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# Everyday Voices in Marginal Places: Political Anxiety, Resistance, and Mass Support under Duterte's Martial Law

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# *Everyday Voices in Marginal Places: Political Anxiety, Resistance, and Mass Support under Duterte's Martial Law*

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*Eliseo F. Huesca Jr.  
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## **Abstract:**

This paper examines ordinary people's voices by foregrounding their sentiments and perspectives on Duterte's imposition of martial law following the Marawi siege in May 2017. The paper purposively privileges the voices of everyday citizens, which are often overlooked, to generate alternative viewpoints to the elite-driven narratives dominating political discourses and counter-discourses. Drawing on 4-month extensive fieldwork in south-central Mindanao, we surface how martial law has caused political anxiety, resistance, and widespread support despite its tentativeness and apparent perplexities. We argue that the prevailing narratives of those in the peripheries of Mindanao directly affected by martial law are sharply in contrast to the chilling and attention-grabbing headlines. While the political atmosphere initially turned precarious and tumultuous, the apparent military rule in fragile areas of Mindanao has actually gained traction and widespread support. The article concludes that the populist appeal of Duterte's version of the military rule is synoptic of the multiple and pervasive sources of insecurity in large part of Mindanao. Additionally, the public enticement of the current martial law is symptomatic of swelling frustrations on the shortcomings of state's apparatuses working within "democratic terms" in addressing personal and communal insecurities.

**Keywords:** *Duterte, Mindanao, martial law, everyday politics, everyday voices*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

When the Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte placed the entire Mindanao under Martial Law following the assault of ISIS-leaning local armed groups in Marawi City, the political atmosphere in the region immediately turned tense and tumultuous. Photos and video footages on the situations within and outside Marawi's main battle grounds uploaded through social media accounts were unsettling. But despite the chilling headlines and media-hyped renderings on the Marawi incident, people in most parts of Mindanao were generally collected. Political reactions in the next several days were puzzling: the responses of those outside Mindanao – particularly the 'informed' segment of the country's population – contrasted sharply with the general reactions of those on the ground directly affected by the looming authoritarian rule.

This apparent disconnect between the more privileged classes and the ordinary citizens in Mindanao prompted us to inquire how the latter interpret the unfolding political issue, and in this case, the highly contentious Martial Law (ML) as a government tool to restore and ensure national security. Moreover, this disconnect also begs the question of how everyday marginal voices have engaged in a political world where politicians, bureaucrats, technocrats, activists, and academics dominate media interviews on how to better solve particular problems. These inquiries relate to the apparent tensions privileging the voices of conventional opinion-makers over those of ordinary citizens within the course of defining political or public policy choices.

There has been abundant literature on the roles of ordinary people - or the 'everyday actors' – in political dynamics (see Scott 1985; Kerkvliet 1990, 2009; Boyte 2004; Yates 2015). Scholars'

interests have grown from dissatisfactions with conventional approaches to understanding politics which disproportionately favor traditional actors – state officials, activists, and other prominent figures – over ordinary people. The voices of the larger fraction of the society are thus effectively excluded. The exclusion of common people in understanding political dynamics, as Kerkvliet (2009, 240) argues, ‘obscure the political significance and ramifications of the things’ that the majority of the society regularly do in their attempt to influence government decisions. Moreover, interrogating the everyday lives and daily practices of ordinary citizens are vitally important for ‘understanding political adherences and preferences’ (Yates 2015, 20).

The term ‘everyday people,’ is a vague and contentious term. In this article, it refers to those who are relatively powerless, vulnerable, and in subordinate positions (Scott 1985; Kerkvliet 2009). These ordinary folks - the street vendors, housewives, youth, classroom teachers, farmers, indigenous people, and war-displaced families – often find their voices ditched or marginalized because they have limited political agency, are geographically distant to, and are socio-economically restrained from accessing formal structures and conventions of political and decision-making processes. In effect, they have become marginalized for having their voices excluded or unheard, except in some extraordinary events such as elections. Building on existing scholarships which interrogate the intersectionality of everyday life, marginal people, and their political responses, this article seeks to illuminate the missing voices in martial law discourses – the narratives of everyday people. Specifically, we intend to explore how martial law (ML) caused political anxieties among ordinary citizens, how they registered their resistance, and why they popularly supported Duterte’s ML despite the unpleasant narratives of military rule during the Marcos regime.

Literature and mediated discourse on the political landscape of Mindanao suggests that the dominant actors articulating support, resistance, and ambivalence on the military rule in Mindanao are, by and large, constituted by traditional opinion-makers, i.e., government figures, media practitioners, academics, and those in civil society groups. As a result, the political articulations of the ordinary citizens, or the everyday actors, are often diluted in the noisy discourses, and animated banter in various media platforms. Moving away from ‘methodological elitism’ (Stanley & Jackson 2016) by foregrounding the voices of everyday people in exploring the (un)popularity of Duterte’s with ML as a case in point, this paper raises the following: (1) what does Martial Law

mean for people in the peripheries of powers and political circles? and (2) why do they resist or support the imposition of Martial Law in Mindanao?

Data presented in this paper is primarily drawn from our extensive fieldwork from September 2017 to January 2018 across south-central Mindanao. Intensive field immersions were made in several evacuation sites in the adjacent towns of Marawi. These were supplemented by further interviews carried out in the first quarter of 2018. This research forms part of a more extensive study which explores the nexus of women, peace, and security in the conflict-affected environment. By engaging the ground, it provides an alternative take on Duterte's martial law through the lenses of ordinary local residents within conflict and conflict-affected zones in Mindanao.

Mainly, this was fieldwork at home since both authors are 'natives' of Muslim Mindanao. The insider status of researchers is not, at all times, advantageous as compared to being an outsider. Nonetheless, insiders have peculiar strengths in navigating the field. The language proficiency is a definite advantage. Establishing rapport and trust with potential informants takes lesser time (Mughal 2015; Permunta 2009) and the cultural intimacy within the field which developed over the years while growing up position an insider in a vantage point as a field researcher (Narayan 1993). This insider status afforded us to extend beyond "field gazing" as we were able to figure out things when we encountered stillness and vague articulations in some field sites.

This paper stands on two strands of different but mutually constitutive scholarships: resistance and populism - both framed from the lens of everyday politics. The following discussions are divided into four parts. The first section contextualizes the ML in Mindanao. This is followed by peoples' articulations of their anxiety, expressions of their resistance, and why they support ML with all its current tentativeness and ends with a brief conclusion.

