

PERSPECTIVE

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The Differences Duterte Relied Upon to Win

Malcolm Cook and Lorraine Salazar¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Democratic politics in the Philippines changed significantly with Rodrigo Duterte's surprise victory in the 9 May presidential elections.
- Duterte won decisively despite the fact that he joined the race late, spent the least, was not a celebrity, was not backed by a major party, did not have a national political post, and comes from Mindanao.
- Instead, he benefitted from growing differences between urban and rural voting behaviours, the growing overseas vote, and the levelling power of social media.
- These three structural changes thus signal the opening up of new political space for local candidates to rise to national power.

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INTRODUCTION

Rodrigo “Digong” Duterte’s rise from being mayor of Davao City in southern Mindanao to being president of the Philippines was not only improbable and hugely iconoclastic as well. His maverick political persona and undeniable retail politics skills dominated the 9 May election media cycle and pushed his more mainstream candidates to the margins. Duterte’s campaign and victory have garnered sustained international media interest, much of which has focused on the brazen and controversial statements that he made as the presidential front-runner and now president-elect.

His resounding victory suggests that future presidential elections will be open to a much larger range of candidates with a chance of winning. Duterte’s win holds important lessons for future presidential candidates and Philippines watchers.

DUTERTE’S VICTORY

Eighteen months before the 2016 presidential election, Duterte did not even figure among the likely presidential candidates. Pulse Asia’s *September 2014 Nationwide Survey on the May 2016 Elections* listed fifteen possible presidential candidates, and Duterte was not one of them.² When the 16 October 2015 deadline for certificates of candidacy had passed, Duterte had not filed one. He only replaced Michael Diño as the PDP-Laban presidential candidate on 27 November 2015. From January to March 2016, Duterte consistently polled last among the four main candidates. Yet, by April, Duterte was the clear front runner.

Table One: Presidential polls and election result (in %)

	Duterte	Roxas	Poe	Binay
Sept 2015 SWS	11	20	26	24
Sept 2015 PA	16	20	26	19
Dec 2015 PA	23	17	21	33
Jan 2016 SWS	18	21	24	31
Jan 2016 PA	20	20	30	23
March 2016 SWS	21	22	27	24
April 2016 PA	35	17	23	16
May 2016 SWS	33	20	22	13
9 May election*	39	23	21	13

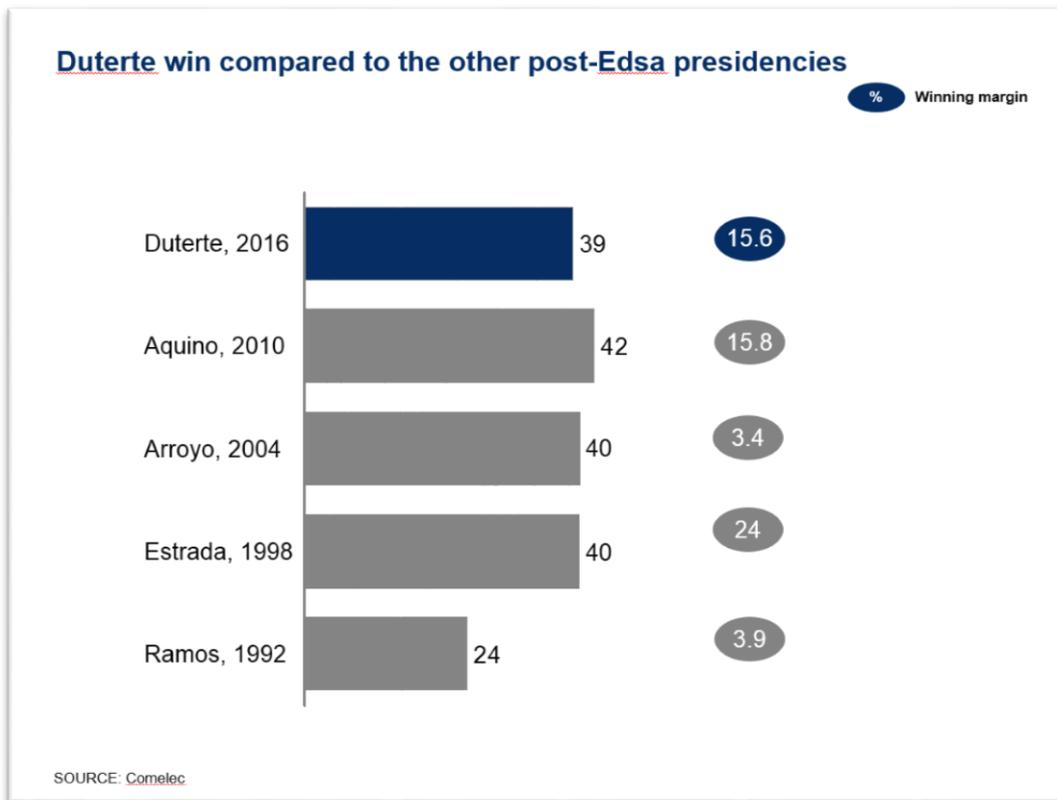
* <http://ph.rappler.com/elections/2016/results/official>

