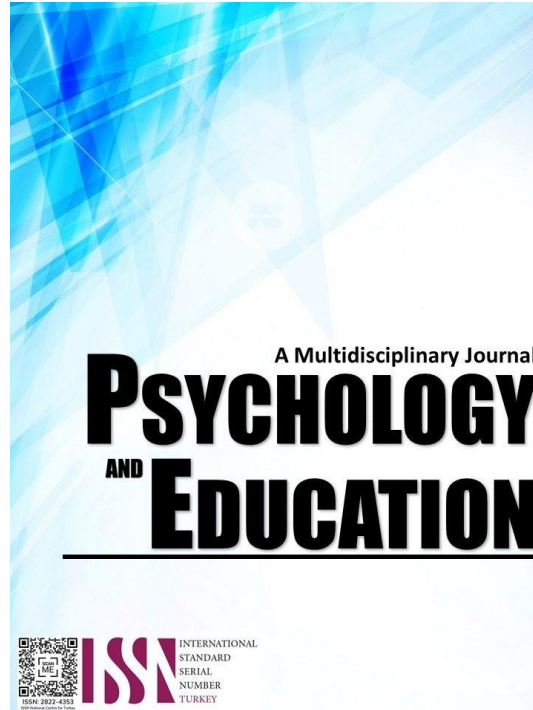


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A Phenomenological Analysis of Duterte's Former Supporters

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Abstract

Rodrigo Duterte, known for his strongman reputation as the former mayor of Davao City, sparked the emergence of the Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS) movement during his 2016 presidential campaign. Their frustration with the status quo, systemic inequality, and ongoing corruption fueled them to gain hope and security through Duterte's lens. However, Duterte's unfulfilled campaign promises disappointed many, leading to a surge of DDS who resisted his leadership. A descriptive phenomenological approach was utilized to explore the lived experiences of the six (6) former Duterte supporters through a semi-structured interview with fifteen (15) open-ended questions. The data was analyzed through Moustakas' phenomenological data analysis method. Results indicated that the participants' ideal leader and view of Duterte's presidency showed why they stopped supporting him. They expressed disappointment for themselves and Duterte. Moreover, they have gotten out of the cognitive dissonance chamber and resisted justifying the system. Results highlighted the essence of critical thinking, which allowed the former supporters to eliminate their cognitive dissonance and make smarter decisions. The study's central findings indicate that understanding the causes of growing unquestioning support for a political figure can better equip individuals to deal with it.

Keywords: *Duterte, former Duterte supporters, descriptive phenomenological analysis, lived experiences*

Introduction

The 2016 presidential election campaign made the rise of the Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS) that served as the political group tool for the 16th President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Roa Duterte. This was a play on Duterte's reported operation of the Davao Death Squad (DDS) to suppress drugs and violence in Davao City. Their widespread frustration with the status quo, systemic inequality, and ongoing corruption made them eager to gain hope and personal safety through the lens of Rodrigo Duterte (Antazo & Felipe, 2020). The DDS seemed firm in their political stance and were willing to confront it when challenged. For many people, he represented a respite from terrible experiences, and his leadership had created an unbreakable militia of support, whether he realized it or not. This heterogeneous political support base of Duterte from different classes of Philippine society explained his enduring power.

The mechanism of the DDS who continuously supported Duterte had become alarming. Moreover, his support base celebrated mass killings, which undermined the traditional democratic culture the Philippines should have (Syjuco, 2016). A large portion of the public had learned to tolerate human rights violations as the price for a greater sense of security among the wider public. With this, Duterte's supporters successfully utilized the digital space to amplify their arguments to defend his controversy or support his plan. Statistics alone revealed that the numbers of DDS members active on online platforms range from 200,000 to 250,000, with 30% being real people and the rest being paid trolls (Masigan, 2021). Because of this, misinformation and disinformation directed at the public were rampant. Therefore, the social-media activism of the DDS supporting his propaganda was indispensable in that it created public confusion and division (Robles, 2020). During his presidency, people witnessed what he meant by his tagline: Change is Coming. However, the changes he showed were contrary to what the public expected of him. Specifically, when more than 7,000 people were killed in the 'war on drugs' program by Duterte in just six (6) months (Amnesty International UK, 2017). Despite the various questionable actions taken by the administration, Duterte's supporters remain out of control on social media platforms. Yet, it did not stop people who previously supported him from turning their backs. In a blog post by JM (2018), a former DDS courageously admitted on her Facebook account that she regretted voting and campaigning for the President. In her post, she said, "I am a Filipino & my president was Duterte." She was wholly dedicated to Duterte during his electoral campaign, yet; he let her down, which made her realize that her decision to support Duterte was wrong. She added that the least she can do now was to break her words apart and use them properly, this time to express her regrets. She also mentioned that all Filipinos were victims, and the offense committed had been too much. The former supporter described the nation as becoming more "unsalvageable" in Duterte's past years of leadership.

Currently, the numbers of the DDS have kept growing. This also led to a record-high satisfaction among 91% of the respondents who recognized his performance and personality in December 2020 (Reuters, 2020). However, despite the increase in supporters, many people oppose the administration. Incidents of 'no-show' and late-night national addresses have become a big issue during the COVID-19 pandemic (Baizas, 2021). His militaristic approach to dealing with crises has also met with strong opposition. These have led to the rest of the Filipino people being left hungry and desperate to survive, especially in the marginalized sectors. In addition, some companies closed and filed for bankruptcy. Therefore, it was difficult for some of the former DDS to admit that the leader they believe is different from others is untrue.

Subsequently, many people were shocked by how he played an important role in ruling the Philippines and other essential affairs

because of his way of accomplishing public responsibilities and priorities. The administration's promises for his campaign in the 2016 elections disappointed many in expecting a good presidency. The 'Change is Coming' was different from what many expected (Mercado, 2021). Other people have lost their trust in him because of his behavior. Thus, former supporters and other Filipinos realized what the Duterte administration has done.

According to Ranada (2018), Duterte's statements, broken promises, and governance style were many reasons DDS abruptly changed perspective. A prime example of this was Duterte's use of rhetorical terms like 'obosen ko kayo', 'papatayin ko kayong lahat', and 'shoot them dead' to demonstrate how much power he possessed in convincing Filipinos to believe his promises in combating corruption and the growth of illegal substances (Viray, 2017). This and similar phrases or sentences can be heard during his State of the Nation Address (SONA) and news conferences. Therefore, being a supporter or a critic entailed a variety of perceptions and judgments (Ranada, 2018). When the attitudes and mentalities of the DDS and the previous DDS are compared, it was clear that there was a significant difference in their perspectives and qualities that influenced their political judgments.

Duterte remained robust as long as there is what we call 'DDS.' But hope remained for the public because there were individuals whom we called 'Ex-DDS.' These are the individuals who, after six years, rethink their political stance and consumed propaganda. Therefore, it was further studied, especially about the post-DDS lens, which substantially promoted the psychological aspect of this movement.

To date, the research and literature have focused on the discussion of the Duterte supporters' movement and emphasized the reasons for the unrelentless support for the administration over the years (Aranda, 2021). This view was challenged by recent data showing that Diehard Duterte Supporters changed their perspective due to the context of Duterte's speeches, broken promises, and his act of governance (Ranada, 2018). Former supporters and other Filipinos became aware of its adverse impacts. However, initial studies have failed to identify and analyze the psychological viewpoint of this phenomenon, and the lived experiences of former Duterte supporters.

Despite the importance of why Duterte supporters campaigned and voted for him in the last presidential election (Aranda, 2021; Malmgren, 2019), a considerable amount of analysis regarding the social and political attitudes and behaviors of Duterte supporters on social media platforms has been made. Therefore, few researchers have studied this militia of support but focused on the current Duterte supporters rather than the former ones.

Moreover, a notable quantity of articles and blogs have been produced concerning why former Duterte supporters felt betrayed (JM, 2018) and how they lost their adoration for the President (Ranada, 2018). Still, no research study regarding those topics has been published yet, as this present study served as a settling figure in this field. Researchers have also been able to study the grounds of the former supporters, whether they chose to withdraw their support considering their realization or the influence or pressure from society.