### **Martial Law in Mindanao: The Context and Contests**

How does martial law, as a policy, come into being? How do key actors and factions respond to a political action which hinges on the authoritarian rule? In this section, we provide a brief

antecedent on Duterte's Martial Law as a policy; and present the contesting dominant narratives surrounding it.

### *Restive Moroland*

The island of Mindanao is home to a number of armed Moro (Filipino Muslims) groups with diverse yet overlapping political interests. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and its major break-away faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation (MILF), are the two largest rebel groups with profound secessionist agenda since the late 1960s. Both factions have been representing the so called Bangsamoro (literally means indigenous Muslim people in the country) struggles against the prejudices and hostilities of the central government and the dominant Christian population. Intermittent armed encounters in the past four decades have displaced millions of people, resulted in over a hundred thousand deaths, and stunted the islands economic growth. A lasting political settlement is still on the distant horizon in the incumbent administration.

In the 1990s, several radical groups emerged and were responsible for a string of kidnappings, extortions, and piracy in southern maritime borders. The most notorious is the Abu Sayyaf Group which operates mainly in the Sulu archipelago and while the Pentagon Gang is active in central Mindanao. These radicals were involved as well in bombing activities which inevitably spoiled the gains from the peace processes and putting the ability and sincerity of MILF and MNLF in question.

The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) came into the picture after the botched Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) of the government and MILF in 2008. BIFF leaders and followers were former MILF combatants based in an area straddling the provincial boundaries of Maguindanao, Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat. Since then, BIFF has staged several offensive operations against the government and further complicates the fragile landscape in south-central Mindanao.

The Maute Group, a more radical group, based in Butig, Lanao del Sur, has grabbed headlines since 2013. The Maute brothers, also former MILF guerillas, formed the group to take a more radical approach in asserting their political agenda of establishing an independent Islamic

state in Southeast Asia starting with Mindanao. The Maute has an obscure relationship with other Islamist, and the black-cladded, ISIS flag-bearing armed entities such as Jamaal al-Tawhid Wal Jihad Philippines, Ansar Khalifah Sarangani, Khalifa Islamiyah Mindanao, Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and the BIFF (see Chalk 2016).

With the protracted Bangsamoro struggles remain unresolved, the growing frustrations and dissatisfactions of ordinary guerillas on MILF-Government peace processes, and the proliferation of radicalized and extremist groups all contribute to the fragile nature, violent picture, and uncertain future of Mindanao. Citing political under currents in Mindanao, security analysts have hinted that the island is a ticking bomb (Ward 2017; Chalk 2016).

### *The Marawi Seige: The Ties that Bind Rebels, Rulers, and Drug Lords*

As it dragged on for months, the Marawi siege was a revelation of the changing dynamics of war, criminality, and violence in Mindanao. The ideological tendencies of Muslim insurgency groups are changing shaped by political events beyond Mindanao; and have turned more radical and extreme. From small local bands of bandits, the Maute, ASG and the BIFF are increasingly becoming global threats by proclaiming themselves as local jihadist networks of ISIS (Islamic State), symbolically or literally, by brandishing ISIS black flag and head bands.

The firefight in Marawi was triggered, as government authorities' claim, by the military attempt to arrest the Maute brothers but spotted ASG's most senior leader Hapilon instead Isnilon (Fonbuena 2017). As government forces advanced, military officials did not expect such a quick and robust response from the combined forces of Maute and ASG, thus, foiling the arrest plan. What became apparent as the exchange of fires unfolds was a confirmation of long-standing rumors that local insurgency and banditry groups were building more organized and a bigger coalition to gain recognition from ISIS in the Middle East.

The Maute group was aggressively expanding their membership as confirmed by our informants. Interviewees from Marawi also confirmed military reports that Maute recruiters were using mosques in luring youth from impoverished villages. One informant said he was recruited with a promise of 20,000 pesos (roughly US \$400) of monthly salary plus firearm but quit soon after. A local resident, sharing the experience of her teenage son, said:

The Maute recruiters have frequented the mosques in our village. They beguiled the youth as early as 7 years old to attend Friday sermons for 500 pesos each. Weeks later, the number of those in attendance has grown big because of the money. However, my son complained that the sermons were not entirely about Islam, but preachers have become critical in attacking the government and hinted for an armed uprising. I told my son to stop attending those sermons. Luckily, he heeded my advice.

Surprised with the tremendous amount of cash, ammunitions, and explosives recovered from insurgents' hideouts, Duterte blamed the Maranaos implying that the Maute militants would not have stocked firearms and ammunitions to sustain several months of an intense firefight without the facilitations of local personalities in Marawi (Gita 2017). The President implicated some local politicians, referring to those who lost in the elections a year before, for conniving with local militias in wreaking havoc in Marawi. Some local residents charged these losing politicians for destabilizing the city by allowing the entry of militias, thus, effectively channelling hatred among electorates against the incumbent leaders.

Duterte also claimed connections of the Maute leaders and some elected political figures whom he labelled as 'narco-politicians.' He boldly implicated some local government officials involved in large-scale drug trade along with other drug lords in Mindanao (Valente 2017). He also publicly divulged, complete with the matrix, that these drug personalities were funding Mautes' activities in exchange for armed protection against government authorities (Macas 2017a; 2017b). Such revelations did not surprise many of the Marawi residents, and our informants claimed that the public was aware of this insurgency-politics-drug trade connection 'for a very long time.'

### *Martial Law: A Necessity*

President Duterte was on a 5-day state visit at Russia's capital in May of 2017 but had to cut short his trip and rushed home due to the Marawi incident. On the same day the armed encounter escalated, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the government announced the Proclamation Number 216 declaring the entire southern region of the country, Mindanao, under Martial Law for a period of sixty days. This move of Duterte administration was heavily criticized locally and abroad. The government, however, was firm in its stand because of two things: (1) that the Maute's rampage constitutes a rebellion; and (2) that the situation in Marawi posed a challenge to national security. Expecting a legal battle

before the country's highest court, the Philippine Solicitor General expressed his confidence for a favorable court decision because the imposing of Martial Law in Mindanao was founded on 'substantial and factual' basis (Placido 2017). The Solicitor General stressed that:

What's happening in Mindanao is no longer a rebellion of Filipino citizens. It has transmogrified into an invasion by foreign terrorists who heeded the clarion call of the ISIS to go to the Philippines if they find difficulty in going to Iraq or Syria... Given the above clear and present dangers and atrocities happening in Mindanao, especially in Marawi City, it is the President's constitutional duty to unsheathe the Republic's sword of martial law to crush the rebellion that threatens to divide our country (Placido, 2017).