Duterte’s victory presents an impressive number of historic firsts. The most important include being the first president-elect from Mindanao (the poorest, most troubled of the country’s three main island groups), the first president-elect to come directly from a local and not national political office, and, at 71 years old, the oldest.³ Despite these firsts, and despite starting the campaign six weeks late and facing three challengers with traditionally

² See <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B3b9qPFV1cRDTk16WXpXZmlVM0k/edit>

³ See <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/132862-rodriigo-duterte-president-firsts>

formidable electoral strengths, Duterte won easily. The size of his winning plurality and margin of victory compare favourably with the last five presidential elections.



As many as 81 per cent of registered voters cast a presidential ballot in 2016, the second highest turnout of registered voters for these five elections and over 5% higher than the 2010 turnout.⁴

DIFFERENCES

Duterte's victory shows that many of the entrenched assumptions about how to win Philippine presidential elections were invalid for this election. Duterte was purely a local/provincial personality, not a celebrity; did not have the support of traditional money politics or a pre-existing network of local political bosses supporting him; was not the candidate of a major party; and is not the scion of a generations-old, national-level political dynasty. His three serious challengers each had a combination of these in their favour. So, how did he win?

⁴ See <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/784634/comelec-voter-turnout-at-81-percent>. The 1998 turnout was estimated at 86.1%. See <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/133335-high-voter-turnout-2016-philippine-elections>

Candidate Duterte

Duterte captured the hallowed mantle as the anti-establishment candidate coming from the outside, and was the most able to connect most deeply with the widest spectrum of voters.⁵ He was the only one to have won provinces (or districts in Metro Manila) across the four main voting regions in the country, namely Metro Manila, Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. According to the quick count conducted the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting, Duterte exceeded his national plurality in 9 of the 19 voting regions, won 2 with smaller pluralities, and lost 8.⁶ As expected, Duterte won all six regions in Mindanao with a total of 63.9% of the votes. Duterte also did very well in Central Visayas where his family originates from and where the One Cebu Party had switched allegiances from Binay to Duterte during the campaign. More surprising was Duterte's victory in Central Luzon over Grace Poe (34.1% to 30.7%) where Poe's father won convincingly in the 2004 presidential election. Likewise, Duterte beat Poe in Southern Luzon (CALABARZON region) by 33.9% to 27.5% notwithstanding Poe's father being triumphant there in 2004.

In policy terms, the strong anti-crime message at the centre of his campaign and his mayorship in Davao City had national appeal. Uniquely, Duterte attracted significant support from Mindanao and the Visayas on a campaign to reduce the dominance of "imperial Manila" in national politics and infrastructure spending, by campaigning on a switch to a federal parliamentary system. At the same time, he won by a landslide in the national capital on voters' hope that he can bring order to Metro Manila and the country as he has done in Davao City.