Subsequently, the question remained as to what lived experiences of the former Duterte Supporters were. It remained an unresolved social phenomenon that many former supporters have made up their minds that they failed to acknowledge the mishaps of the Duterte government (Ranada, 2018). These differences have been analyzed since the DDS movement is a phenomenon that has continuously been a big part of the Philippine political scene. It showed a point when a large population acts as one with a couple of its individuals being genuinely educated; such developments were not difficult to control and mishandle (Sison, 2015). Additional studies regarding this social phenomenon were essential because the current DDS was too polarized and cohesive to the point that it seemed unbreakable. This psychological propensity revealed how most DDS bolstered the status quo and saw everything the regime had done as fair and sound despite the numerous questionable actions. As a result, these factors had been studied further to aid in developing studies on Duterte's former Diehard supporters. With all the gathered information, this study answered the lacking information and answers or gaps from other studies.

This paper introduced Duterte's former supporters' lived experiences. A total population of six (6) participants was interviewed, admittedly a former DDS and a resident of the Republic of the Philippines. Through a purposive sampling method, the researchers utilized a descriptive phenomenological psychological approach in interpreting given data. The study was done within a year and three (3) months.

Research Questions

This descriptive phenomenological study explored the underlying grounds for former Duterte supporters to withdraw their support for former President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. At this stage in the research, the lived experiences will be generally defined as the first-hand involvement and representation of the former supporters in boosting and tolerating Duterte's presidency. Specifically, it answered the central and sub-questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the former Duterte Supporters?
 - 1.1. Why do former Duterte supporters stop supporting him?
 - 1.2. How do former Duterte supporters change their perception of him?
 - 1.3. How do the past political choices of former Duterte supporters affect their views in the present?

Literature Review

For the longest time that politics has existed, people have become more accustomed to encountering frustrated hopes than fulfilled

ones. The most rational expectation people can put into politics and political leaders is the intent of the principles of justice that people can benefit from, such as fundamental human rights, non-discrimination, and democratic decision-making (Stahl, 2021). However, people become disappointed in politics to political leaders when the outcomes of what they are hoping for do not occur, when there is a discrepancy between the 'is' and the 'ought.' People's fallenness is depicted in the failures of political leaders, which is why citizens must hold government officials accountable and maintain a healthy benefit of the doubt toward their use of power (Creech, 2021). To better understand the very foundation of the study, the researchers identified various themes and concepts emphasizing the phenomenon of support withdrawal from a political figure in local contexts. This contains a discussion of the country's politics, political leaders, the rising number of its supporters, and a review of former supporters.

Voters in the Philippines are primarily supporters who cast ballots to choose the nation's next leader; however, they do not consider how the administration will run the government. Vote buying indicated that supporters have a shallow view of governance and policies that influence them, suggesting that good governance is not an important issue to consider when making decisions. According to Pedrosa and Reyes (2022), the election season in the Philippines is typically a momentous time with captivating signs, fancy motorcades, and different assemblies. The public has learned a lot about the candidates through these campaigns and materials, which greatly impacted supporters' choices rather than campaign agendas.

Rodrigo Roa Duterte has established a reputation as a strongman since the year he became the former mayor of Davao City. The former President Duterte has hardly been out of the news headlines in the early three (3) months after being elected. His confrontational approach to international diplomacy has stirred the international stage (Quiano & Perry, 2016). Human rights groups were protesting his much-publicized drug war, and relations with longtime ally the United States. On the other hand, he sought to mend ties with China, which had been strained by the Philippines' long-running territorial conflict with its more influential neighbor. Nevertheless, 86% of Filipinos have remained trustful in the President's performance despite numerous controversies, according to a 2016 Pulse Asia satisfaction poll (CNN Philippines, 2016).

Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS) is the label given to people who support Rodrigo Duterte. DDS was derived straight from the "Davao Death Squad," a vigilante gang that operated in Davao City during Duterte's time as mayor. (Baraan, 2020) According to Borres (2021), Diehard Duterte Supporters' rise began in the 2016 election. It became his primary support system regardless of his contempt for the rule of law and the rights of the people. Despite the absurdity of his promises, many Filipinos were eager to put their faith in Duterte to keep it. However, with such unwavering support arises a proclivity to zealously protect Duterte on social networking platforms, potentially jeopardizing the country's democratic political discussion. The DDS openly supported Duterte and fought anyone who went against him in any way. Supporting this claim, Antazo and Felipe (2020) conducted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to understand the underlying factors of the rise of Diehard Duterte Supporters. Through an interview with a self-identified DDS, they found that they were frustrated with the status quo and appreciate what Duterte has done to Davao City. They viewed Duterte as a liberator, wherein he is a symbol of hope for the country to progress. With this, the researchers also found that although there is a small-scale count of the DDS, they were rising in numbers and potentially represented a Filipino population. The continuous rise of the Diehard Duterte Supporters is nonstop, even though Rodrigo Duterte himself has committed inevitable mistakes.

Nevertheless, people were convinced he was still doing something to benefit the Filipino people. Over the past years, it has become continuously high even when Duterte's administration's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the country. The majority of the public seemed willing to turn a blind eye and continue supporting. Furthermore, Malmgrem (2019) investigated this phenomenon by doing semi-structured interviews with the DDS in Sweden, and it was almost the same as the findings that Antazo and Felipe (2020) found. Their study claimed that Duterte appeals to be charismatic, which has an image of a non-traditional politician. His supporters feel they are seen; hence, they opt to give unconditional support to Rodrigo Duterte.

The proliferation and success of the DDS movement can be traced back to the 2016 election campaign, wherein Duterte used social media as a weapon to mobilize public opinion through a network of support that his camp had established. A study by Aranda (2021) on OFW Facebook groups revealed that through this network, the support for Duterte is getting more robust to the point that these individuals were convinced enough to organize an online campaign mobilization. However, although this group operates independently, they were not an exception to the influence of the diversionary tactics and propagation of fake news that the official Duterte social media campaign has been doing.

The rise of misinformation and disinformation has been rampant in social media in the 2016 election campaign by the Duterte camp. Cabañes and Cornelio (2017) stated that the trolls were threatening, spreading fear, and misleading information about Duterte. Because of his violent acts and how Duterte made them reimagine a new foe of the country, they have said that there were also journalists that have been attacked for being biased just because they reported something about Duterte. They also stated a gray line between trolls and real supporters and that the real supporters were being defined and resembling a troll. Political trolls hijacked almost the majority of cyberspace. The only thing news companies can do to rid them is to reimagine the task and expect that they have little to no chance of reclaiming the space occupied by trolls. Supporting this claim, Arugay et al. (2019) explored how social media played a role in Rodrigo Duterte's election victory. According to the study's results, an analysis of almost 40,000 randomly chosen comments across official Facebook profiles of presidential aspirants showed that Duterte has the most engagements. The study also revealed that Duterte's supporters online were a mirror of his supporters offline. In addition, a poll data of 621 respondents shows that Duterte fans

were more aggressive in their online support for him and more devoted offline. At the same time, Uy (2017) explored the reasons that led to the formation of the DDS and how they consume news in Facebook groups. In addition, they investigated their Facebook groups and conducted an in-depth interview with one pro-Duterte family. The researcher's findings on the DDS phenomenon and their consumption and production of content in those selected groups showed how dynamic and highly interrelated the supporters were regarding how they identified themselves and were represented in the media.

While there has been an increase in the number of Diehard Duterte Supporters, there has also been a proliferation among the DDS movement that has turned its back on this cohesive group. According to an article by Abad (2021), former Rodrigo Duterte allies have changed their tune as the 2022 elections approach. Names like Moreno, Pacquiao, and Lacson were now labeled as "opposition" as they vied for the Philippines' highest office. Furthermore, even low-profile DDS officials have voiced a want to withdraw their support for the Duterte regime. A former DDS stated that it is difficult to stand up for their opinions, yet they must be vocal to be heard, making people go out of the echo chamber (Rappler, 2021). Furthermore, Castaneda and Melendres (2022) studied the journey of Ex-DDS or former supporters of Duterte in politics. Based on the Ex-DDS they interviewed, they had voted for and supported Duterte because they saw his tough image and believed that Duterte could bring the development they hoped for the nation. However, they got lost in protecting the candidate they had supported and forgot why they supported him in the first place. Former supporters of Duterte have realized that voters need to start rethinking how they select candidates. In a story published by Ranada (2021), a DDS learned that Duterte was not the man he expected to be. He stopped supporting him and fell out of love with Rodrigo Duterte's image due to his lack of genuine commitment to what he said during the election campaign.

