

The Paradoxical Security Implications of Duterte's War on Drugs: Emergence of a Domestic Security Dilemma

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Paradoxical Security Implications of Duterte's War on Drugs: Emergence of a Domestic Security Dilemma

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ABSTRACT

Duterte's war on drugs initially gained strong support but has bolstered public judgments of insecurity approaching his last presidential term. The conduct of extrajudicial killings, house raids, and incentives to kill for law enforcers have resulted in paradoxical security implications for Duterte's counternarcotics policy since 2016. This article employs Field's 2016 theory of Domestic Security Dilemma and argues that paradoxical security implications are well present in Duterte's anti-illegal drug campaign, proven by the following phases of the domestic security dilemma; 1) occurrence of a domestic security threat in the form of drug abuses, 2) Duterte's response through counternarcotic policies of extrajudicial killings, house raids, and incentives to kill for law enforcers, 3) security paradox emerges with concerns over possible misuse of government power, leading to citizens to be insecure and fear the government, and 4) implications of difficult counternarcotic policies to be implemented in the future, and the constant fear of conflict due to the introduced rhetoric of 'war.'

KEYWORDS

Domestic Security Dilemma, War on Drugs, Counternarcotic Policy, Security Paradox

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1. Introduction

From 2016-2019, the International Criminal Court (ICC) estimates that 30,000 people have died due to Duterte's counternarcotics policy of 'war on drugs' (Ratcliffe, 2021). Duterte gained public support to take office due to his merciless rhetoric on criminals and perpetrators of illicit drug trafficking. The rising number of drug misuse in the Philippines staggeringly increased with time, and the Philippines in 2016 seemed to need a more assertive stance in eradicating the problem (Curato, 2016). Less is known, though, that once Duterte took office, a series of widespread, systematic attacks against civilians occurred (Utama, 2021). Duterte attempted to send a message to criminals and narcotics-related crimes (drug dealers and users) that there is no compromise to their actions in the Philippines (Castro, 2020; Lamchek & Sanchez, 2020). They will be humiliated and killed in the name of the Filipino people's safety and protection.

Duterte's public support rose in 2016 and in continued to surge in the early months of his election to office. However, a recent survey indicates that from 2018-2019, the majority of Filipinos have been against Duterte's harsh policies against drug traffickers and users (Cornelio & Medina, 2019; Thompson, 2021a). As much as 76% of Filipinos now believe that human rights abuses are currently off-limits, with another 56% agreeing for the UN Human Rights Council to conduct investigations under the allegations of extrajudicial killings and destruction of human rights in the country (Asia Watch, 2020). Catholic activist [12] also expressed their disagreement due to the massive collateral damage of Duterte's anti-illegal drugs campaign (Wills, 2019). Duterte's war on drugs is among one of the worst human rights situations faced by the Filipino people, indicating that Duterte currently does not hold the majority of support for his anti-illegal drugs campaign.

What has taken place since 2016 with Duterte's war on drugs has been deemed unacceptable by global norms (Putra & Cangara, 2018). This should not be seen as a surprise, considering that most traditional and non-traditional security threats arose due to a disintegration of national to global norms (Anugrah et al., 2020; Beddu et al., 2020). The drug crackdown operations include

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extrajudicial killings and are described as a form of crime against humanity (Putra, 2020a; Reyes, 2016a). The reason for this is that house raids do not require search and arrest warrants, as crackdowns are randomly undertaken under the preference of local police officers. In many instances, the overall process of capturing suspects is publicly showcased and staged to visually publicize the effectiveness of Duterte's counternarcotics policy (BBC, 2020).

In 2017, based on unpublished reports on intelligence shared with the media *Reuters*, it is stated that police officers attain a considerable amount of incentives in undergoing illegal drug-related killings (Felbab-Brown, 2017). Special incentives in the form of cash are given for police officers not to capture but directly prosecute (kill) perpetrators of either drug dealing or drug use. An additional 10,000 pesos are given for killing an individual, one million pesos for the killing of drug-related distributors and wholesalers, and five million pesos for killing individuals under the category of 'drug lords' (Felbab-Brown, 2017). Police officers, thus, under Duterte's rule, now have that additional motivation to directly prosecute suspected criminals and drug users, and traffickers due to the additional incentives attached to the action of killing them (Heydarian, 2017; Holden, 2022; Siena, 2022). This situation does create massive concerns for human rights activists, as it allows room for extrajudicial killings to take place in slum areas, as well as residences designated for middle-low income families (Cruz de Ciriaco, 2017; Sales, 2020). The killings thus also result in an issue in the economy for the most vulnerable parts of the community in the Philippines (Cabato, 2019). Duterte's war on drugs is a double-edged sword, showing a higher tendency to be of disadvantage to the Filipino people.