The credibility he brings to long-thwarted efforts to resolve the nation-spanning communist insurgency and the Moro Islamic rebellion in Mindanao also garnered hope and support from affected voters. Duterte has good ties with the militant left and the leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines, Jose Maria Sison. He is part Moro himself and has good relations with both the leadership of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and with Nur Misuari, the founder of the Moro National Liberation Front. The MILF and MNLF are the two main Moro insurgent groups.

Three factors beyond Duterte's own political acumen help explain his ability to overcome the obstacles that had effectively blocked previous presidential candidates. Each is structural in nature and is likely to become more important in future presidential elections. Duterte's outsider victory is unlikely to be a one-off anomaly.

Urban voters

Duterte's biggest plurality and margin of victory in the Philippines outside of his Mindanao and Central Visayan bailiwicks was Metro Manila (National Capital Region). He amassed 44.1% of the votes. This was more than double what was gained by Grace Poe who came in second with 20.7%. He also triumphed in 15 of 16 voting districts in Metro Manila. The

⁵ See <http://www.philstar.com/opinion/2016/05/10/1581668/angry>

⁶ Of these eight regions, he finished second in four, and third in four. See <http://election2016.ppcrv.org/wall/maparea.php>

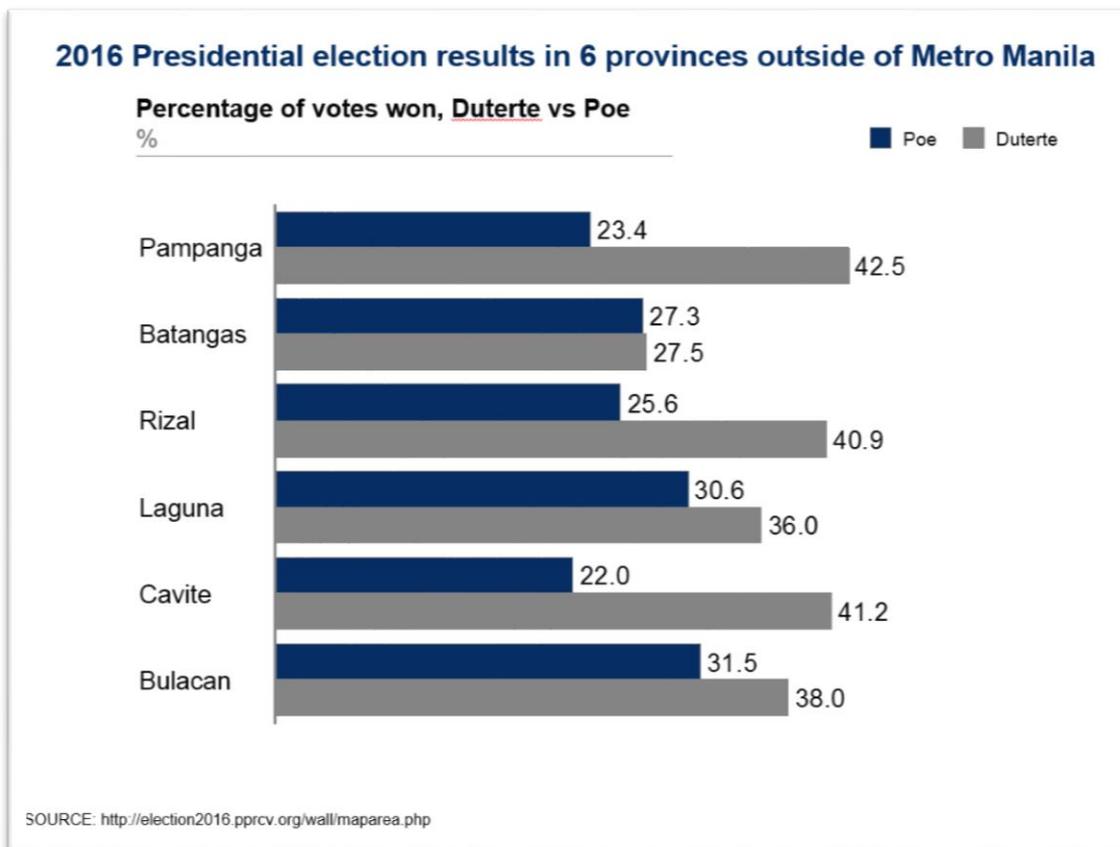
only one he lost was Makati City, which Jejomar Binay and his family have dominated for the last three decades.