Approximately 70 organizations, along with the #CourageON: No Lockdown on Rights coalition, criticized the current administration for failing to address people's concerns and granted the Duterte administration a dismal failure rating in all of the report cards' categories (Rappler, 2021). A resounding outcry was also unleashed by a downhearted daughter (Casey Ann Cruz) of a Filipino nurse who passed away due to COVID-19 – "We deserve better" (Ellao, 2021). On June 3, 2021, Cruz was among those who participated in the 'Duterte Wakasan Movement's' online launching. The campaign, which included church leaders, progressives, and cultural workers, demanded that the Duterte administration and its failed policies and programs be ended. Due to the fallacies of the Duterte administration, urban poor groups fearing the recurring of a failed government, marched to Mendiola and fearlessly protested 'no to another Duterte presidency' (Alpasan, 2021). While these were some documented former DDS, many were still silent. Ex-DDS out there had already made up their minds, broken the cycle of mindless devotion and idolatry for a political figure, and started to think critically about the country's future.

With this, an interconnection can be drawn and perceived in the phenomenon that is currently happening. Although the literature reviewed was substantial and can serve as a solid foundation for claims about the ongoing phenomenon, the study focused on the lived experiences of former Duterte supporters, which emerged as the gap that was filled in this study. From a psychological lens, it is not easy for an individual to change his mind, especially if the fanatic group he belongs to is very cohesive, resulting in Group thinking.

Hence, although scarce, the vast amount of literature has shone a light on the researchers to examine the lived experiences of the former Diehard Duterte Supporters; and how they changed their political choices and affected their current views.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive phenomenological psychological approach was used to understand the lived experiences of the former Diehard Duterte Supporters inside a particular timeframe and locality (Cresswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). As a methodological framework, phenomenology is a process that explores reality in people's narratives of their lived experiences with the participant of interest (Cilesiz, 2009; Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). This process is also required to develop meanings, cluster themes, and thoroughly describe the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yldrm, 2015). This description includes "what" the participants experienced along with "how" they encountered it (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) outlined the process as identifying phenomena to investigate, bracketing out one's personal experiences, and gathering data from multiple individuals who have encountered the phenomenon. The researchers then evaluated the data by distilling it down to crucial statements or quotations and categorizing them into themes. It then creates textual descriptions to represent the essence of the experience. Overall, these fortified the research methodology's aim and the researcher's positionality in the exploration of the underlying psychological experiences requisite for the phenomenon to exist.

Participants

According to Cresswell (2012), a phenomenological framework implies a generally homogeneous set of participants. As a result, the participants in the study were chosen due to their similar substantial and meaningful experiences with the topic under investigation (Cresswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). This study's participants are drawn from an exclusive group of people. Hence, the study participants consisted of former Duterte supporters who are Filipino citizens from 25 to 50 years old. This study had a total of six (6) participants who were all residing in the Philippines. The participants were selected through a purposive sampling method since this technique included the population's characteristics and the study's purpose in choosing the sample through the researchers' judgment.

Instrument

To develop a sound understanding of the phenomenon, the researchers devised an interview guide for a semi-structured interview consisting of four parts: introduction; establishing of rapport; the interview proper; and debriefing. In addition, the interview guide contained fifteen (15) open-ended questions that experts validated. The researchers developed the interview question based on the study's objectives, which aimed to answer the central and sub-questions of the lived experiences of former Duterte supporters.

Procedure

The data collection procedures for the study were divided into four (4) stages: Preparation Stage; Selection of Participants; Interview Process; and Transcription Process.

Preparation Stage. The preparation stage in the data gathering procedure focused on the validity and reliability of the interview guide. Next, the researchers consulted psychology and political experts to validate the interview guide. Then, the semi-structured interview guide had undergone proofreading before properly conducting the interview with the former Duterte supporters. Lastly, adequate documentation and permits were prepared for the Institutional Review Board's approval.

Participant Selection. The researchers selected six (6) participants for the interview given that they met key inclusion criteria such as being between the ages of 25 and 50, being registered voters who voted for Duterte in the 2016 election, having previously supported Duterte but are now ex-DDS (Diehard Duterte Supporter), being able to access the Zoom application, and having a stable internet connection for the interview. Finally, both had a functioning camera and microphone. Exclusion criteria included people who previously backed Duterte but are under the age of 25, as they were clearly beneath the legal voting age during the 2016 elections.

Participants were recruited through a Facebook group formed by people who previously supported Duterte. The researchers conducted a thorough search within that group for posts describing the targeted participants' experiences and thoughts [i.e., how they backed Duterte and why they quit supporting him], and then recruited them by reaching out through an online chatting program. Following their agreement, they were sent an email with a link to their informed consent form. The form included the study's goal, ethical issues, and a reply slip to determine their willingness to participate in the study interview.

Interview Process. Each of the study's participants took part in a semi-structured interview. Participants were given details about the study's purpose and that participation was voluntary, and that they might withdraw from the study at any moment. In addition, the contents of the informed consent were reiterated for clarification. The researchers then built rapport with the interviewees in order to maintain a relaxed atmosphere throughout the interview. After establishing rapport, the interview was conducted.

The interviewer utilized the validated guide to facilitate the process. To elicit the participants' personal experiences, the interviewer employed a series of open-ended and probing questions. Participants were given as much time as needed to answer the interviewers' questions. The interviewer regularly asks the participants to substantiate their responses by citing situational examples to increase the depth and credibility of the data. Finally, the interview process is followed by the debriefing procedure. Each interview was recorded in a Zoom conference that lasted between thirty (30) minutes to two (2) hours.

Transcription Process. The researchers transcribed the recorded interview session verbatim. Creswell (2013) suggested using the 'interview protocol', a tool devised by Asmussen and Creswell (1995), which enables the researcher to take notes of the participants' responses during the interview session. However, more advanced and efficient tools have emerged in these technology-oriented times. The researchers utilized two transcription tools — the 'tl;dv' (too long; didn't view) application and 'Auris'. Both tools allowed the researcher to convert the recorded audio/video to text efficiently. The texts converted were not hundred percent accurate, but the researchers did the crosschecking and polishing to ensure that every word was transcribed accurately. As part of the data-gathering procedure, all recognizing details that would have divulged the participants' and other individuals' identities were withheld to keep the individuals' privacy. The polished raw data was then utilized for the data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study prioritized ethical considerations to safeguard the privacy and security of the human participants involved. Various crucial aspects were considered, such as obtaining consent, ensuring confidentiality, maintaining anonymity, and protecting the participants' data. The research instrument employed in this study was carefully designed to prevent discrimination based on the respondents' answers. The researchers diligently avoided biases, misleading or false information, particularly in primary data representation. All communications related to the study were conducted with honesty and transparency. In compliance with the Republic Act 10173 - Data Privacy Act of 2012 of the Philippines, the data obtained from this study were treated as confidential, and no individual information would be used without the explicit knowledge of the respondents. Strict measures were implemented to ensure the utmost confidentiality. Participants could remain anonymous or have their identities undisclosed throughout the research. Furthermore, the participants were free to discontinue or withdraw their participation at any time, as their full consent was not obligatory. A debriefing session was conducted after the experiment to ensure that participants concluded their involvement in a similar state as when they initially participated.

Results and Discussion

The study's findings demonstrated how participants expressed views on their ideal leader and how they felt about Duterte as President and showed regret over their political decisions. They learned that false information has historically influenced Filipinos' political opinions. Moreover, they now choose their moral principles and beliefs as they commit to becoming advocates who spread the truth.

The Participants - Summary

The participants were requested to fill out a Google form prepared by the researchers for demographic profile purposes. There were eleven (11) demographic questions. Specifically, data and information were collected related to participants' age, sex, marital status, educational attainment, employment status, where they are from and currently residing, the number of people in the residence, community type, and the average monthly family income.

