

DOCTORAL THESIS

Authoritarian Populism: Mediating Human Rights and Nationalism in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The study argues that the democratic pillars of independent media, human rights and nationalism are largely disfigured in and through communication. As an intervention in the scholarship on communication and populism, authoritarian populism (AP) is understood as a political communication style that articulates the us-versus-them divide to amass a popular and nationalist appeal. The methodological approach is inspired by interpretation and criticism, and supported by frame analysis, interview and secondary analysis. Using the concept of media populism, the mediated narratives of news editorials, human rights and nationalism are interrogated to examine the communicative might of AP. First, the editorial frames that the dominant news media outlets deploy when dealing with Duterte are uncovered. They exhibit how the media can enable, nurture and counter populism. Second, the anti-human rights agenda of populism is fueled by the discourses of strongman and fake news. It shows the ways in which the democratic consensus on human rights is delegitimized by sustained attack. And third, the inclusive vision of nationalism is reformatted through the manufacture of exclusionary nationalism. It probes the role of patronage, hate and mediatized masses in targeting group identities. Arguing against an ahistorical perspective on AP, the study contends that Philippine media, human rights and nationalism were deeply compromised long before Duterte exploded on the national stage. The leader harnessed these flaws and turned them into a particular style of authoritarian-populist politics. The study contributes to a more historical conception of AP and suggests that patronage, postcolonial politicking and institutional property of media are pivotal in deconstructing the populist playbook. While these factors appear underrated in the dominant literature, the Philippine experience propounds how populism is perpetuated by established blocs of patronage power, postcolonial sentiment and political-economy climate of media. The implications of AP to mediatization of politics are considered.

Keywords: authoritarian populism, media populism, human rights, nationalism, Philippines, Duterte

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