The size and margin of Duterte's victory in Metro Manila are arguably the most impressive of the last five presidential elections. Benigno Aquino III won a larger plurality in 2010, winning 47.1% but won one less voting district than Duterte (losing in Las Piñas and Navotas). Aquino's plurality in Metro Manila was 5% larger than his national one, while Duterte's was 5.5% larger. Aquino's margin of victory in Metro Manila was 17.8%, only 2% higher than his national margin while Duterte's was 23.4%, 8.3% greater than his national one. In 2004, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo lost Metro Manila to Fernando Poe Jr by well over 400,000 votes and lost to him in 15 of 16 districts (only winning Las Piñas and by less than 2,000 votes). In 1998, Joseph Estrada won Metro Manila with 33% of the vote and a 5% margin over second-place Raul Roco. Estrada's plurality in Metro Manila and his margin of victory were substantially smaller than his national tallies.

Duterte also won the six provinces surrounding Metro Manila. These are the fastest growing part of the country in population terms and house the 3+ million people that are the difference between Metro Manila's day-time population of over 14 million people and the night-time one of slightly over 11 million. Grace Poe finished second in all six provinces. In 2004, her father had won 4 of 6 provinces while Macapagal-Arroyo only won her family dynasty's Pampanga bailiwick.⁷ Aquino, like Duterte, won all six in 2010 but with smaller margins and pluralities in general.

It was Duterte's huge win in Metro Manila and triumphs in the city's hinterland provinces which delivered him victory. These voting populations were not primarily guided by linguistic or regional identity. Duterte has no ascriptive links to these areas and yet won them convincingly due to these voters' perception of his performance as mayor (or vice-mayor) of Davao City for 27 of the last 30 years. Under Duterte, Davao City is seen widely in the Philippines as having dealt well with its peace and order, and urban infrastructure and traffic management situations, two areas that Manileños perceive have worsened significantly in the nation's capital in the past decade.

⁷ Pampanga province is the bailiwick of the Macapagal dynasty. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, daughter of the 9th president of the Philippines, won the province convincingly in 2004 with over 80% of the total vote and a margin over Fernando Poe Jr of 69.5%. Duterte has promised to pardon former president Macapagal-Arroyo and has nominated a number of her former cabinet members suggesting close political ties between the two.



The voting appeal of Duterte’s record as mayor of Davao City also explains why Duterte did better in urban areas across the country, even in provinces and regions where he lost. Despite finishing a distant third in Palawan province, Duterte won Puerto Princesa city. Also, Duterte finished a distant third in the Cordillera Autonomous Region on Luzon but won Baguio City decisively. Similarly, in Negros Occidental, Duterte finished second, 13% behind Roxas but won Dumaguete City by over 15%. This presidential election showed a clear difference in voting patterns between urban and rural areas.

Overseas absentee voters

How overseas Filipinos vote increasingly is an accurate bellwether of the outcomes of the national elections suggesting that their participation going forward is key. The 2016 elections saw the highest number of overseas voters participating in the elections. Overseas Filipinos first voted in national elections in 2004. According to the Commission on Elections, 432,706 people or 31% of 1,376,067 registered overseas absentee voter cast their votes for the 9 May elections in 82 posts globally.⁸ Given that the total number of registered overseas voters is just 13% of the estimated over 10 million Filipinos overseas, there is still

⁸ <http://beta.philstar.com/headlines/2016/05/14/1583190/comelec-tally-of-overseas-votes-complete>. Of the estimated 10.2 million Filipinos currently overseas, around 4.8 million are permanent residents, 4.2 million are temporary residents and 1.2 million are irregulars or not properly documented.

a lot of room to grow in the future in tapping this voting segment. Logistical issues such as distance from overseas missions/embassies, challenges in getting time off work and lack of voter information on timelines, among other factors, reduced final voter turn-outs. However, various overseas missions have done well in increasing participation through massive information campaigns, supporting postal voting, as well as providing free shuttle services to bring voters to the embassies and consulates.