National security officials underscored the necessity of ML because the war in Marawi was not confined among Filipinos resisting the government, but the recovery of dead Maute fighters suggest that the government forces were actually fighting against foreign terrorists as well. With ML, according to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), it will facilitate easier processes in securing all national borders in the south, pointing the risks posed by porous maritime borders of Mindanao (Tan 2017).

The Catholic Church has been very critical of the government since Duterte rose into power. However, it was surprising that there was a consensus among the bishops of Mindanao supporting Duterte's decision of declaring ML, although their collective stand underscored that the use of military power over civilians in the entire island should be temporary (Arguillas 2017). Cardinal Orlando Quevedo of Cotabato and the highest Catholic figure in Mindanao responded to the calls rejecting ML saying that the facts were inadequate to withdraw church support on Duterte's action in addressing the Marawi incident (Mayol 2017). As a long time Catholic leader in politically restive Muslim Mindanao region, Quevedo is conversant of the political landscape of conflict-affected areas and that the problems in Marawi were not confined within the city alone, thus, the need to contain, suppress, and neutralize potential Maute supporters in the strongest military terms.

Danilo Dayanghirang, the head of the Philippine Councilors League (PCL), disclosed that the executive board of the PCL unanimously supported ML in Mindanao saying that 'none came forward to complain about abuses' (Mellejor, 2017). Officers of two local government organizations – the League of Provinces in the Philippines (LPP) and the Union of Local

Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP) – have extended their full support to the President. ULAP has issued a statement, through its website, reiterating its support:

The Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines, the umbrella organization of all local government units and locally elected and appointed officials, strongly condemns the terrorist attacks by the Maute Group, affecting several local communities in Mindanao. We sympathize with the leaders and local government units as these terrorist acts instill fear and uncertainty among the people they lead and serve. These have caused chaos and distraught calling for nationwide vigilance and empathy.

We, in the local government, deem it important to be unified and to work hand-in-hand to overcome this national threat. We are one with President Rodrigo Roa Duterte on his declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao consistent with his Constitutional mandate to ensure peace and order. The President's declaration is in the best interest of the country. This declaration is required to ensure public safety and to restore peace and order.

Dr. Padoman Paporo, the chair of Lanao del Sur Provincial Women Council and an official of the Philippine Women Muslim Council strongly supported Duterte's move, saying:

Marcos' Martial Law was different with that of Duterte because the former was used to crush Muslim Filipinos fighting for the legitimate cause while the latter was used to fight Filipino and foreign terrorists who terribly torn an Islamic city into pieces. They killed Muslims and Christians. Critics of Martial Law missed to take into account the culture of revenge among Maranaos; and without military rule, the situation would have been worst (personal communication, December 14, 2017).

With the magnitude of Maute's capability in resisting government forces, Duterte has extended the martial law initially until the end of December 2017. This was subsequently re-extended up to the last day of December 2018. Although the extension was challenged politically and legally, martial law extension went ahead with the green light from both chambers of the Congress.

### *Martial Law: A Perplexing Moment*

Proclamation 216 has, in effect, stripped off the citizens of Mindanao of their constitutional rights to be protected from warrantless arrest and unwarranted search and seizures, as well as curtailment of freedom of expression. In a press briefing in Davao City, however, a top official of the Armed

Forces of the Philippines (AFP) pronounced that the government has no intention to suspend freedom of expression. Nonetheless, the AFP official warned the public that the government would exercise necessary censorship on media outlets and social media postings which were deemed inappropriate and would compromise public safety, military tactical operations, and national security (*GMA News*, May 26, 2017). The Philippine National Police (PNP) also appealed to the public to refrain from posting and spreading unverified information, especially on Facebook, regarding the Marawi incident to prevent panic and confusion among the people.

Martial law is often associated by Filipinos with the country's "dark period" under former President Ferdinand Marcos. The unpleasant first hand and anecdotal accounts of how Marcos ruled the country under ML have had lasting effects in the imaginations of the people. A Moro woman in Maguindanao, as she recalled the immediate reactions of her relatives:

I could just imagine the horrors and trauma brought about by military rule in the 1970s to 1980s. I'm in my early 30s and, naturally, I never experienced it. But the ghosts of Martial Law still haunt the people, and I can clearly remember the grim situation during those times based on the reactions of my aunties with they knew about Duterte's declaration [of Martial Law]' (personal communication, November 29, 2017).

With the imposition of ML, there was an air of panic all over Mindanao. Social media outlets were immediately inundated with mix sentiments. There was a profoundly unusual silence and confusion among people even working professionals. Those in legal professions posted some reminders when dealing with military forces. Although these reminders were, in so many ways helpful, they further scared some ordinary citizens as they have a grey understanding and comprehension of legal terms such as "due process" and "writ of habeas corpus." These reactions were just reminiscent of the pains, dangers, and violent realities of Marcos' military regime.

Local government units (LGUs) and other public agencies had to continually inform their respective constituencies to stay at home if possible, continuously bring their identification cards, cooperate with government authorities, and to heighten vigilance and inform authorities on any suspicious activities. Military agents have become very visible in usually crowded places; military checkpoints along primary and secondary roads significantly increased, and security measures were tightened in entry and exit points of every town and city. In general, the political atmosphere in Mindanao was beyond normal especially in the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte,

and some parts of Maguindanao. Because of the sudden changes, compounded by the negative association of Marcos' ML, these collectively fuelled the paranoia and anxieties of inhabitants in many parts of Mindanao.

Samira Gutoc-Tomawis, a very influential figure from Marawi, resigned from her post as government delegate to the Bangsamoro Transition Commission as she was offended by the President's joke allowing ground troops to rape as they respond to the Marawi siege. As the Congress deliberated the extension of Martial Law, Tomawis tearfully appealed to the legislators to take time asking the Maranaos how they feel about government's militarism policy to suppress local terrorists and other armed groups supporting them. She enumerated instances of military excesses and how security measures have inconvenienced the majority of displaced civilians.