This article attempts to understand better the emerging public disagreement over Duterte's war on drugs, evolving within the public domains of the Filipino people. In doing so, this article employs Anthony Field's 2016 theory of 'domestic security dilemma,' which extends the International relations theory of 'security dilemma' introduced in the early 1950s. Duterte's special incentives to the Philippines police officers in undergoing extrajudicial killings of suspects of illicit drug-related activities and the overall increase in the country's capacity to fight narcotics have led to an increased capacity to oppress civilians. The growing concerns over possible excessive government power have grown strong in the Philippines. Thus, when government policies are aimed to make people safer from the threat associated with narcotics, it also establishes the unintended outcome of growing concerns over oppression related to Duterte's war on drugs.

2. Literature Review

Exists a vast number of articles highlighting Duterte's unique measures in his war on drugs. This literature review will be structured based on two significant discourses that can help us comprehend the current decline of public support for Duterte's attempt to heighten its national security. The first discourse introduced is literature related to Duterte's war on drugs and how academics have attempted to understand its growing human rights concerns. The second discourse focuses on the theory of the 'domestic security dilemma' and how it is relevant to the discussions of this article.

A major discourse related to this article concerns the analysis of Duterte's methods in counternarcotic operations. (Kenny and Holmes 2020) made a ground-breaking article that focused on penal populism, connecting Duterte to public opinion and the war on drugs in the Philippines. He tested whether a coherent correlation existed between the penal policies adopted, which in this case include the actions of extrajudicial killings, to populist attitudes and preferences over a charismatic leadership. This article provides great insight into understanding the public support for Duterte in his early years, from the questions of why he was initially supported and the evolution of opinions of his current leadership. Nevertheless, other articles related to this discourse majorly provided additional explanations for understanding the concerning human rights abuses taking place in the Philippines.

(Raffle 2021) described the war on drugs as a form of 'state vigilantism.' He argued that it is not normal for state actors to conduct extrajudicial killings of their people on baseless evidence and without a fair trial. It is thus an example of state actors that is taking the next step of oppressing its people, but without falling under the category of 'dictatorship.' There are also other interpretations of Duterte's war on drugs, including by (Reyes 2016b), who attempted to construe the meaning of violent actions undertaken by Duterte, which in this case is translated as a political message to political and societal elements in the Philippines. Elements here include the community (deterrent effect), and political elites (opposition parties), indicating Duterte's seriousness in eradicating the persistent problem of drug abuse in the Philippines (Ordoñez & Borja, 2018). Furthermore, a radical interpretation of Duterte's anti-illegal drugs campaign was elaborated by (Simangan 2018), stating that it falls under the category of genocide. This article contributed immensely to this discourse, as it attempts to put the actions of extrajudicial killings and human rights oppressions to a level where it results in both physical and psychological ramifications, which thus constitutes a form of genocide.

In this discourse, an important topic explored by academics includes the process of Duterte securitizing the issue of narcotics in the Philippines. Past scholars have utilized the Copenhagen School's securitization theory to understand the process of drug-related problems framed as a security issue in the Philippines. Past works by (Kim et al. 2017) focused on a wider group of securitization that focused on marginalized groups in the Asia Pacific. This included countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and China, on which several study cases on marginalized groups were focused, proving that several countries in the Asia Pacific have conducted securitization in several domestic security-related issues. (Crick 2012), which focused on the element of existential

threat from Copenhagen School's securitization theory. A complete analysis of the securitization of Duterte's war on drugs can be found in research entitled 'Securitization in the Philippines' Drug War Disclosing the Power-Relations between Duterte, Filipino Middle Class, and the Urban Poor' (Utama 2021). Utama focused on the rhetoric of Duterte's past speeches and how it eventually constituted a form of securitization of the drug issue in the Philippines. Furthermore, Utama also attempted to link several crises related to Duterte's war on drugs with the Filipino middle class and urban poor, which on many occasions, have become the victims of Duterte's war on drugs. An asymmetrical power relation was concluded in his article, with Duterte exploiting the poor societies of the Philippines in order to keep in power through his war on drugs.

The second discourse focuses on the process of constructing the theory of 'security dilemma' in a domestic setting. To employ Field's theory of domestic security dilemma in understanding Duterte's war on drugs, we will need to outline prior discussions on the International relations concept of the security dilemma. John Herz and Herbert Butterfield contributed immensely to understanding the presence of a security dilemma for countries in an International relations setting. (Herz 1950) in his writing, 'idealist internationalism and security dilemma,' provided a core outline of the theory of security dilemma. He stated that countries tend to enhance their security due to the anarchic system in the International order. However, such actions tend to be counter-productive because of the anxiety it creates among other countries (militarily provoking others) (Herz, 1950).