Table Two: Overseas absentee voting

Year	Registered vote	Voters who actually voted	Voter Turnout
2016	1,376,067	432,706	31%
2013	710,951	118,823	17%
2010	568,733	153,323	27%
2007	485,720	81,732	17%
2004	359,296	233,137	65%

Source: COMELEC

Among overseas absentee voters, Duterte came out as the overwhelming choice for president, garnering 72% of the votes compared to Roxas's 10% and Poe's 5%. Duterte did not follow the well-beaten path of visiting overseas voting hot-spots during the campaign. Mar Roxas and Grace Poe did, calling on vote-rich Hong Kong during the formal campaign period. In the 2010 elections, Aquino also garnered a majority of overseas absentee voters, winning 54.5% of the total votes cast.

Given their exposure to different economic and political systems, overseas Filipinos have a privileged vantage point compared to voters back home in the Philippines. More importantly, their role as the financial providers to their families put them in an influential position in shaping their families' and their immediate social networks' voting choices. Duterte was able to connect with these overseas voters through social media, emerging unanimously as the choice across all overseas voting posts, particularly in countries with a predominance of overseas Filipino workers among voters. Going forward, the vote of overseas Filipinos will increasingly matter as more get registered and accessibility to polling registration and voting increase through postal ballots.

Post	Actually voted	Votes cast			Percentage		
		Duterte	Poe	Roxas	Duterte	Poe	Roxas
Abu Dhabi	62,103	51,879	1,708	3,985	84%	3%	6%
Hong Kong	52,449	34,004	3,173	4,927	65%	6%	9%
US	49,671	30,277	2,898	4,533	61%	6%	9%
Saudi Arabia	46,912	35,713	2,515	4,890	76%	5%	10%
Singapore	39,651	30,389	1,276	3,746	77%	3%	9%
Canada	22,738	15,879	1,708	3,985	70%	8%	18%
Qatar	15,694	12,475	558	1,333	79%	4%	8%
Japan	14,886	11,216	829	1,274	75%	6%	9%
Italy	14,159	9,249	1,276	1,859	65%	9%	13%
Taiwan	13,082	11,544	319	343	88%	2%	3%
TOTAL	432,706	313,346	22,476	41,263	72%	5%	10%

Source: COMELEC

(Social) media over machine

Traditionally, a candidate’s political machinery has been crucial in delivering votes. While the role of machinery has been slowly changing, nowhere has this change been so clearly magnified than in Duterte’s victory.

Among the four main candidates, Duterte officially spent the lowest amount at PhP 371.5 mn (USD 8 mn) compared to big spenders Poe (PhP 510 mn/USD 11 mn) and Binay (PhP 463.3 mn/USD 10 mn).⁹ All the candidates had equal access to above-the-line advertisement on TV, radio and newspapers. A key factor that explains Duterte’s win is how his campaign team recognized the importance of social media, and effectively harnessed it and utilized and created online communities. Going forward, social media will define future elections, and candidates whose campaign teams know how to develop a sophisticated digital media campaign and link it with their on-the-ground messages will improve their chances.