Table 1. *Description of Participants*

Name	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Educational Attainment	Employment Status	Currently Living	Description of current residence	No. of people in residence	Community Type	Income per month
P1	25	Male	Single	College Undergraduate	Full time	Luzon	Living with family members or relatives	2	Urban Community	30,000 - 45,000
P2	41	Male	Married	Graduate Studies	Full time	Mindanao	Bought and owned by one's self	4	Urban Community	60,000 - 75,000
P3	46	Male	Married	College Graduate	Freelance	Mindanao	Bought and owned by one's self	3	Urban Community	45,000 - 60,000
P4	28	Male	Single	College Graduate	Full time	Mindanao	Living with family members or relatives	2	Urban Community	30,000 - 45,000
P5	29	Male	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Full time	Luzon	Rented and paid by one's self	3	Urban Community	90,000 and above
P6	36	Male	Single	College Graduate	Self-employed	Visayas	Rented and paid by one's self	2	Urban Community	15,000 - 30,000

Table 2. *Emergent Themes*

1. **Former Duterte Supporters and the Reason Behind their Withdrawal of Support**
 - 1.1. A Former Supporter's Viewpoint on their Ideal Leader
 - 1.1.1. Participants' View of an Ideal President.
 - 1.1.2. Participants are looking forward for the Philippines to be the next Davao
 - 1.1.3. Participants View Duterte's Strongman Image
 - 1.2. A Former Supporter's Viewpoint during Duterte's Presidency
 - 1.2.1. Participants' False Hopes in Times of Despair
 - 1.2.2. Duterte's Management as Former Mayor of Davao City
 - 1.2.3. Duterte's Unmasked Image
 - 1.2.4. Getting Out of the Blind Support
 - 1.2.5. Non-Supporters as Narcos
 - 1.2.6. The Campaign Contrast
 - 1.2.7. Prevailing Principles and Beliefs
 - 1.2.8. Manners and Behaviors Unlikely to be a Leader
 - 1.2.9. Incompetent Government Officials
 - 1.2.10. Effects on Individuals During Duterte's Term
 - 1.2.11. Issues Transpired During Administration
 - 1.2.12. Populism Approach in the Philippine Context
 - 1.2.13. Sentiments over Withdrawal of Support

2. **Changes in Perceptions of Former Duterte Supporters**
 - 2.1. The Significance of Participants Selecting an Effective Leader
 - 2.2. Participants tolerated the status quo violence
 - 2.3. Participants Unconventional Support for Duterte
 - 2.4. Participants Realized the Importance of Patriotism over Political Identity
3. **Political Decisions of Former Duterte Supporters**
 - 3.1. The Past Political Decisions
 - 3.1.1. Participants' Unquestioning Enthusiasm of Support
 - 3.1.2. Participants' Unhealthy Information Diet around Social Media Sites
 - 3.1.3. The Cognitive Dissonance Chamber
 - 3.2. The Present Political Decisions
 - 3.2.1. The Present Philippine Political Situation
 - 3.2.2. Professionals as Fake News Victims
 - 3.2.3. The Challenge of Technology
 - 3.2.4. Radical yet Critical Judgments
 - 3.2.5. Bouncing Back by Destroying Denials and Distortions
 - 3.2.6. Comparative Political Viewpoint
 - 3.2.7. A Former Supporter's Perspective on Philippine Politics
 - 3.2.8. Risking Chances

1. Former Duterte Supporters and the Reason Behind their Withdrawal of Support

1.1 A Former Supporter's Viewpoint on their Ideal Leader

The first subordinate theme aims to explore the perspective of former supporters regarding their preferred presidential candidate.

1.1.1 Participants' View of an Ideal President.

The subtheme focuses on the qualities that the participants look for in their ideal president. They highlighted ideal traits as they believe these should be the criteria of a candidate when selecting a leader for the Philippines.

"First, political will, honesty, which is being transparent about whatever it is, and then of course the track record. I think that's one of the most important things, his track record, what he has done in recent years or past years in his political career. And then also, I'm looking for someone who has, who has the, ah, like the authority, who has the influence. When they speak, people really listen, you know, but not someone who is a flatterer. But someone who has the authority, when the person speaks, uhm, many people will listen to them." (P2)

The participants' potential leaders present traits based on their view of future leaders. In a study by Bolo and Murcia (2016), only a leader with a proven track record can be organized and exhibit a purposeful manner in any situation as they keep the commitment. Moreover, the participants like candidates with more leadership qualities than they do. Voters envision the ideal politician as having characteristics that are usually linked to leadership abilities (Aichholzer & Willmann, 2020).

1.1.2 Participants are looking forward to the Philippines to be the next Davao

Despite issues circulating about Davao, the participants still believe and hope the country can become like the city. According to Lague et al. (2016), the president's goal is to make the Philippines a larger version of Davao City, and he plans to do this by reducing crime and drug use. Furthermore, the participants expressed their views regarding Duterte's ordinance in Davao. According to Davao City Journal (2016), on the campaign journey, Duterte frequently emphasized Davao City as an example of the policies and measures he would implement throughout his six-year presidency.

"Davao is one of the best cities. So, um, personally, it's like, there's this feeling, like, I'm one of those who said, 'Wow, Davao is really beautiful.' Even though I haven't been there, but, um... I'm one of those who say, 'Let's make the Philippines another Davao.'" (P5)

1.2.3 Participants' views of Duterte's Strongman Image

Duterte's strongman/alpha male attitude resulted in fear of the public and his actions. The participants viewed Davao as a safe haven even though Duterte can mean his word and can directly put action to it. Before becoming president, the participants saw Duterte possessing a strong public image as Duterte served as mayor of Davao. To Paddock (2018), though Duterte was known for helping those in need, his war on drugs resulted in the deaths of numerous people.

"A safe haven, that's what Davao is. It's like, okay, ah, you do your business in Davao, those of you in the neighboring provinces, their offices, company offices, whatever is in Davao, they always say, well, according to what Duterte says, 'When you enter Davao, leave your weapons behind, I am the only mayor here.' So there's that presence of a strongman, that strongman attitude being demonstrated." (P3)

In conclusion, Duterte's former supporters have their views on what makes a great leader in the future, what makes a great country, and how each citizen perceives Duterte's threats that might be a reflection of his impulsive attitude. However, his statements and actions imply that no one is safe from his threats.

1.2 A Former Supporter's Viewpoint during Duterte's Presidency

This second subordinate theme is classified into subthemes that present the diverse viewpoints of the former supporters of Duterte during his presidency and the reasons they chose to withdraw their support from him.

1.2.1 Participants false hopes in times of despair

The past administration's failures and disappointments significantly made Duterte a live vision of a refreshing and hopeful beginning. The participants were hopeful for Duterte hoping that he could be a leader who implements things that no other Filipino Presidents have done in the past.

"So, his credentials, he's a lawyer, Duterte, so I said, he's good enough, I said that before, and knowing that prior to 2016, there were a lot of failures during the [name withheld] administration, uhm... that's the reason why I did not give a chance to [name withheld] and I know that [name withheld] is dying." (P1)

Having witnessed and experienced by the Filipinos the failures of the past administration, it became easier for Duterte to establish his image as a modern leader who showed himself his true colors. The lack of action and slow response to the millions of families affected by super typhoon Yolanda; the mishandling of the Mamasapano incident that led to the death of 44 Special Action Forces (SAF) commandos (Mirasol, 2021); as well as the failure to implement Daang Matuwid to all public officers (Chikiamco, 2015) — these are some of the remarkable failures that slammed the past administration prior to Duterte. On the other hand, Duterte's campaign slogan 'Change is coming' had indeed swayed a lot of Filipinos, making them feel that Duterte just unlocked the chance for change to finally happen (Salaverria, 2016).

1.2.2 Duterte's Management as Former Mayor of Davao City.

According to the participants living in Mindanao, people in Davao do not care how a rule or a program is being implemented as long as the results are good — even if it questions your morality.

"And one time, during the Kadayawan festival, there was a tourist, not from Davao, who came and sort of... bragged [by smoking], and he was forced to eat [referring to the tourist being forced to swallow the cigarette butt], you have so many cases like that, you know? He's really that brutal, and people love it so much." (P2)

Discipline must be instilled in whatever means it takes, and under the former mayor's management. In a news article by Gonzales (2015), a Davao tourist during the Kadayawan Festival who breached the city's anti-smoking ordinance was forced to swallow a cigarette butt after being threatened by Mayor Rodrigo Duterte himself by making the tourist choose among being shot, imprisoned, or swallowing the cigarette butt.

1.2.3 Duterte's Unmasked Image

Despite the unthinkable knowledge regarding Duterte, participants remained hopeful that Duterte would be the one to bring the change that every Filipino has been yearning for in the country.

"He gave me a warning because, you know... I shouldn't get involved because her husband is a member of the DDS, the DDS, the Davao Death Squad. That's true, Ma'am, there really is a hitman under Duterte in Davao. That's why Davao is peaceful because the people there... the drug addicts, the criminals, they fear Duterte. Because he's the king." (P6)

The participants took the risk to support Duterte even though they know the issues of the Davao Death Squad. In 2017, a retired Davao police officer named Arturo Lascanas claimed that the Davao Death Squad was real and that he was one among those who carried out covert executions of drug dealers and criminals under Duterte's command. (Lema & Morales, 2017).