In Davao City, the President's hometown, human rights activists, and other progressive groups have resoundingly rejected martial law arguing that it was unwarranted. *Konsensya Dabaw* (Conscience Davao), a loose group of activists in Davao City, issued a statement addressed to the President and the Congress:

We appeal to the President to make a more sober assessment of the situation upon his arrival, resist the influence of the warmongers among his circles, and to back down on martial law in Mindanao. It is not yet too late to avoid the ineffective shortcuts proffered by militarism and strongman rule, and demonstrate leadership grounded on an understanding of the historical and systemic natures of our problems.

We challenge the Philippine Congress to make an independent assessment and revoke the proclamation. The President has not even accounted to Congress the results of Presidential Proclamation 55 that put the whole country under a "State of National Emergency on account of lawless violence in Mindanao" and now martial law in Mindanao? (*MindaNews*, May 24, 2017).

Moreover, the political climate in Marawi and nearby towns had been precarious. Local residents have cried foul against military forces. Concerns of unreported but increasing human rights violations, disregard of civilians' interests in crushing the militants, and horror stories under the hands of the military were mounting. These issues, nonetheless, did not surprise many political observers – both locally and abroad. Critics of Duterte have forewarned the public of serious threat to the country's democracy. This controversial and colorful President, in fact, has already earned

monikers such as ‘The Punisher’ and ‘Dirty Duterte’ from the foreign press; and *berdugo* (the executioner) by his domestic political foes for being tough on criminals as a long-time mayor of Davao City. The declaration of Martial Law (ML) was often conjectured as Duterte, flirting with authoritarianism by capitalizing on his nationwide popularity (Curato 2016).

### *Lost Voices Between Dutertards and Yellowtards Spectacles*

In spite of the negative portrayal of Marcos’ ML in textbooks and literature, the declaration of Duterte’s ML was widely welcomed. Duterte, unfazed by local and international criticisms, has easily found solid public support based on this trust and performance ratings in December 2017 surveys (SWS 2017; PAR 2017). For some quarters of the country’s “enlightened” class, the apparent return to military rule should be partly blamed on the *Duertards* – a derogatory shorthand for Duterte supporters who are perceived as politically illiterate, fanatical devotees, and undiscerning citizens. The term evokes class distinction: poor, deficient of rationality, decency, and decorum. The followers of the other side, on the other hand, are labeled as *Yellowtards*: intellectually superior and well-bred but hideously unjust to the powerless and less privileged.

The contentious issues concerning Duterte’s military regime in Mindanao, apparently, is just one of the several political strands indulging these two adversarial factions since 2015, a year before the national elections. Apparently, there is a duopoly of narratives relative to martial law. The voices of ordinary people of Mindanao, however, are often overshadowed by or lost within the narratives of *Yellowtards* and *Duertards*. By foregrounding the alienated voices of everyday citizens, the discussions in succeeding sections revolved around three major themes: political anxiety, resistance, and mass support.

### **Political Anxiety**

When we talk about political anxiety, in this paper, we refer to the collective and everyday feeling of distress and precariousness. This sense of uneasiness, weariness, and constant insecurity are part of the informal discourses from household level, neighborhood chats, and social media postings, up to the news headlines and to more formal political gatherings. Following the Martial Law declaration in Mindanao, it has left everyone anxious. Fears of possible massive violations of

human rights, increasing climate of militarism, and Duterte's authoritarian tendencies are the significant drivers of anxieties among the local populace.

### *Increasing Lawlessness, Erosion of Human Rights*

The declaration of Martial Law automatically resulted in the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. It essentially means that government agents can arrest and jail a person suspected of rebellion without a warrant. Consequently, ML ignores legal protection to expedite the arrest of suspected rebels. A few days after the Martial Law took effect, the military started to crack down on people who were directly or indirectly responsible for the Marawi siege. Some communities suspected of harboring suspicious individuals were also searched.

The most visible strategy made by military officials was the installation of checkpoints in all entry and exit points to and from Marawi City. Other major cities such as Cotabato, Davao, Cagayan de Oro and Zamboanga were temporarily locked down and security measures were further tightened. Those manning the checkpoints required everyone to show an identification card or any document to identify their legitimate identity, and failure to have one often meant intense military interrogation. The military checkpoint in Misamis Oriental successfully apprehended former Marawi City Mayor Fajad Umpar Salic barely two weeks after the siege broke out. Salic was named by the President as a leading narco-politician in Mindanao and for being a financier of Maute-ISIS group. Shortly after Salic's arrest, the patriarch of Maute leaders, along with other family members, were intercepted by the military in a Davao checkpoint. A few days after, their mother was nabbed at a checkpoint in Masiu, Lanao del Sur.

While these checkpoints yielded positive results, these have been criticized by Marawi residents. Many of the evacuees complained how these checkpoints doubly jeopardized their situations – running away from stray bullets and had to face interrogation upon crossing checkpoints. A middle-aged woman at the evacuation site complained:

We left our homes with nothing. Do you think we still have the chance to think for our ID (identity cards)? We did not even have our extra clothes because we hurriedly run away for safety with my kids. My husband can't use the (company) vehicle, and we had to walk several miles to reach here [Pantar]. We are victims here yet further complicate our difficult situations (personal communication, December 17, 2017).

This woman merely echoes the collective feelings among evacuees. The informants noticed that the military personnel were generally courteous. They understand the need to tightening security set up but the number of desperate and exhausted civilians stampeding in checkpoints made these military responses impractical and unjust. Although the security measures were intended to contain the possible escape of Maute members and avoid spill over of fighting in other areas, for evacuees, these should not supercede the immediate concerns and interests of over two hundred thousand civilians fleeing from the war zone for uncertain lives in temporary shelters elsewhere.

Since the firefight ensued, a trail of death from the lines of government forces, rebels, hostages, trapped civilians, and civilians fleeing from battle grounds were beyond the locals' expectations. Speaking before the media, Zia Alonto Adiong of Provincial Crisis Management Committee described the situation as "...beyond evil, all Maranaos couldn't describe how they fell, it's beyond evil. You felt helpless and angered" (Gagalac & Quintos 2017, par 19).

The death toll was reaching 1,000 individuals in its fourth month of continuous fighting (Rosales, 2017). This figure includes those who were believed to be extra-judicially executed by government agents and excludes those subjected to forced disappearance as claimed by relatives of the victims. Eight cadavers were dumped in the ravine on the outskirts of Marawi five days after the fighting began. The military blamed the ISIS hinting from the Islamic sign *munafik* (locally understood as a traitor) near the cadavers, but locals believe that they were executed by the military because the location was just a few hundred meters between two military checkpoints. No one was held responsible for this incident.

