, we qualitatively interpret participants' open-ended responses to examine the representational dynamics of cognitive polyphasia among the populist-led Filipino public.

### 'Tough for Our Own Good': Supporting Duterte as Paternalistic Patriot

Participants with positive scores on the first dimension and negative scores on the second correspond to Duterte supporters who represent his regime in terms of his individual leadership. Embedded in Quadrant 1 (Figure 2: bottom-right), respondents in this category justify Duterte's methods, despite the criticism it engenders, by pointing to their results: the betterment of the country. Emma and Fidel exemplify this view:

*Duterte is actually implementing or trying things to solve the country's problems despite all the negative feedback. He seems to be more nationalistic and caring for the future of the country. (Emma, D1: +1.72, D2 = -0.13)*

*It may be difficult to accept new changes at first, but I believe that we will be able to adjust and that Duterte is doing what he can for the betterment of the nation. Duterte's administration may have offended many, but his willpower gets the job done. (Fidel, D1: +2.34, D2: -0.18)*

Emma and Fidel locate their support for the Duterte regime in the president's person, constructing him as both patriot and father figure to the country. By invoking his 'nationalism,' 'care,' and 'willpower,' they construct Duterte as a heroic individual who must lead a country afflicted with numerous 'problems' and 'get the job done' despite resistance from the 'many' who are offended by his efforts. As argued earlier, such constructions resonate not only with narratives of support for populist leaders in general, but also with scripts of authoritarian parenting which pervade a collectivist, high power-distance culture like the Philippines (Alampay & Jocson, 2011; Hofstede, 2011).

Discipline, in this view, constitutes an imperative of heteronomous trust in authority figures like the populist leader (the father), predicated on the populace (the children) 'adjusting' and 'accepting' the president's actions without question. Only under such conditions, in this view, might Filipinos achieve progress: by aligning themselves with Duterte's 'changes' for 'the future' and 'betterment' of the nation. Individually framed representations of populist support in the Philippines thus not only lionize the populist leader, but also sets up an ideal of dutiful citizenship in terms of loyal obedience to the leader. By linking the patriotism of Duterte to the patriotism of the citizenry through a paternalistic lens, such representations implicitly position 'negative feedback' of the regime as inutile,

thereby sharply demarcating boundaries between populist supporters and detractors as in-group and out-group, respectively, of Duterte's family-cum-nation.

### **'The Philippines Benefit From His Corruption': Supporting a Morally-Bankrupt yet Progressive Technocracy**

Other supporters of the Duterte regime focus on the substantive policies enacted by the administration. Participants with positive scores on both dimensions highlight the sophistication in the Duterte government's management of the economy, despite the recognition of corruption and incompetence which may nonetheless remain embedded in the system. Embedded in Quadrant 2 (Figure 2: top-right), Gemma and Harold explain:

*The massive infra spending, and general expansion of the economy, by way of BBB (and to an extent, TRAIN) . . . I think it's the Duterte admin's (or Dominguez's I must say, because I doubt anyone else knows jack shit about Keynes) way of signaling to international markets and learned individuals that this time, economic management is going to be different. . . . Does this then mean that I am pro all the economic stances of the administration? The answer is not quite. I'm merely remarking that I'm quite impressed intellectually, and also a bit sad that this complexity is something not captured by public media outlets. (Gemma, D1: +0.27, D2: +1.20)*

*Build-Build-Build at least is a step towards the right implementation of corruption. Bear with me for a bit. I would love it if there were no more corruption and if this problem were fixed, but it's a system-wide problem, the poor are corrupt, the rich are corrupt, everyone in the Philippines is basically corrupt . . . so at least even if Du30 is corrupt, the Philippines benefits from his corruption. In the short run, there will be more jobs, more infrastructure, etc. I'm just saying at least we'll benefit from our tax money and it won't just be pocketed. (Harold, D1: +0.69, D2: +0.09)*

In representing the Duterte regime, Gemma and Harold prioritize an assessment of economic legislation such as the TRAIN Law (Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion) or comprehensive infrastructure programs like Build, Build, Build. By emphasizing issues of 'economic management' and 'implementation', technocratic representations of the regime eclipse the significance of Duterte's populist leadership and recover the multifaceted functionalities of government systems. In such representations, recognition of the moral ('corrupt') or possibly technical ('I doubt anyone else knows') failings of the populist leadership no longer requires redemption through personality-based assessments of nationalism and care. Instead, implicit concession is made that while the Duterte administration is imperfect, the Philippines may still benefit over time due to its technocratic competence (Finance Minister 'Dominguez').