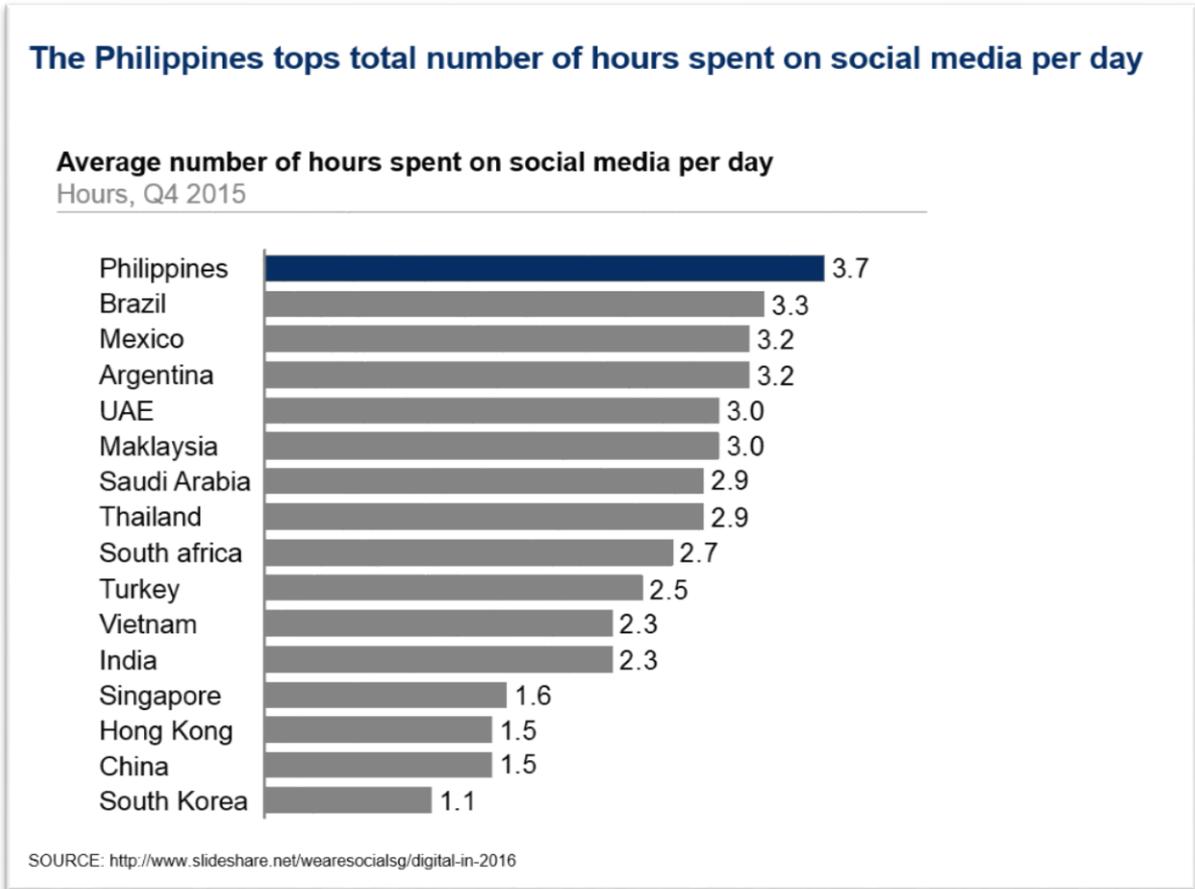
The Philippines – with its 75.4 million mobile users and about 40 million smartphone owners in 2016 – actually owns the distinction globally of spending the most hours daily on social media per capita.¹⁰ This is despite the country being judged as having the second slowest average download speed among 22 Asian countries (at 3.64 Mbps) besting only Afghanistan at 2.52 Mbps and embarrassingly behind Myanmar and Pakistan, which performed better at 6.54 Mbps and 4 Mbps respectively.¹¹ Paradoxically, the affordability of access to social networks is driven by prepaid data offerings made by mobile operators Globe and Smart, who provides unlimited access to Facebook, Facebook Messenger and

⁹ <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/569233/news/nation/duterte-reports-spending-p371-m-for-campaign>. Administration candidate Mar Roxas missed the deadline for submission and is yet to provide information on his own campaign expenditure.