"As a human rights advocate myself, it was like, 'Okay, I will take the risk,' to, sort of, to bet on him, on him, ah, for the common good. That was my belief at that time, that for the common good, for the betterment of Mindanao, for the betterment of the Philippines, because we wanted a radical change." (P2)

The participants' desperation for the betterment of the country turned their eyes blind to the immoral acts they knew about Duterte. In an interview with Gikan sa Masa Para sa Masa, Duterte admitted his connection to the Davao Death Squad. No hints of regrets were seen from him about his actions. Instead, he even challenged to file a case against him in court and warned the public that he would kill a hundred thousand criminals if elected as president (ABS-CBN News, 2015).

1.2.4 Getting out of the Blind Support.

The participants deliberately dismissed the issues like EJK and Human Rights Violations because they believed that those were usual problems concerning drugs. Living and growing up in Davao makes a person numbed in human rights issues like this. People in Davao turn a blind eye because they think Davao is becoming a safe city.

"The first 1 or 2 years probably, or 3 years, I think I was satisfied with what he did, of course, there are issues of human rights, ah, extrajudicial killings. Before he started his term, there were really a lot of killings, but at that time, as a hopeful supporter, I just closed my eyes because drugs were really a problem, drugs are a problem everywhere." (P2)

As former supporters, the participants considered what they had previously done for Duterte. They got out of the support and became aware of social issues concerning the public.

1.2.5 Non-Supporters as Narcos.

Some of the supporters of Duterte viewed non-supporters of him as someone who is a criminal or has illegal motives, particularly on drugs. Since their main campaign of Duterte involves eradicating drug-related problems for 3-6 months, it has become his edge to gain popularity. However, many of his supporters have cohesively thought that if someone does not support him, they are being assumed as a drug addict or criminal.

"I'm thinking why he doesn't like Duterte, maybe he's a drug addict or something like that. Maybe he's a drug addict, that's why he doesn't like him because Duterte is known to be against those, you know, terrorists, drugs and all. So I thought that anyone who is against Duterte might be a drug addict or involved in illegal business." (P6)

1.2.6 The Campaign Contrast.

The participants stopped their support of Duterte mainly because of unfulfilled promises to the nation. They expected that crimes and corruption would be eradicated, which is impossible.

"One of his promises was to end, within three to six months, he will end the drug problem in the Philippines, and also corruption, but it seems like he hasn't, it seems like that promise hasn't been fulfilled... his promise." (P4)

During the opening of the Cebu-Cordova Link Expressway, Duterte said that he was mistaken to believe that he could eliminate the illicit drug trade in the nation in three to six months (CNN Philippines, 2022). Extrajudicial killings also are one of the reasons why participants stopped supporting Duterte, but still tried to justify it first, calling it collateral damage.

1.2.7 Prevailing Principles and Beliefs.

One participant's personal experience at Quiboloy's church made him doubtful of Duterte's true motives in leading the country. Quiboloy's way of treating his members is unreasonable and questionable, which makes him question why Duterte has an alliance with the pastor. Last 2021, Quiboloy, the leader of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, was charged with sex trafficking (NBC News, 2021).

"Quiboloy claims to be Jesus. He has claimed to be Jesus Christ in modern times. He declared himself as the savior, and that was also a significant factor in my awakening. If Duterte were a responsible leader, he should have long ago put a stop to Quiboloy or given him advice that his claims were wrong." (P6)

Another issue that transpired was Fr. Mark Ventura, a priest environmental activist killed during Duterte's presidency due to him, exposing the ongoing black sand mining. However, Duterte told the public that the priest had a series of illicit affairs and that one of those people would be behind the killing (UCA News, 2018).

"For me, the environmental issue here is a political issue, so defenders of the environment are getting killed because of protecting or voicing out their concerns. So, there's this priest here who defended his... his uh, let's say, his jurisdiction." (P3)

The participants cannot fathom how Duterte was able to build linkages and make up stories of individuals that were killed inhumanely. It was then made a spark that they should withdraw their support to him. His governance and morals have become even more questionable, which helps the ex-DDS to uphold their morals and principles.

1.2.8 Manners and Behaviors Unlikely to be a Leader.

The participants expressed more dismay with Duterte's actions containing unprofessional conduct in the public, incapacities, and insufficiencies as a leader. They vented out extreme feelings of disgust toward the unprofessional conduct of Duterte that made him look like not a president. Among those sentiments were the speeches of Duterte, which often included "kill" remarks. Concerning that, amid the surge of COVID-19, Luzon has been put under strict lockdown to keep the spread of the virus further. However, due to a lack of relief supplies, people went out to the streets to protest. Later that night, Duterte warned the public: *"Defy the lockdown orders again, and the police will shoot you dead"* (Capatides, 2020).

"I can't remember if it was a SONA or just a random speech, but... I was extremely disgusted because he was swearing and, I guess, the majority of what he was saying didn't make sense. It wasn't about the topic, it was like he was just cursing, and in other speeches, he always says 'kill this' and 'kill that,' uhm... he also made rape jokes, numerous highly inappropriate comments. So, he didn't seem like a president to me, he seemed more like a... disgusting person, like someone intoxicated." (P5)

Also, due to the dissatisfaction with Duterte's lack of immediate COVID response, the participants withdrew their support. In an article, two experts in political science and development studies said that the Duterte administration "underperformed" in the COVID-19 pandemic response, which hinders the country from recovery (Mercado, 2021).

1.2.9 Incompetent Government Officials.

The participants noticed that Duterte had been too centered on appointing his peers rather than experts that should be leading the government agencies and departments. On the other hand, Duterte said that he was only paying back the debt of gratitude he had to the people from Davao by appointing them to various positions (Galvez, 2021).

"You know, those are his... his colleagues, his fraternity brothers from Davao. Almost all of them from Davao, even if they're not really competent or lacking in capability, he appoints them." (P6)

Moreover, Duterte's declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao was taken advantage of to forego their intention to steal the lands of IPs for their own sake.

"If you remember, he [Duterte] declared Martial Law, that lasted a long time. Martial law was used to mobilize private armies, and then the lands of the Indigenous Peoples were taken by... these wealthy individuals for mining... that's what happened. They engaged in mining, so they displaced the Indigenous People, many IP leaders were killed and portrayed as members of the NPA (New People's Army). But the truth is, no, I know it's not true because... I even participated in many consultations with these IP leaders." (P2)

As someone living in Mindanao and working at an NGO, one participant expressed his prior knowledge about the events happening with the Maguindanao Martial Law. In contrast to the participant's narratives, an article by the Philippine News Agency featured Datu Ramon Bayaan's DWDD Radio interview. He said that the reports asserting that IPs are being mistreated due to martial law are entirely false. The sources of this information are from Luzon, not Mindanao (Nepomuceno, 2019).

1.2.10 Effects on Individuals During Duterte's Term.

The participants did not personally experience unemployment during the administration. In contrast, others are greatly affected, possibly because he grew up in a middle-class family or was privileged.

"I have friends who lost their jobs because of, you know, how they handled COVID and the overall confidence our foreign investors have. Especially because our companies are mostly foreign-owned." (P5)

Participants also experienced being red-tagged, cases like that increased rapidly during Duterte's presidency. Ever since Duterte took office in 2016, red tagging has worsened.

"Do you know how many times I've been red-tagged because of, you know, because of the comments I made criticizing? 'You're probably an NPA (New People's Army), right?' Those kinds of things. I said, thankfully I withdrew my support [to Duterte]." (P1)

Overall, the direct and indirect experiences of the respondents led to the withdrawal of their support for Duterte.

1.2.11 Issues Transpired During Administration.

With all the issues that arose when Duterte took over the presidency, his lack of action regarding the dispute around the West Philippine Sea was the participants' final straw to stop supporting Duterte. Aside from that, the dismay intensified after learning that he was defending China instead.

"The first issue that I really criticize him ah openly in social media, and even in a lot of my colleagues and a lot of my friends who knew so much that I really am an avid supporter of Duterte, was the West Philippine Sea issue." (P2)

It was known to the public that the previous President prior to Duterte had brought the country's arbitrary victory against China's sweeping maritime claims. However, in 2018 when tensions had been high between the two countries as Chinese military vessels kept swarming the disputed waters, the President's office denied that such a thing was happening (Abenis-Macahilo, 2018). Meanwhile, in the 2019 Chinese hit-and-run incident, a Filipino fishing boat captain demanded accountability from the Chinese captain and a promise that the same incident would not happen again through the help of President Duterte. Nevertheless, to their dismay, Duterte left them a remark that what transpired was a mere maritime incident (ABS-CBN News, 2019).

1.2.12 Populism Approach in the Philippine Context.

The participants expressed a political approach that satisfies the public and the common people. If there is no awareness of what ignited populism in recent years, we risk repeating the same cycle. According to Urbinati (2019), even if populism is more prominent and

significant in today's politics than ever, political theory struggles to make sense of it. Populism appears inside the realm of opinion and contradicts all democratic principles.