Hence, while some minor recognition is accorded to the Duterte administration's putative political will, greater credit is given to the 'complexity' and 'rightness' of policy decisions in bringing about 'more jobs, more infrastructure'. By prioritizing system-based representations of the political governance, some Filipinos may compartmentalize their view of the Duterte regime and thereby compartmentalize support for it as well, noting that they need not be 'pro all the economic stances of the administration.' Meaning-making along these lines thus does not buy into the conventional anti-liberal and anti-technocratic narrative of support drummed up by the populist leader from a supply-side perspective. Interestingly, such support does not seek to distance itself from the failings of liberal democracy, but rather sees its continued workings of 'incremental change' even in the context of populist regimes. Such representations thus result in nuanced and ambivalent support that is granted with a streak of practical Machiavellianism.

### **‘A Murderer and Dictator’: Opposing Duterte as Oppressive Tyrant**

For opposition to the regime, however, the moral failings of Duterte as a leader cannot be redeemed or negotiated. Embedded in Quadrant 3 (Figure 2: bottom-left), participants with negative scores on both dimensions indict Duterte’s person as a tyrannical oppressor, as Irene and Jolo exemplify:

*Duterte’s policies has never been kind to the people who needs his help the most, the poor and oppressed. Instead, they make it far more difficult for them. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration if he wanted them to die out of hunger. Duterte wants to build a government where he can do anything that he wants including but not limited to killing off people he doesn’t like, ignoring the human rights of our citizens for his naïve way of doing things, and cussing everyone he doesn’t like without thinking about who he’s representing to the world. (Irene, D1: -0.47, D2: -0.64)*

*It goes without saying that they don’t care about the country, and just rode off idiotic nationalistic sentiment. At least Aquino didn’t blatantly encourage murder. (Jolo, D1: -1.00, D2: -0.51)*

Tyrannical representations of the Duterte regime strongly reverse the caring and patriotic figure espoused by populist supporters, constructing Duterte as an ignorant (‘naïve way of doing things’), indifferent (‘don’t care about the country’), and violent (‘he wanted them to die’) oppressor of the people. Focusing on his uncouth ‘cussing’, defilement of ‘human rights’, and intolerance for the dissent of ‘people he doesn’t like’, participants belonging to this third category represent Duterte’s populist qualities as those of one emphatically unfit for political leadership in a democracy. Instead, they are emblematic of the sinister despotic tendencies (‘a government where he can do anything that he wants’) of a ‘murderer’, whose violent policies specifically aggravate the lives of ‘the poor and oppressed’—thus reversing the populist’s ostensible status as the people’s champion. In this manner, supporters of the regime are correspondingly reframed as ‘idiotic’, whose ‘nationalistic sentiments’ have been severely misplaced.

Opposition to the Duterte regime is underpinned by a powerful moral rejection of Duterte’s person and his unprecedented denigration of Philippine democracy. For some, this rejection sparks contrast with the preceding Aquino administration, against which the Duterte campaign had propped up their crusade for sweeping change. Because the prior government at least ‘didn’t blatantly encourage murder,’ some detractors of the Duterte regime return nostalgically to it as a flawed but morally preferable alternative. Individualized focus on the populist leader thus paints political opposition to his regime in terms of extreme and exceptional villainy, condemning it wholesale and seeking a return to democratic politics as exemplified in the past.

### **‘Just More of the Same’: Opposing Historical Continuation of Entrenched State Violence**

Finally, respondents with negative scores on the first axis but positive scores on the second represent the present plight of Philippine democracy not as a sui generis breakpoint but as a historical continuation of long-standing state violence (CuUnjieng, 2009). Embedded in Quadrant 4 (Figure 2: top-left), Karina and Lance’s responses typify this claim:

*While the previous administrations have been more “peaceful”, they are no better than Duterte’s administration. Aquino failed to help typhoon victims. Arroyo, Estrada, and Marcos stole from the country. There are flaws and injustices from each administration, and they are gravely worse because they haven’t been dealt with, and they are continuously forgiven and let go by the masses, which only encourages these*

*officials to abuse their power. The Philippines has been going through a cycle of the rich and powerful abusing the weak and poor. (Karina, D1: -0.24, D2: +0.45)*

*Federalism, ML, and Drug War seem to be more about consolidating power and inflicting violence on marginalized groups. The Duterte admin is a mixed bag when it comes to policy, but overall, it's made our country worse off. Just because the Aquino administration didn't have as much widespread rejection of institutional norms doesn't mean it's necessarily an ideal state we want to return to. We need to get better with our democracy and elect someone who embodies values that truly uplift the last and the least in the nation.' (Lance, D1: -0.71, D2: +0.89)*

By framing previous presidencies ('Aquino failed'; 'Arroyo, Estrada, and Marcos stole') as complicit in the current state of political turmoil, the Duterte regime's 'flaws and injustices' are historicized within a systemic frame of corruption and oppression with roots which grow deeper than any individual leader. Thus, members of this final category overall reject nostalgia for a better political past ('no better') and instead focus on the urgent need for deepened democratization ('get better with our democracy') in the future. Such oppositional representations contrast with individual-based charges of tyranny, which view the populist leader as an exception and therefore seek to go 'back to normal.' Interestingly, detractors adopting such representations share with populist supporters a condemnation of the corrupt elite which had dominated Philippine politics. However, to these detractors, Duterte does not represent the cure to the nation's political malady, only its culmination, anchoring the direct violence perpetrated under his leadership in the wider context of structural violence (Galtung & Høivik, 1971).