Lootings were likewise widespread. One of my informants said "people shopped and got everything valuable from our house. Our village was outside the battle zone, so our household appliances were not destroyed, but we lost everything including my heirloom jewellery". Another local said that a military man from Maguindanao hired a vehicle to transport his looted items. When they were stopped at the checkpoints, the driver would just say he is an evacuee and had to bring all valuable items into a safer place. As explained by our informant:

It is easy to sneak out these items because the driver can speak the local dialect. The driver didn't like what he was doing, but he was commanded by a military. What else should he do? I have talked

to him a few times because I was part of the rescue team for several weeks. It's sad that some military personnel were taking advantage of the situation.

Martial law, as expected by many, was meant to crack down high-valued targets including narco-politicians. Under ML, government agents can easily ignore the constitutional rights of suspected drug personalities. The extensive media coverage on the deaths of Mayor Samsudin Dimaukom of Datu Saudi Ampatuan, Mayor Reynaldo Parohinog of Ozamis, and the arrest of former Mayor Fahad Salic of Marawi prior to ML declaration demonstrated how serious the government was on running after 'big fishes.' If these traditionally untouchable political figures were obviously scrambling with some seeking refuge in rebel camps without ML yet, tensions were rising even more after ML came into force and, apparently, sent a terrifying message to ordinary and powerless people.

The increasingly authoritarian approach of Duterte and grim portrayals of media on the initial 6-month war on the drugs policy of Duterte also sent a chilling message to ordinary drug users. The *tokhang* approach (literally means knock & talk) in dealing with drug users and peddlers at the village level, and the notoriety of forced disappearance of victims while within the custody of police have earned the Duterte administration the ire of local and international communities for gross disregard of human rights. Some of my informants, many of whom were long-time drug dependents, went into hiding for months when killings of drug addicts even in rural villages became an everyday affair.

#### *Fear of Authoritarianism and Militarism*

In response to the ML, local government officials across large cities imposed curfew hours, thus, restricting the physical mobility of the people. In Cotabato City, residents and non-residents were barred from exiting and entering the city from 10:00 in the evening up to 4:00 o'clock in the morning. Only those with exceptional cases such as health emergencies were allowed to cross military checkpoints. Loitering within the city between these times were also banned, a policy which was applied only to minors before the imposition of ML. The chief of the country's Armed Forces warned local chief executives that their powers over local police would be revoked should they fail to observe the national government's campaign related to the imposition of ML. Local

officials were expected to shape up, thus, compelled to take a more hardline stance to connect with the President's authoritarian directives in addressing national security concerns.

Before boarding the plane in Moscow, Duterte pronouncements were baffling. He verbally expressed that his martial law is akin to that of Marcos and "it will be harsh." Elaborating how his martial law would look like, the President declared:

I am appealing to the humanity of everybody, especially those who sow terror, do not allow [IS] to come in. I warn you again do not do it because as I have said, my response would be harsh. I will not hesitate to do anything and everything to protect and preserve the Filipino nation... Anyone caught possessing a gun and confronting us with violence; my orders are shoot to kill. I will not hesitate to do it. My human rights are different (Andrade & Salaverria 2017, par 12-14).

As soon as he arrived from his Russia trip, he assured the military commanders and ground troops, saying:

If you go down, I go down. But for this martial law and the consequences of martial law and the ramifications of martial law, I and I alone would be responsible, just do your job, I will take care of the rest... if you had raped three, I will admit it, that's on me (*Inquirer.net*, May 26, 2017).

The President is known to have a dirty mouth during his speeches, but this rape joke has terrified women in conflict-prone areas of Mindanao. This has seriously concerned Moro women who have firsthand knowledge and experiences of sexual assaults committed by military forces in combat zones since the Moro rebellion broke out in the 1970s. While there were no reported cases of such until the crisis in Marawi ended in October, the joke had created fear amongst some residents.

## **Resistance**

Duterte's flirting with authoritarianism upon imposing ML in Mindanao has further provoked political anxieties in a fraction of the country's population. These public anxieties were far from unfounded, however, as we have discussed earlier. Extending the politics of public anxiety, this section begs the question: how do anxious ordinary public articulate or practice their resistance to Duterte's Martial Law? In this paper, resistance is understood as an oppositional act, either publicly or disguised (see Scott 1989; Vinthagen & Johansson 2013; Lilja et al. 2017). While Scott

and other scholars characterized resistance of having two significant strands - the “organized” on the one hand and the “everyday” on the other – we focus on the “everyday” performance of it. Moreover, we subscribe to the works of Lilja et al. (2017) which conceptually stretched “everyday resistance” to mean a ‘practice that is often, but not necessarily always hidden’ (p. 46). As demonstrated by experience in the Philippines, a poor pedicab driver or an unemployed housewife, for instance, may publicly display his or her intense opposition on certain issues on an everyday basis without resorting to a more organized way such as demonstration and political lobbying. This, in effect, departs from Scott’s idea that the everyday practice of resistance is often concealed or deliberately hidden within subtle actions (Scott 1989).

### *The Agency of Social Media for Open Resistance*

The expansion of internet connections to the countryside has facilitated the participation of ordinary folk in political debates, albeit informal, through their respective social media accounts. One has to note that Duterte had a landslide victory in the 2016 elections primarily because of social media since the mainstream media outlets were notably hostile to him. Amidst the noises of media, civil society groups, and local political figures relative to the Martial Law declaration, ordinary citizens took their public rage and resistance against government actions through Facebook. For the ordinary citizens, Facebook becomes their informal platform to express their thoughts and dissent; and gives them a political avenue to share and exchange their sentiments with others. These recent changes in the Philippine political landscape imply that ordinary people are not voiceless; they are merely not heard in the mainstreams of power and decision-makers.

A Maranao undergraduate student, Nor-Fatimah Cahar, posted a seemingly open-letter to the President Duterte conveying her resistance to the use of air strike in suppressing the Maute militants on the ground. She claimed that the use of the military’s air assets was excessive. Posted on her Facebook page on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of fighting in her hometown, she says:

To you, dearest President Duterte, I was an avid supporter of yours since the day you decided to run. But this time, I can be your number 1 hater because of letting this brutality happen in my hometown. I just can't bear seeing my hometown burned into ashes.