¹⁰ See Philippines section in *Digital in 2016 report* by We are Social’s January 2016 at <http://www.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/digital-in-2016>

¹¹ <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/489762/scitech/technology/list-philippines-ranks-21st-of-22-asian-countries-in-internet-download-speed>

similar popular social networking or messaging applications for as low as P10 /USD 20 cents per day.



Duterte’s campaign team has been the most effective in utilizing the power of social media in terms of creation of online communities, message delivery and amplification by making messages viral and eventually translating online communities to offline action that delivered the votes on election day.

Duterte’s win was not accidental. Rather, it was the outcome of sophisticated planning and use of social media, under the management of Nick Gabunada, ex-Senior VP of national media firm ABS-CBN’s sales and marketing. In an interview with *Rappler*,¹² Gabunada revealed that his team compared to that of other candidates was the most passionate and technology savvy. Recognizing the power of social media, they reached out to existing online groups and communities and categorized them into four major groups: Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

Among these groups, influencers and administrators were identified who could act as conduits of weekly messages aligned with the overall campaign messages. A “message of the week” was issued in the form video, and in messages or texts that could be popularized

¹² See <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/rich-media/134979-rodriigo-duterte-social-media-campaign-nic-gabunada>

as Twitter hashtags or posted and reposted in social media platforms like Facebook. Influencers and their communities were also given specific calls to actions, such as participating as audience members in the televised presidential debates, highlighting parts of the debate when Duterte performed well and popularizing these by posting and reposting in various social media groups. Duterte's social media team also created and curated specific content developed by its volunteers which targeted different classes of voters. Finally, the campaign team effectively used drones to cover the crowds that attended Duterte campaign sorties, which created the feel of real-time groundswells following the candidate's campaign.

Coordinating and working in tandem with the traditional media team and on-the-ground political field agents, the social media team effectively used available data and responded in an agile manner to changing campaign circumstances, depending on what changing issues Duterte had to deal with. For instance, when Duterte faced a challenge with regards to owning an undeclared bank account, the campaign team popularized the hashtag #DuterteTilTheEnd to counter the campaign. At another point, they ensured that the hashtag #DutertePaRin (#WestillsupportDuterte) would trend. Social media were also heavily used to invite supporters to participate in offline/physical activities, take photos and videos during campaign sorties and events that were further fed online.

The social media team had very limited resources, having been allocated a budget of only PhP 10 million (USD 217,000). Gabunada revealed that their expenses were minor (snacks, travel and boosting expenses) and that they relied on an army of volunteers numbering from 400 to 500 people who were influencers or administrators of communities that range from 10,000 to 800,000 members.

However, the social campaign tactics did not just stay with positive messaging, as negative campaigning was also part of their arsenal, making use of readily available public materials on the other candidates and amplifying its distribution online. When the negative campaigns got out of hand, Duterte who had professed "no knowledge of how to use social media except knowing the fact that internet in the Philippines is slow,"¹³ had to come issue official statements to stop his own supporters from threatening others.

Contributing continuities

Duterte's victory clearly did not break all the rules of Philippine electoral politics. Rather, he benefitted from and took advantage of some powerful structural continuities. He successfully sought the support of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* religious group and its assumed block vote of up to 2 million of its faithful.¹⁴ Duterte even stepped out of character and donned a *barong tagalog* (Filipino formal wear) for that meeting. His landslide win in

¹³ See <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/rich-media/134979-rodrico-duterte-social-media-campaign-nic-gabunada>

¹⁴ See <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/05/05/1580369/inc-endorses-duterte-marcos>

Mindanao benefitted greatly from Mindanaoans voting for one of their own.¹⁵ In his home Davao region, he won close to 90% of votes cast. His decisive wins in Cebu, Pampanga, and Ilocos Norte reflected support from the dominant provincial dynasties, the Garcias and Osmeñas, the Macapagals, and the Marcoses respectively. These same factors explain how Roxas was able to win the Western Visayas and Negros comfortably¹⁶, as well as Binay's huge margin in Cagayan Valley.¹⁷