By foregrounding a system-focused representation of political governance, historical representations of the Duterte regime correspondingly propose an institutional response, one that breaks free from the 'continuous forgiveness' of personality politics in the Philippines which has perpetuated the chokehold of the 'rich and powerful' over the 'weak and poor' (Sidel, 2005). In the context of such representational practices, Filipinos who oppose the Duterte regime and see it as more than Duterte's individual leadership thus look ahead to the subsequent elections and imagine progressive possibilities ('uplift the last and the least in the nation') for the succeeding government.

## Discussion

This paper utilized the concept of cognitive polyphasia to examine social representations of Duterte's populist regime in the Philippines. Integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, we mapped the organizing themata of the Filipino public's representational field and characterized the polyphasic meanings different groups may adopt across its dimensions. Our findings highlight novel contributions to extant debates in the populism literature, specifically in terms of attending to politico-psychological plurality with which citizens enact 'world-making assumptions' in the context of fragmented Global South democracies (Elcherath et al., 2011; Schulz, 2015).

We discuss implications of our findings in terms of unique representational processes of *differentiation* and *annexation* which underpin crucial meaning-making practices in unequal populist publics. Specifically, by attending to cognitive polyphasia, we (i) characterize parallel practices of representational differentiation among opposition to the populist regime; and (ii) introduce processes of representational annexation among both supporters and detractors of the populist regime. Finally, we conclude with reflections on future work and democratic engagement in the Philippines and the broader Global South.



## Representational Differentiation Across Political Alignments

Previous scholarship emphasized the dual processes of vertical and horizontal differentiation which underpin support for populist regimes in the West (Moffitt, 2016; Staerklé & Green, 2018). Our work empirically affirms that similar representational processes are deployed by some supporters of populist leader Duterte, both *vertically* against a corrupt elite and *horizontally* against drug addicts (Ordoñez & Borja, 2018; Teehankee & Thompson, 2016). While this analysis validates the dominant populist narrative in the Philippine setting, it also showcases the Global South departure from the prevailing anti-immigrant storyline in the US and Europe. Whereas among the latter, more advanced democracies, the designated social pariahs originate from outside the nation, the local drug war is directed inward, leveraging the institutional fragilities and inequalities embedded in a less developed, nascent democracy (McCoy, 2017).

Furthermore, our findings novelly demonstrate how opposition to the populist regime likewise perform practices of differentiation parallel to those of populist supporters. By adopting tyrannical meanings of the Duterte regime, the populist opposition *vertically* militates against an oppressive political order as personified by Duterte himself, while *horizontally* diminishing his admirers as misled at best and ignorant at worst. Much like populist supporters, then, the populist opposition may implicitly claim moral ascendancy as ‘the authentic people’ of the nation, albeit framed not in ‘essentialized’ terms which tie identity to territory or race, but in more ‘civic’ terms as rational citizens and principled advocates of democratic processes and institutions.

Diametric contestation between communities representing Duterte as either a patriot or a tyrant constitutes sharp polarization among the Filipino public in line with the prevailing scholarship on populist publics. Extending this view, we propose that underpinning such polemical representations are not only bifurcated meanings of Duterte’s populist leadership, but also competing assertions of rightful citizenship as ‘true’ Filipinos.

## Representational Annexation Across Political Frames

This paper introduces the new concept of representational annexation, as a complementary meaning-making process undertaken by populist publics. We define representational annexation as a process of linking, extending, or fusing meanings of social objects to complicate and specify their politico-psychological force. Besides extending the purview of representational differentiation across political alignments, we show how divergent political frames exceed and enrich a polarized view of populist support and opposition.

Our findings exemplify these processes especially among system-based representations of the regime. By embedding the populist leader within wider systemic contexts, the public locate their moral evaluation of the regime not solely in Duterte’s personality or imputed authenticity, but in the broader structural contours which nest his leadership. Diversely deployed both by Duterte’s supporters and detractors, representational annexation may serve to amplify or diminish the centrality and accountability of the populist leader, thereby constituting unique political meanings of populism not otherwise emphasized in previous scholarship.