We, Maranaos, supported and voted you for the reason that we believed in you. But now, can you listen to our voices? Just for once Mr. President. LISTEN! LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF

MARANAOS! Please, STOP THE AIRSTRIKES! Aerial bombing is not the solution. It won't help eradicating those terrorists, rather it kills innocent people and destroys our beloved city. It is the civilians that suffer for all the brunt. Maute group are out-numbered compared to the AFPs. Thus it can be done without deploying bombs in the different parts of the city.

Lt. Col. Jo-ar Herrera, the spokesperson of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in Marawi, repeatedly emphasized during press briefings that the government was doing surgical airstrikes to avoid massive destructions within battle zones. He said the use of bombs and ground canons were “very precise, very deliberate” in flushing out the Maute fighters. But what was revealed after the guns were silenced were massive destructions which, for many affected residents, were beyond repair.

Maranaos traditionally do not put their money in commercial banks because many find it *haram* (forbidden) since these banks do not observe Islamic practices. Money and expensive jewelry were kept in their homes. This suggests how much cash and valuables were left in the entire city since residents hastily left their homes with nothing to seek refuge elsewhere. While there were some locals who took advantage of the situation, most of the affected residents believe that military personnel was responsible for looting because, aside from the Maute members, they were the only people who have access to the battle zones. With ML enforced, the military was presumed to have control over human movements in affected areas. Thus, they know what's happening on the ground. A Marawi resident was fuming on his Facebook post:

We were not allowed [by the army] to go back [to the battle ground] due to the dangers of unexploded bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) left by Maute. What is amusing is that people lost their expensive beds, fridge, and other [bulky] household wares but none was reportedly hit or hurt by bombs. Unlike some, we are not gullible and fool to believe them. They [army] should leave Marawi, and we will take care of ourselves. Later on, they may plant bombs and explode these to cover up their looting activities.

Postings such as these were flooding over Facebook a few days after the Marawi siege and continued even after the city was liberated from Maute forces five months later. For several political observers and civil society groups, what makes Duterte's ML different from that of Marcos was that the former had not curtailed freedom of expression which is a stark contrast to the latter's regime. Local media, human rights activists, left-leaning civil society groups, and some

local politicians critical of ML, by and large, remain free to register their dissenting voices publicly. The resistance that these “people of influence” has, in fact, created some followers among ordinary people. The experiences in Mindanao confirm the claim of Lijla et al. (2017, 51) that “resistance encourages or creates resistance.” The ordinary folks act as local followers and simply imitate or parrot the opposing ideas and dissenting narratives of influential figures. Mediated by Facebook, some ordinary citizens were bold in airing out their dissent without much apprehension because the government has remained tolerant of dissenting voices amidst ML declaration. This permissive political atmosphere to express opinions and ideas incongruent with the actions of the government suggests that the freedom of expression and democracy in Mindanao generally remains healthy.

### *Concealed Resistance*

With the Martial Law being enforced for nine months since May 2017, so far, there are no signs that the government will penalize unfavorable voices and unsavory expressions. Yet, many dissenting ordinary people have resorted to using more subtle forms of resistance. Their resistance is mainly symbolic negation such as sarcasm, slander, cursing, withdrawal, and even cringing silence (Scott 1989). An evacuee in Pantar, a town north of Marawi City, verbally relayed his frustration and anger on what he finds excessive use of military force, saying “how do they know that the areas targeted by [war] planes have no civilians? What about those civilian hostages held by the Maute’s used as human shields?” A few weeks into fighting, he had a chance to sneak in to check their village within the battle zone but was devastated to see it beyond recognition except a burned post. “Our neighborhood was razed flat and covered with ashes. Where shall we return to after here [evacuation camp]? Isn’t it too much?” he asked.

People from very remote areas have been affected as well by intensified military activities even in relatively the peaceful areas of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato, and other adjacent provinces. The communities of indigenous people in hinterlands were crumbling with the relentless campaign of government authorities against other insurgency groups, i.e., New People’s Army (NPA) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). One Teduray lady working as a household helper in Cotabato shared with us the situation of her family in Maguindanao. According to her:

The residents in our *barangay* (village) are terrified now because of Martial Law. People have noticed the increasing numbers of Philippine Marines in their area and started to ask for identification cards (IDs). Bringing down farm produce to towns and in Cotabato City is difficult because there are lots of checkpoints along the way and authorities require everyone to show IDs. Many prefer not to travel anymore, and some have retreated to more remote hinterlands. Without IDs to show would mean higher risks. Military might drag us and become victims of salvaging [forced disappearance] common during Marcos time.

In a group discussion with about 15 men in the evacuation site in Lanao del Norte, one participant commented in jest, which created a loud roar from everyone in attendance:

Martial Law has done very good for us. The best rice was no match with the NFA rice (government-imported rice which derogatively perceived as poor man's rice) rationed to us here [evacuation camp]. NFA rice, I think, is healthier. See, most of us here have grown tummies now. For so many years as a trader of the premium rice, I was so skinny. The [slightly foul] odor of NFA might have some vitamins, too!

While everyone had a hard time to compose themselves with these intermittent jokes as they recalled their experiences, the discussion was, on the other hand, full of sarcastic, snide comments and frustrations. The bursts of laughter were punctuated by long silence at times especially when asked how they foresee their future or how long they will stay in the evacuation camp since all of them have no more houses to return to. With a cracked voice, the acting camp leader said, "if the government decided to bomb Marawi City, officials must have taken care of us immediately. That decision [to declare Martial Law] left thousands of us homeless and in great despair". A wife from the same evacuation camp, with tears looming at the corner of her eyes, butted in during our discussion saying:

We are happy that you are here. At least we have someone to listen to our experiences. I hope you will share our stories to others and those in the government [national officials] so that they will know what we have gone through, what we are going now, and what we will go through in the days to come.

While it was clear that the evacuees were profoundly displeased of their plights after the declaration of ML - especially in the use of airstrikes to crush the Maute fighters - which left them homeless and with bleak future, we have not sensed any sort of political undercurrent for them to resort to more organized resistance. This was even with the growing frustration among them on

how the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), humanitarian groups, and local government officials were questioning their legitimacy as evacuees because they were not located in government-designated evacuation sites. Whenever trucks bringing relief goods skipped them, they settled on cursing and name calling and then moved on to attend their organic vegetable gardens next to their makeshift houses.