"...it's like there's a similarity, a level of... like there's an assimilation, a level of consciousness or awareness, helping others. You know? So, that's what you can see in [name withheld]... is just that... why did he/she lose? Because that's not familiar and popular among the people." (P3)

1.2.13 Sentiments of the Participants over their withdrawal of support.

The participants felt the feeling of remorse for supporting Duterte. They have various sentiments on their past political choices. They are, in fact, very regretful and hurt by how they had become one of the ways the Duterte administration has executed their inhumane plans successfully.

"It's so very hurting that I've been an enabler. It's really a very regretful that... I've been part of this." (P2)

"For a 40-year-old, [chuckles] I was 40 years old at that time [2016], it's still the same, it's like... you're still broken-hearted that there's still no change in the Philippines." (P3)

The participants hold deep regret regarding their political choices. They cannot even realize how they became an enabler of the Duterte administration. Additionally, they realized that what they initially thought of who Duterte was, was not true. They regretted their decision to convince other people to support Duterte. The #ChangeIsComing is not the change that they expected it to be.

2. Changes in Perceptions of former Duterte supporters

This section focused on the new perspectives and changes from the political views of Duterte's former supporters towards him.

2.1 The Significance of Participants Selecting an Effective Leader

This focuses on the participants' realizations of the importance of being sharp in choosing and deciding who to be a leader.

"Uhm that seems to push me more as if the people needs to be more informed, even for me it seems like before because that was my only basis. Like what I said before, just a checklist of experience, integrity... things should he/she have. But there are many things to consider like what did he really do? What is the impact of what he did? Let's say he made a law, what is the impact of that law? Who benefits? who didn't benefit? And what are those problems?" (P5)

De Lima (2021) stated that we require a leader who can inspire action and mobilize our people's vast talents and intelligence. One who would prudently manage public funds and would not, as a default solution, tax the people, raise membership fees, and turn to lending institutions, resulting in a government with more debts than wealth.

"Uhm... he was an effective communicator, because, ah... he was able to level with the protesters, and he had leadership presence back then, and that's his experience, that's it, he's the Mayor of Davao, so that's it." (P5)

The participant said that Duterte is an effective communicator and has experience being a leader, which is why he thinks Duterte would fit as a President and voted for him in the last 2016 elections. However, the opposite of a leader's qualifications mentioned earlier is how he was described in an article by Venkatachalam (2016). Philippine's (former) President Rodrigo Duterte's attitude is symbolic of a culture of corruption, dictatorship, and violence that has dominated the country since it gained its independence from the colonizers.

"But we can't deny it, we really need a leader who can change. That's really the dream." (P3)

In addition, another participant also stated that people could not deny that they need a leader who will give a glimpse of change and will surely make a good change.

2.2 Participants Tolerated the Status Quo Violence.

Extra-judicial killings are one of the most talked about during Duterte's presidency. Since his election in June 2016, an average of 13 people had been killed without due process every day. Moreover, his supporters celebrated these killings, which undermined the Philippines' traditional democratic culture by tolerating impunity (Syjuco, 2016).

"Then fast-forward, those, there are what, there are calls here, ah, instance when you talk to a taxi driver, "Hey, how's the place?" "Hey, linaw sir, linaw", linaw means peaceful, but I said, "Oh, how are EJKs?" "Ah, it's really part of that" so, you know, you idolize the person, because something has been done, something is really being done in, the bigger picture, Davao is being enlightened." (P3)

"...but there is really something, there are really extrajudicial things that will happen right? So, sometimes I said, "what if it's mistaken?" "that's the problem sir" that's what's called collateral damage, that's it." (P3)

"I became more sympa[thetic] because I really didn't care if people were killing each other like left and right, like that. I said "Ah, maybe that's just what I said, it's just collateral damage." (P1)

It was also added that those killed in extrajudicial killings were just collateral damage. However, results of surveys conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) tell that 7 out of 10 Filipinos were still satisfied with the war on drugs implemented by the Duterte administration despite the back-to-back apprehensions (Talabong, 2017).

The research participant has been one of those Filipinos who anticipated the cessation of the rampant illegal drug trade in the Philippines through the war on drugs. This made him tolerate the status quo of violence. He was also concerned about becoming a victim of EJK, yet still chose to condone and rationalize Duterte's policies.

"Because they said, that's how he died, but it was out of fear, it was out of fear. It's like the, what [name withheld] previously flagged as a new society is a society of yours that lines up properly, crosses the right crossing, things like that on is because out of fear, it is not because you respect the law, it is not because you respect the authority." (P3)

"Before he started his term, there are a lot of killings, but at that time it was like, like a hopeful supporter, I just shut up because drugs are really a problem, drugs are really a problem everywhere, and in Davao City because, it's like those, during those years, I don't feel like that because the drugs, because when we know, when someone sells drugs, they're really dead. In Davao, you really will certainly be killed if you're a pusher, like that, it's hard for a druggist to make a living in Davao, that's the culture there." (P2)

Additionally, Curato (2016) emphasized that a piece of Duterte's appeal is based on "penal populism," which is built on two opposing political arguments: the governance of fears and the governance of faith.

"What I said was a 360 turn, during my presidency, this will happen, I will push for federalism', that was Duterte's very promise, I abandoned all my principles in life. All of EJK, that's not there, to the point that I rationalized him." (P3)

One of the participants added that all his beliefs and ideologies in life were turned down and became forgotten, and he decided to rationalize the extrajudicial killings because of Duterte's promise that he would go with federalism which the participant always wanted.

2.3 Participants unconventional support for Duterte

This focuses on how the participants believed and supported Duterte regardless of how they saw his violence and wrongdoings:

"...maybe there was a part in my youth that I believed in the armed struggle. But, I know, as it develops, it fades, it fades terribly. Uhm, it will also become a traditional politics concept, so to speak, if you would describe that in the Philippine context, ah it becomes money making machinery. It becomes, that ideology that'll fade." (P3)

According to the participant, he decided to support Duterte because he believed that Duterte would soon become an ordinary or classic political identity, disregarding his knowledge about the wrongdoings of Duterte.

"...violence has no place in building a just and humane society, that's it. So, during 2016 everything that I believed about him, everything turned upside down, personally, everything turned upside down." (P3)

According to Garcia (2018), people were forced to flee their homes in the Philippines, schools for children were blown up, and lives and families were killed. People's fundamental rights were violated. Right now, our country's peace is under threat. Sustainable peace requires a collaborative effort and a shared responsibility, whether you are a civil society, administration, or global community member. Everyone has a significant role to play because long-term peace benefits everybody.

"So those of you I'm talking to, I know you have a strong stomach here, but can you tolerate Duterte? Why? There are many things, there are many names here, ah, well he's an executioner, that's what I said, he's an executioner." (P3)

He managed to ask the people in Tondo if they could handle Duterte. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte compared his bloodshed pro-government campaign to Hitler, announcing he would be "delighted to murder" 3 million drug abusers (CBS News, 2016).

"All revolutions are bloody, and revolution is like giving birth, to give birth to something new, a new offspring." (P3)

"What just happened, it's like, your lens changed. You just changed your lens, you just put on Duterte's lens ... that's it " (P3)

Furthermore, he added that it seems that he is wearing a different lens, and he found that he is already wearing Duterte's lenses.

2.4 Participants realized the importance of Patriotism over Political Identity

This focuses on how the participants prioritize their country before idolizing and supporting the political identity.

"I'm an activist, I'm patriotic, I'm pro-Philippines, I'm not a pro-politician, but then I supported Duterte, I became a fanatic." (P3)

The participant insisted that he was once a supporter of Duterte; however, he still believed and saw himself as an activist and someone who prioritized his country over a political identity.

"It seems that my patriotism has not changed for me, your love for the country has not changed, it's just felt... it's like... it's like at some point you were disillusioned that you thought those would be achieved under Duterte's presidency but you were fooled. If you are cheated, you will be more angry, won't you?" (P3)

The patriotism of an ex-DDS did not fade; the love for his country was still there but somehow lost in unknown aspects. However, he stated that it seems that after he was disillusioned by Duterte's promises, that made him say that "If you were tricked, you would get mad," in which he somehow shows disappointment in Duterte. Heydarian (2020) defined various types of followers, one of which is true patriots, using Defense

Secretary Delfin Lorenzana as an example. Duterte is a welcome change for them, even if he is no longer the type of president, they expected him to be.