Duterte's victory over Roxas again reflects a powerful trend in presidential elections in the post-Marcos era. Fidel Ramos in 1992, who won by a narrow margin and with less than a quarter of the vote, was the only candidate favoured by the last elected president to win. In 1998, Estrada won with the largest margin of victory over Ramos' favoured candidate Jose de Venecia. In 2004, in questionable circumstances, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo squeaked by Fernando Poe Jr., Estrada's best friend.¹⁸ In 2010, Aquino easily beat Estrada who had been pardoned by Macapagal-Arroyo in 2007 and former Secretary of Defense Gilberto Teodoro whom Macapagal-Arroyo endorsed.¹⁹ Anti-incumbency is a powerful trend in post-Marcos presidential elections.

Finally, Duterte was aided by the weakness of political parties in the Philippines and the fluid nature of political loyalties of local leaders which was at the core of this weakness. Duterte's late entry into the presidential race left him the candidate of a small, Mindanao-based party, PDP-Laban, facing Roxas backed by the Liberal Party, the largest in the country. Poe was backed by the second largest party, the Nationalist People's Coalition supported by tycoon Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr. Binay is the head of the United Nationalist Alliance that served as the main opposition party in the legislature. Yet, local candidates and officials from these larger parties actively supported Duterte's campaign.²⁰ The success of Duterte's team in gaining support from local political leaders of parties backing other presidential candidates helps explain PDP-Laban's ease in quickly forming a majority coalition in the House of Representatives despite having only three elected members.²¹ President Ramos and Jose de Venecia carried out a similar feat in 1992.²²

¹⁵ Duterte's margin of victory over Roxas in Mindanao accounted for 60% of the total national margin. Mindanao accounted for 22% of votes cast.

¹⁶ Roxas' margin of victory over Duterte in these two regions was over 1.4 million votes

¹⁷ Binay won 45.9% of the vote in this region and had a margin of more than 400,000 votes over Duterte.

¹⁸ Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's 2004 victory is tainted by widespread and credible allegations of vote-fixing in her favour. See <http://pcij.org/i-report/special/garcillano.html>

¹⁹ See <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/530926/news/nation/how-past-presidents-chosen-ones-fared-in-previous-polls>

²⁰ See <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/local-news/2016/04/15/sitoys-now-support-duterte-468190>; <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/743388/lp-leaders-in-mindanao-go-for-duterte> ; <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/manila/local-news/2016/04/29/binay-spokesperson-jumps-ship-support-duterte-470741> ; <http://politics.com.ph/npc-half-hearted-in-supporting-grace-dutertes-camp-expects-some-party-members-to-bet-on-her-rivals/> ;

²¹ See <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/05/29/1588094/pdp-laban-members-in-house-to-exceed-100->

²² See <http://www.philstar.com/opinion/2016/06/03/1589620/rainbow-coalition-reborn>

Presidential opening

Duterte's come-from-behind victory undercuts the conventional, largely pejorative wisdom about Philippine democracy and presidential elections that has held for so long. Large and expanding groups of voters are voting less along ascriptive lines and more on instrumental, performance-based ones. At the same time, the efficacy of money and party machinery was shown to be lacking. Without a doubt, social media has changed the way electoral campaigns can be won in future elections in the Philippines. While principles of organizing, community building, research, message crafting and real offline organization remain crucial, how one translates these into an online digital strategy will be a distinguishing factor differentiating success from failure. A key structural shift in how politics will be conducted in the Philippines is how social media will be leveraged to not merely win electoral campaigns but also help run the government, not merely as a feedback loop for problems and issues but also to gently nudge opinions along preferred policy positions.

Each mutually reinforcing trend opens up the range of possible presidential candidates and the ways of amassing a winning plurality. Going forward, we can expect more presidential candidates to come directly from local posts or to garner more of their national political appeal through their record as local officials. Rather than scouring the halls of national power searching for the next likely president, analysts will have to look online and at local leaders.

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