### **Mass Support**

In a roadside eatery just outside the ARMM compound in Cotabato City when a guy in his 50s, seated at the cashier's table, blurted out, "Nangaunsa man na sila? Nakaanhi na ba na sila diri (Cotabato)?" [What happened to them? Have they been here (Cotabato)?]. This was in reaction to a TV report covering the mass protests in Manila denouncing the imposition of martial law. He was visibly irked by the political nuisance in the country's capital. Comments such as this, i.e., countering the anti-martial law sentiments, has become an everyday affair – inside a passenger jeep, barbershop, or in a local branch of a money transfer company. Public support for the necessity of martial law in Mindanao was hardly unsurprising because one month after its declaration, Social Weather Station (SWS) survey shown that 57 percent of Filipinos nationwide concurred with the President (Flores 2017). Three months later, another SWS survey revealed that 54 percent of Filipino adults back up the government's decision to extend martial law; and 64 percent of respondents from Mindanao agreed to the extension (Mateo 2017). Why does martial law, in spite of its unpleasant renderings in the country's recent history, found massive support from Mindanao? In what ways does martial law resonate with the political imagination of the ordinary people in the country's south?

#### *Hapsay: Martial Law Viewed from Below*

For people in Mindanao, especially for residents in conflict-affected areas, martial law is often depicted positively. As we talked to people across various field sites, the most common description of martial law based on their lived experiences suggests *hapsay*. This Cebuano term literally means "order" or "smooth." It may also denote a sense of peace, disciplined, or self-restrained behavior.

The first three days after martial law was declared, Davao City – largest and the most populous in Mindanao – has recorded a zero crime rate as the City rolled out the 'hold and secure'

policy after the earlier “lock down” order was withdrawn (Revita 2017). In Cotabato City – the country’s most affected city by Moro rebellion and violence – also reported a zero crime rate for several days due to the ‘No ID, No Entry’ policy, imposition of curfew at night, and stepped-up military visibility (Lao 2017). Local governments have become proactive in activating and strengthening their security efforts. Thus, local elective officials were noticeably “working” to thwart the threats. Crimes against person and properties within the neighborhood have significantly gone down as noticed by local residents.

In Muslim Mindanao, brandishing a gun in public is a norm. Along with gold jewelry and cars, a gun symbolizes power, influence, and authority. But this is no longer the case in many parts of ARMM after Duterte imposed martial law as only those with proper permits have the courage to bring firearms. Firearms are creatively concealed if not left entirely at home. One Maranao told us, “You know, I never travel without my gun with me before this martial law. I have it all the time because I don’t know when people might attack me. You would never know when you get attacked by anyone”. Even poor citizens own guns, albeit improvised. One has to understand that many parts of Mindanao remain fragile due to the widespread rebellion, insurgency, and criminality. People tend to arm themselves due to the apparent weaknesses of local government institutions to secure communities. With the military rule, the gun-wielding individuals in public spaces have significantly reduced.

Martial law also paved the way for increased settlements of *rido* – a deadly inter- and intra-clan feuds widely practices in Muslim Mindanao. This horizontal conflict is, at times, deadlier and more violent than intermittent vertical conflicts. A local informant working in the government informed us that the military authorities were taking advantage of martial law by convincing warring parties to resolve their *rido* peacefully. Otherwise, government forces will be constrained to raid all parties involved, thus, putting their respective guns, safety, and liberty at severe risk. The surge of *rido* settlements in later part of 2017 suggests the efficacy of martial law in bringing decades-long communal violence into a temporary halt, if not termination. This means *hapsay* is slowly spreading in villages affected by constant yet unpredictable blow of violence and deaths from warring families and clans which often displace civilians for several days. Wives are enjoying *hapsay* lives because they are no longer worried of a sudden outburst of senseless killings which automatically force their families to leave their homes and possessions to avoid outright retaliation.

As widely recognized, military rule is used as a tool to bring forth order beyond the threats of Maute group. Martial law also has consequences for the drug trade and consumption in urban communities as well as in rural villages. The drug trade in Mindanao, after all, is well reflected in the narratives of armed groups formations and expansion (see Lara & Schoofs 2016). As transpired in recent experiences, martial law is utilized to run after “big fishes,” local parlance for key actors such as narco-politicians; as well as the petty drug dependents. As personally confessed to us by former drug dependents, their main contacts and suppliers have laid low, access and network shrunk and even started killing each other. With the precarious atmosphere after Duterte set foot in the Presidential Palace, the waves of extra-judicial killings of some notorious drug addicts within the villages forced many to “cool down” in other places and lead a normal life. A self-reformed addict shared his views, saying “My life would have been in a mess if not of Duterte. His martial law is good to cut off [drug] supplies in the villages which were casually traded in the streets without much fear [from authorities]”. Based on personal accounts and assessment from informants in the villages and local communities, there were dramatic falls of drug-induced crimes against persons and communities. There are fewer people who are still engaged in it because the supplies of illegal drugs (methamphetamine or *shabu* in local parlance) were significantly restricted, if not eliminated entirely, and access is getting more difficult. While the stories of human rights violations in relation to drug war were often emotionally heart breaking and morally wrenching, the atmosphere of *hapsay* is unquestionably benefiting the larger fraction of local populace.

### *Martial Law 2.0: Addressing Complex Insecurity, Demonstrating Political Will*

The continuous popularity of Duterte including his policy of utilizing a more iron-handed approach in putting order resonates well with the ordinary public. Duterte’s approach struck some of the critical chords among the people, especially in Mindanao, where insecurity (visible and otherwise) concerns many. The proliferation of illegal drugs, unresolved rebellion and insurgency, criminality, radicalism and extremism among Moro youth, the prevalence of *rido*, and everyday violence – all fuel the insecure social climate in Mindanao.

Illegal drugs, as many believed, are controlled by local politicians. With the drugs being available even in the most remote villages in Maguindanao, people are worried since some

suspected addicts get rowdy and are regularly involved in fist fights. Petty crimes such as theft and burglary become common. These things were not the norm during President Arroyo's time, but things turned terrible during Aquino's administration, complained one resident. Others use *shabu* as medicine to cure body pains and increase physical stamina as they work in the farms. Yet, this emergence of *shabu* in rural farming communities made people anxious and insecure, but they were clueless about how to counter the scourge. It is a public knowledge that a town mayor controls the drug trade, and seeking assistance from the local government is considered a futile exercise.