"So, when he ran they have their support to other candidates. I mean, my group is actually my mountaineering group but we are split because they're supporting [name withheld]." (P3)

It was added that when they knew someone that surpassed their perception in terms of leadership qualities, they went on different paths and ways of supporting that individual who was running for the Philippine presidency.

"You just choose who you talk to, my circle used to be in human rights [inaudible]. I don't approach them because I'm like a stranger to them. You're not included because you're supporting a mass murderer." (P5)

The participant stated that the moment he supported Duterte, he decided to choose the people he will talk to since his circle of friends are against his current decision and that he feel that he was left out since he is supporting someone who's a murderer and someone who is against their beliefs and ideologies.

3. Political Decisions of Former Duterte Supporters

This section is divided into two parts—past political decisions and present political decisions. It aims to demonstrate how former Duterte supporters' prior political decisions influence their views in the present.

3.1 The Past Political Decisions

3.1.1 Participants' unquestioning enthusiasm of support to Duterte

The participants who have supported Duterte have reached the point where they tolerate his wrongdoings. When they ignore arguments, facts, or consequences that contradict their responses, they engage in irrational behavior (Perkinson, 2002).

"We were even more proud that he cursed those people who criticizes him. The ones that always notices his mistake." (P6)

Duterte was known for being a foul-mouthed president. Duterte's speeches were frequently filled with insults and curses directed at various people, including UN officials, human rights organizations, government officials who belong to the opposition, and journalists who criticize him (Ranada, 2016).

Corresponding to the participant's words, the public applauds and laughs during those speeches (Tomacruz, 2018). Meanwhile, in 2019, Duterte defended his cursing, saying it was not a crime. Rationalizing his behavior, he even told that the Supreme Court ruled the phrase 'p*t*ng *n* m*' as not slanderous and was his way of expressing his anger (Corrales, 2019).

Moreover, the participants chose to turn a blind eye despite knowing the injustices as long as they see results that favor them. According to Jost (2018), people display system-justifying inclinations to protect and legitimize current political systems, even if it means sacrificing individual and/or group self-interest.

"So it's like you turned blind. I turned a blind eye to all the things that Duterte did in Davao. The human rights violations, whatever else it is, ah, and then I tried to rationalize and defend it." (P3)

In addition, the participants were hopeful for the first few years of Duterte's presidency, which they described as birth pains. They tried justifying it by stating that it was too early to criticize him.

3.1.2 Participants' unhealthy information diet around social media sites

The participants voiced their concern about the masses not having the luxury of time to fact-check all given information or to even have a healthy exchange of ideas since they prioritize looking for means to provide for their everyday needs.

"Right now, with the hardships of life today, people are busy to find, means to live through working. They don't seem to have time to analyze and watch the news right?" (P6)

They are the most vulnerable to believing and being deceived. However, critical thinkers are the ones who are more dangerous because they have the power to manipulate and control such information.

Moreover, the participants expressed that they have been victims of rampant fake news on social media. People with cognitive biases are more likely to be misled and manipulating emotional biases to propagate false news articles influences political opinions (Ohio University, 2019).

"That's why no matter what you say to them, whether you explain to them the truth, it seems like it doesn't exist anymore. Is it because of fake news? There is a lot of fake news today on social media. [P6]

There has been a divide between truth-tellers and fake news peddlers. However, many believe more in the ones who disseminate disinformation than those who help mitigate fake news.

"That's because, with the amount of fake news on social media today, they look at people who are really telling the truth differently." (P6)

Facebook has emerged as one of the most effective and inexpensive propaganda tools ever to be utilized by authoritarian populists (Robles, 2021). It helps feed conspiracy theories and spread fake news, usually through troll farms.

Because the masses are not a thinking crowd, they are highly susceptible and vulnerable. In all the revolutions, why are the masses always the victim of manipulation? Because they can easily be deceived by what you instill in them. Then the thinking crowd poses a greater threat. If the public is a critical mass, critical thinkers hold the most power. We possess the ability to manipulate information that the masses tend to believe.

They are victims of Duterte's propaganda, and if one adopts it, it becomes hard to distinguish between genuine truth and illusion. According to one participant, propaganda was made to tarnish the prior administration's image before Duterte so that the public would think highly of him as a potential president.

3.1.3 The Cognitive Dissonance Chamber.

The participants experience dissonance whenever they defend and justify Duterte's actions. When people are presented with evidence that contradicts their firmly held ideas, they seldom display conceptual change immediately. (Spillane et al., 2016) Although the participant had a broader view of what was happening, he admitted that he had been disillusioned.

"The first quarter of 2018, all of that, I defended Duterte, I was being laughed at in my place. I defended him to the fullest, saying that all the issues thrown at him is just a fabrication. But then, I read the meaning of dissonance, it looks like that. From 2016 to part of 2018, it's like I'm looking for something to justify, even if you know it's worthless, justify it anyway." (P3)

The participants have become secluded in the echo chamber and were made to believe lies over the truth. Another participant viewed himself as objective but was still willing to argue and defend Duterte against his acquaintances.

"I am not really a person who, who's really a fanatic, I'm an objective person, to be honest. I am objective, but of course, if I would really support you, I will debate, I will argue, and in fact, I debated for Duterte. I argue with a lot of people, friends, family members, etcetera. So even though I know my colleagues in the development work, have the PhD's and all the years of experience, I, I laid down facts and everything." (P2)

In support of the latter participant's initial experience, a collaborative study from Harvard and Stanford universities uncovered that despite having diverse and complex policy preferences, voters adjust those preferences to match up with the framework of their preferred political figure (Acharya et al., 2015).

In an article by Jeffcoat (2022), he quoted a statement by Joel Cooper, a professor of psychology at Princeton University and a cognitive dissonance expert: "When events make us experience existential threats that are in contradiction to expectations of happiness and well-being, we are driven to make changes in order to restore consistency to our world.". This is where the latter participant finally decided to withdraw his support from Duterte.

3.2 The Present Political Decisions

The following subordinates revolved around when the research participants were asked about the insights of their current political decisions now that they have withdrawn their support to Rodrigo Duterte.

3.2.1 The Present Philippine Political Situation.

Participants shared personal and general disappointment sentiments when asked what they think the current political situation in the Philippines is. The Duterte mechanisms to spread misinformation, disinformation, and historical distortions were just the beginning of an almost irreversible wrath. The illusion of mass support was a tactic that Duterte appeared to favor. The social media army he created has successfully made him gain a lot of supporters (Williams, 2017).

"Honestly, that's why I also resigned as a teacher Ma'am, because of that reason, is it like you risked history. It is sad. Why do people believe what people said to you about [name withheld]? Everything has changed, what happened Ma'am is disappointing, especially when [name withheld] won." (P6)

On the other hand, it is noticeable that although Filipinos have had numerous unfortunate circumstances, many of them have not even learned their lessons.

"It's like backward instead of growing. I would describe it as...we are shrinking when it comes to politics. We are becoming immature...uh people look at politicians as superheroes rather than leaders, they look up at politicians as authoritarians. They tend to believe what they say is true or correct rather than...becoming or making them accountable." (P2)

Additionally, the participants expressed their frustration about how all of this happened. Most people vote for a leader with a populist approach that attracts most of the masses. "Penal Populism" describes Duterte's tactics wherein it involves the politics of hope and politics of fear (Curato, 2016). The participants' sentiments were aligned with the study of Antazo and Felipe (2020); people are tired of the status quo resulting in tolerating inhumane tactics and instilling public fear, just like what Duterte is doing. Most people believe that it is all for their good despite the collateral damages:

"People who are popular and famous get more votes than people who have principles, are capable, and have...and really have the qualities to be a leader." (P2)

The continuous injustices, corruption, and many unfortunate circumstances that the Filipino people are experiencing led them to believe how such a political figure with a populist and strongman stance like Duterte should lead the country. Despite the numerous struggles during Duterte's term, the majority still resulted in almost the same political figure.