For instance, communities adopting technocratic representations of the regime annex Duterte’s strongman politics and repudiation of democratic norms to multifaceted institutions like the Department of Finance, which persist with economic sophistication despite the president’s putative barbarism. Among Duterte’s supporters, then, representational annexation informs favor for the regime by expanding the scope of what it means to evaluate Duterte’s presidency. In doing so, representational annexation renders visible the ambiguities and contradictions which

pervade any system of government. Whereas such disjunctures expose the susceptibility of governance to volatility in parts, they also recover its capacity to withstand absolute corruption (or absolute salvation) as a whole.

By contrast, communities which subscribe to historical representations annex the Duterte regime to long-standing state violence, invoking collective memories of corrupt, authoritarian regimes wracked with military repression and economic precarity. In this light, representational annexation enflames populist opposition by exposing the fragmented political system which enabled the rise of Duterte in the first place, thus seeking its reformation beyond the replacement of Duterte himself.

In both cases, what is at stake is no longer a contestation of *who* constitutes ‘the authentic people,’ but rather *what* constitutes ‘the real government.’ Are governments equal to their leaders? Or do they encompass larger vistas—and if so, which ones? As support and opposition pivot about system-based political frames, their corresponding communities likewise engage less in debates about collective identity and more about institutions. Nonetheless, even as such representations appear to be less overtly personal, they remain sharply bifurcated, as technocratic representations appear to invite public trust in the resiliency of government systems, whereas historical representations highlight the more dramatic urgency of structural political change given its long-standing afflictions.

### Implications for Unequal Democracies in the Global South

Such compounded fragmentations in the meaning-making processes we observe emphasize how fragile Global South politics elide direct application of dominant supply-side and demand-side populist scholarship. While some representational practices do run parallel to those documented in Western democracies, Global South democracies mobilize unique and unequal patterns of populist support and opposition. The public’s relationship to populist regimes encompasses not only ideological divides, but also diverse politico-psychological attunements to raw personality politics, authoritarian paternalism, bureaucratic institutions, and histories of militarized state violence (Montiel & Boller, 2017; Schulz, 2015).

We anchor these divergent frames in the highly uneven social landscape constituting the stratified Philippine society. Local scholars have long documented the co-existence of bifurcated moral politics tied to classed inequalities (Hedman, 2006; Kusaka, 2017). In contrast to prior scholarship exploring the impacts of economic deprivation on populist identification (Alwin & Tufiş, 2016; Mols & Jetten, 2016), we show how both ‘civic’ and ‘mass’ political frames may become entangled with various political alignments toward the regime, variously resulting in euphoric, apathetic, or even radicalized communities of support and opposition. A polyphasic frame thus exposes crucial contours in societal meaning-making which embody the complexities of local political contexts.

As populism continues to sweep nations worldwide, we propose that such considerations are vital toward the process of democratization. As our work shows, political polarization in populist democracies is underpinned by complex processes of cognitive polyphasia. Such dynamics are exacerbated in the fragmented and stratified political contexts of Global South democracies. In the Philippines, as in many populist regimes worldwide, populist supporters appear to be unified by a clear leader and common sense of loyalty and patriotism. In contrast, citizens critical of the regime may excuse its moral ambiguities, or else diverge in terms of a crucial discordance between returning to a prior state of liberal governance and the more fundamental task of democratic reimagination (Blühdorn & Butzlaff, 2019).

What forms of political change are possible in view of both polarization and polyphasia? Which shared and unshared meanings might enable or foreclose collective action among disparate, polyphasic communities? Our work does not claim to answer these questions, but rather emphasize their urgency by empirically mapping the plural and complex representational practices which drive them.

## Limitations and Future Work

At this juncture, we note that several considerations may limit the conclusions to be drawn from our findings. While following established principles for sampling in semi-qualitative methodologies (Watts & Stenner, 2005), we note that statistical generalizability may remain a desirable objective for more quantitatively oriented inquiry into populist publics. In particular, although geographic diversity was emphasized in our sampling strategy, a glance at Table 1 indicates that our sample may be skewed toward younger, college-educated Filipinos, suggesting that more extensive stratification may also accompany a larger sample size for increased representativeness. In this view, the representational field we uncover thus serves as an informative snapshot of the diverse meaning-making practices adopted by the Filipino public, but it does not claim to encompass all possible social constructions of the Duterte regime.

Future work may thus considerably extend our findings toward further deepening populism scholarship through the lens of politico-psychological plurality. Utilizing our exploratory findings, more traditional survey-oriented methods may construct more statistically valid measures of diverse populist attitudes. On the other hand, from a conceptual standpoint, we note that cognitive polyphasia may also refer to the co-existence of multiple social representations not only among groups, but also within a single individual (Provencher, 2011). By treating individuals as points on the representational field, our analytic design forefronts a more macro exploration of polyphasia in politics. We affirm that such dialogic negotiation of multiple meanings of a populist regime may be fruitful to explore, possibly through a more in-depth qualitative approach.

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