The lines between legitimate rebels, pure criminals, and rogue government officials in Mindanao are blurred. The notorious *karnaper* (bike thieves), cattle rustlers, and goons are freely roaming around preying on potential victims. When pursued by authorities, they automatically sneak into the villages controlled by rebel commanders. Others remain untouchable because they are employed as private armies by local politicians. To demonstrate this point, most Christian residents in one field site were not keen to buy new motorcycles even if they can afford to because having one increases the risks of being killed by Muslim carnappers. Carnapped motorcycles are publicly sold along national roads and even towns' business districts in several towns in Maguindanao. The proliferation of such activities implies the weaknesses of local authorities. However, these realities are not known to many living in the major cities of Mindanao.

The culture of revenge among Moro, especially among Maranao and Maguindanao tribes, mainly fuels the prevalence of *rido* and causes constant insecurity among people. The Maguindanao massacre in 2009 which resulted in the death of over 60 individuals – the majority of whom were local journalists and some trapped civilians – was a clear example of how *rido* undermines community- and village-level security. Apart from *rido*, the formation of break-away rebel groups showing radical and extremist tendencies such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and several others sharing the same areas controlled by Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) further complicates the inherently insecure lives of civilians and ordinary people. In sum, the blurring lines differentiating each armed group from several others; and with *rido* being a peculiar socio-political character among Moro ethnic groups in south-central Mindanao, pose both visible and invisible insecurities. Hence, ordinary citizens believe that firm resolve and strong political are needed considering that the sources and nature insecurities are complicated and challenging.

As demonstrated above, the enormity and complexity of socio-political problems undermine personal, communal, and national securities. Regardless of their religious, ethnic and other ascribed identities, ordinary people in Muslim Mindanao are overwhelming supportive of Duterte and his iron-handed approach of quelling terrorism and violence in Marawi by imposing martial law. People favor short cuts to address the sources and causes of both explicit and latent insecurities confronting Mindanao, especially the communities in ARMM.

The everyday realities in Muslim Mindanao region, for the majority, demand a dependable national leadership which can effect desired changes. The emergence of this public behavior favoring aggressive and punitive political leader fits what Curato (2016) calls as ‘penal populism’ echoing the idea of Pratt (2007) on punitive politics. Martial law resonates well with the public because of the uncompromising war on drugs of Duterte, which has resulted in the deaths of suspected narco-politicians from Maguindanao and Zamboanga del Norte. Many town mayors in Maguindanao publicly named by Duterte lost power while some took refuge in rebel-controlled areas.

It must be emphasized that these town mayors, for so long, were feared by local constituents for their excessive abusive behavior and temperament which often resulted in killing sprees even for minor reasons such as crossing the road which slightly inconvenienced the mayor’s long convoy. Most, if not all, have their own private armies and were untouchables to government authorities in previous administrations. Local elective posts are concentrated in a few families thereby facilitating the formation of local fiefdoms amidst extreme poverty among their respective constituencies.

All of these salient narratives were out of the radar of Manila government and ostensibly absent in national political discourses. These vicious everyday political realities in restive parts of Mindanao frustrate local populations since these realities are very much connected to their constant insecurities and vulnerabilities. Thus, martial law for the local populations is not just about a response to the terrorism in Marawi, but it is widely also hoped as a tool of Duterte’s government to punish narco-politicians and bust their drug networks, insurgency, and criminality, and to curb the persistence of *rido*. The punitive character of Duterte is generally perceived as the best

alternative to deal with the long-standing and collective feeling of hopelessness and helplessness in Muslim Mindanao, in particular, and in the entire island of Mindanao, in general.

## **CONCLUSION**

Scholarship on everyday politics, many of which have dealt mainly on protest, resistance, and social movements, are expanding our understanding of boundaries of politics beyond the conventions of parliamentarians, elites and a selected few. Scholars have been consistently confident in their arguments that the non-professional practices of politics among ordinary citizens have profound significance for democratic, political and public policy processes (Kerkvliet 2009; Boyte 2005; Yates 2015; Lilja et al. 2017).

This paper demonstrates that ordinary people – the poorest of the poor, displaced by armed conflicts, the indigenous people, and the like – who are literally in the peripheries of politics, power, and influence, in so many ways, are politically engaged with a contentious policy affecting them. Their voices may be easily lost or ignored within dominant discourses; these peripheral citizens do reflect and create meanings on specific issues, in this case, the imposition of martial law as a political and legal tool in addressing terrorism and other major societal problems that undermine individual and collective security. In other words, residents at the grassroots communities are far from political bystanders and by no means uncritical followers of the “enlightened” class. The interpretations and constructions of their political views are primarily informed by their own lived experiences and considerably differ from those of conventional voices.

As revealed by recent surveys, martial law in Mindanao is widely supported, but these surveys do not explain why ordinary people support it. Likewise, there are no explanations to date why it is resisted or regarded with apprehension by some Mindanao residents. Our findings suggest that the popularity of military rule only reflects the general sentiments at the grassroots level: (1) that the security landscape in Mindanao is too complicated, thus, requires strong response; (2) martial law is perceived as the realization of Duterte’s campaign promise of putting ‘order’ in “messed-up” democracy of the elites; and (3) peace and order may remain a far fetch reality without a strong national leader who is bold enough to punish perennially untouchable local actors, i.e. armed insurgents, narco-politicians, politicians with private armies, and warring powerful

clans. Simply put, it is incorrect to attribute the populist appeal of martial law to Duterte's popularity. Instead, the phenomenon could be interpreted as (1) synoptic of the underlying sources of insecurities embedded into Mindanao's contemporary history; and as (2) symptomatic of pervasive frustrations over the inadequacies of state's local apparatuses in addressing these insecurities. On the other hand, martial law is resisted partly because of Duterte's strongman persona as a long-time provincial mayor and a leadership tainted with accusations for allegedly violating human rights on a massive scale; and partly because of the shadows of the Marcos regime that haunt the public imagination.

Boyte (2004) argues that ordinary people do connect and engage with people in power and influence. He further argues that de-professionalized politics of everyday citizens can, at times, overturn the tyranny of technique employed by experts and technocrats. Simply put, as long as these ordinary lives are involved in gauging support, trust, and confidence on government through surveys and elections, they can always influence political and policy directions. Therefore, Duterte's martial law will remain popular, though punitive and rough, as long as it connects well to the everyday political realities of ordinary citizens in Mindanao – who composed a large fraction of electorates. His use of military rule in suppressing terrorism and waging war on drugs and criminality, an approach unpopular to the enlightened and privileged classes, has convincingly found resonance with ordinary people's political imaginations of hope, political order, peace, and security.

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