3.2.2 Professionals as Fake News Victims.

Members of the academe and those who had been intensively educated were no exception in receiving false information. The almost too-good-to-be-true news serves as bait for these professionals to believe in even though they should objectively screen information for it to be factual enough:

"My friend is a professional and a history teacher. I asked her... 'why did you choose [name withheld]? aren't you a history teacher, don't you read history?' Her only answer to me, Ma'am, is "because this is what I heard." Was it really that easy to be carried away by fake news? Maybe people are not really used to on YouTube. Because what they've seen on YouTube vloggers, they easily think that it's true." (P6)

Supporting the claim of the participants, according to an article by Devlin (2022), it is an open secret how the Duterte mechanism of hiring professionals to spread fake news is evident. These educated people are paid to work for the disinformation systems of politicians

"Even professors, even if we know that they are really professors... they are fake news peddlers. They even have PhDs. So, sometimes, I tend to double check their credibilities." (P2)

The participants were doubtful and questioned the people in the academe and professionals that hold such degrees and positions. In a synthesis produced by the Fondation Descartes (2020), articles from various studies present how the human brain functions when perceiving false information. Herewith, prior and repeated exposure to fake news can increase its perceived accuracy (Pennycook et al., 2018); some are just lazy in searching for the truth and might not be biased (Pennycook & Rand, 2019); susceptibility to false information can be linked to delusion, religious principles and poor analytical thinking (Bronstein et al., 2019).

The studies above can explain why even professionals can be susceptible to fake news. Further, since people have been more active users of social media and disinformation and misinformation have been spread on different platforms today, it is becoming more challenging to identify which is true and which is false among the information people consume.

3.2.3 The Challenge of Technology.

Since the rise of social media use in 2016, many Filipinos have used different platforms to read and absorb the news. However, as time went by, this seemed like a ticking time bomb that was used as a weapon to mind-condition people into supporting political figures.

"It's like it's really proliferating and it's really... a virus. It's eating up the society right now. It's really dangerous and that's the problem, I said ...[inaudible]. What the heck... those things that are said in the news and what the politicians say, can that still be trusted? Is that believable? Is that true or what? What are you up to, you're suspicious. Or you are doubting whether it is true or not?" (P2)

Although some will argue that fake news is information literacy instead of a technological problem (Leetraru, 2019), the modern digital age that has been through affects how Filipinos absorb information. According to one of the study participants, digital platforms such as TikTok are not reliable sources of information.

"I said that people do more research on TikTok than reading a book. [Inaudible] It's really what we've become in digital." (P2)

Both the young and the old have a role to play in this societal problem. If not addressed, the political situation might worsen in a way that the information system might be corrupted by individuals who manipulate it for their personal gains.

3.2.4 Radical yet Critical Judgments.

After the withdrawal of support of the ex-DDS, some of them pledged to advocate for spreading factual information and also using social media as a tool, just like the Duterte mechanism does. According to one participant:

"Actually, for me it's not good to fight with them just to explain it, to tell them that you are right. Maybe because I also came from their situation. You will understand because they don't really know what's happening in the bigger picture, Ma'am. Maybe it's because they really just want to prove what is there really, will there be any results even though your leader are obviously very authoritarian, obviously dictatorial. Maybe Ma'am, it's just a process, Ma'am, explain to them slowly, show them what your realities are. By now, we're already feeling the effects of mismanagement in previous administrations and especially during Duterte administration." (P6)

They understand why other DDS remain as supporters of Duterte because they have been personally gone in that situation. Participants know that it is not clear their fault why they chose to believe and be hopeful of Duterte's leadership. As stated earlier, the politics of hopes and fears play as the reason why some of them remain in supporting him. They emphasized how ex-DDS should educationally discuss what is happening.

3.2.5 Bouncing Back by Destroying Denials and Distortions.

As someone who has been part of the Duterte movement, even though they had seen themselves have this unwavering support for him. After turning back, they decided to live their lives thinking critically and radically before believing in such information. In a way, they have this mission to reach out to people and wake their consciousness to destroy deception and lies:

"I said, I also really need to get involved with other people to... to reach out to others as well. To define it, our society right now is living in a life of deception and lies" (P2)

Additionally, they will be more vocal as a critique against Duterte's actions to compensate for what he has done before as a DDS:

*"This is the realization and then I see it to myself that from now on, like the noise that I did to support him during his campaign, I'll be now a vocal critic. I promised myself that well, I'll do it and I'll get back. I have committed a sin, "I will take back p*t*ng*n* I will take back" I am campaigning against him."* (P3)

These ex-DDS are now awakened and become advocates who support for good governance. They have become unshakable and rethought their political stance by getting rid of their consumed propaganda (Antonio, 2021).

The advocacy that the participants intend has already been visible during the last 2022 electoral campaign in which they declared they had also participated. This request awakened the Filipinos to break the status quo and to put effort into stopping the spread of fake news.

3.2.6 Comparative Political Viewpoint.

It was a life-changing decision for the ex-DDS to withdraw their support. They were one of those people who thought that their vote never really mattered. However, seeing how devastated the country was during and after the Duterte administration, their principles have changed and now become more politically engaged:

"My past belief is because I'm one of those people who [thinks] my vote can't do anything. You can see in the past that there are people who thought that their vote wouldn't matter. Even though I was a first-time voter because I was last [inaudible] during the Duterte election, I'm still one of those people for whomever is okay with [chuckles]. That kind of mindset. But now, I guess more people have been more engaged. Many registered, many saw what is the value of their vote but the problem is still there - what is your basis for the vote, who are you voting for. For me, the biggest difference is that, what does your vote mean. It used to be that your vote didn't matter, now there is... you can vote... what are you supposed to vote for, that's it." (P5)

Philippine historical accounts serve as the basis for how Filipino ancestors fought against the colonizers. One of the participants emphasized how Filipinos did not even learn from all the mishaps and kept electing officials whom they thought highly of:

"I'm disappointed that we fought against the Spaniards, the Americans, the Japanese before. But where is that? Won't we be enslaved again by our fellow Filipinos this time? Have we not learned? [laughs] Haven't we learned that when are we going to stop that? When are the Filipino people going to stop that? Looking at the... Government officials as high people, right... we should treat them actually not as people that are unreachable, they should be people that we can interact with or really be hands-on with us." (P1)

3.2.7 A Former Supporter's Perspective on Philippine Politics.

Now, more than ever since the new administration started, Philippine politics is shifting.

"Our politics is really uh...it's really deteriorating. But it's hopeful, I think, we're hopeful that unless there are people like you, the young generation, who still have the right beliefs. As much as possible, I said, as long as I can and I'm still here in the Philippines, as long as I can provide such wisdom to influence them, to think right, according to the law - do it. Maybe that's the most effort individually. If there is a movement maybe, perhaps we can join, but uh, as of now, if you join movements, you might even get killed." (P2)

Although the threat remains as Duterte's "kamay na bakal" approach and vigilante killings are known, it will not stop the movement to pursue the good of the country. Nevertheless, although the people's campaign happened in this 2022 election, it did not seem impactful enough to convert the majority of the masses to advocate for good governance against the other formidable force of the government (Contreras, 2022). According to one of the study's participants:

"We all know. I always say to those... To those who are like-minded, the result of this election, this [2022 election], it is the defining moment of what it really is... what kind of people are we, we as the... as the nation. Our consciousness as Filipinos, this is the result today. Now, what I'm trying to say, uh... Did the people's campaign fail? Maybe. Because he/she didn't win. The result of the election is also your basis." (P3)

It seemed like what happened in the last 2022 election mirrors what kind of Political system the Philippines has.

3.2.8 Risking Chances.

Now that the 2022 elections have passed, there is no other way but to take risks and believe in the governance that the Philippines is heading to. But it is not enough reason to support blindly, as one of the participants stated:

"Although you still have to take risks... you really have to take risks. You have to trust but you also have to prove kind of leadership has no positive outcome. If you still believe in that, you have to be excommunicated, you have to be condemned." (P3)

The disappointments from the previous government became the major factor in how participants saw Duterte as a living embodiment of a promising new beginning in the country. They looked forward to the change this strongman would bring when they initially supported him, anticipating that the Philippines would be the next Davao. However, unfortunately, these participants witnessed how Duterte revealed his unmasked image through the issues that have transpired during his administration over the past years. The participants then learned and realized the results of their decision as time went by under Duterte's presidency. They were able to withdraw from the cognitive dissonance chamber because of their principles and beliefs. Furthermore, they realized that patriotism should be the utmost priority of every Filipino over placing unwavering support for a political identity. To make up for their wrong choices, they pledged to be more critical in choosing a leader to support and to be advocates who would counter the lies and only support the truth. The essence of the experience is the critical thinking of the former supporters which allowed them to break their cognitive dissonance and make smarter decisions.

Conclusions

Critical thinking is the essence of the experience of the phenomenon, which allowed the former supporters to get rid of their cognitive dissonance and make more intelligent decisions. The existing diversities in their demographic characteristics limited the study in establishing homogeneity. Addressing the political, social, and psychological roots of increasing uncritical support for a political figure to help people be equipped to deal with it served as the study's implication.

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