It is worth noting that past academics have not eliminated the possibility that the security dilemma can be implemented in a domestic setting. Herz even stated that such competition over security could happen on other levels, including among individuals and groups (Herz, 1950). Taliaferro, in his article, 'security seeking under anarchy: defensive realism revisited,' stated that the security dilemma exists in any possible anarchic environment and not just in the international system, hinting at a possible implementation in domestic settings (Taliaferro, 2000).

In translating public opposition over counterterrorism measures in the US, Field in 2016 wrote 'The dynamics of terrorism and counterterrorism: Understanding the domestic security dilemma.' Field's central argument here is to justify a form of security dilemma in a domestic setting, stating that the fundamental characteristic of a security dilemma is not the anarchical environment that it is present in but the "inherent vulnerability of human beings" (Field, 2016a). This makes it feasible for the theory of security dilemma to focus on variables among individuals, groups in domestic society, as well as states. He argues that the US counterterrorism policy's aim is to protect its citizens, but at the same time raises the unwanted outcome of making people fear government oppression.

Despite earlier works hinting at the feasibility of implementing the security dilemma in a domestic setting, works on this are scarce. Besides Field's 2016 article, (Putra 2020b) attempted to implement the theory of domestic security dilemma in Indonesia's counterterrorism policy against terrorism and separatist movements in the country. It concluded the same as past relevant works on domestic security dilemma, in which Indonesia's Densus 88's increased capacity has fostered insecurity among the Indonesian citizens. Due to the scarcity of this discourse, this article will contribute immensely to the discourse of analyzing the security dilemma in a domestic setting, specifically in the case of counternarcotic operations such as Duterte's war on drugs. Though exists past literature aiming to comprehend Duterte's human rights abuses in his anti-illegal drugs campaign, none has attempted to decipher the growing decline in Duterte's public support for his war on drugs campaign and the increasing fear among the Filipino people that emerged approaching the end of Duterte's presidential term.

3. Methodology

This qualitative research aims to comprehend the public opposition to Duterte's war on drugs counternarcotic policy through the theory of domestic security dilemma. In doing so, this article implements both primary and secondary data associated with Duterte's anti-illegal drug campaign between 2016 and 2021. The year 2016 is justified as it represents the first year of Duterte's position as the president of the Philippines and the implementation of Duterte's war on drugs. The timeframe of five years is deemed sufficient to analyze the early public support gained and the dynamics of the policy leading to public opposition approaching the second to third year of its implementation.

As stated in the literature review, this article employs Anthony Field's 2016 domestic security dilemma theory to apprehend the growing decline of public support for Duterte's war on drugs. The domestic security dilemma is when implemented government policies initially intended to safeguard citizens eventually translate into a source of fear and threat among citizens due to oppression concerns. In the context of counternarcotic operations, Duterte increasing the capacity of law enforcement against drug users and traffickers has fostered insecurity among the Filipino people.

4. Results and Discussion

Since 2016, Duterte has waged war on one of the most persistent domestic issues faced by the people of the Philippines, the misuse of illegal substances (drugs). The rising number of drug traffickers, distributors, and users, eventually established a sense of urgency among the Filipino people to find a resolution to the emerging issue. Duterte, since his electoral campaigns, has stressed the need for a coercive-based policy in responding to the rise of illegal drug use in the Philippines (Thompson, 2021b). It is noted

that Duterte's public support drastically increased once he introduced the rhetoric of war and hard stances against drug users and distributors (Simangan, 2018).

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As the first process in identifying the presence of a domestic security dilemma in Duterte's war on drugs, it is pivotal to understand the essential security threat that illegal drug-related activities construct among the Philippine people. Illegal drug trafficking is an emerging transnational crime and has resulted in the deaths of millions of people due to drug-related violence (Putra, 2015). As seen in many Latin American countries, the cultivation, production, the trafficking of illegal drugs only cause security threats and insecurity among the citizens of a country. Despite the sudden increase of unlawful job opportunities that are promising for low-income families, these types of professions will not last long due to state counter-narcotic operations.

The Philippines faced a slightly similar dynamic, as the lack of a rigorous punishment has resulted in the rise of illegal drug trafficking in the Philippines and the increase of illegal substance use among the Filipino people. But what eventually occurred following those sets of circumstances was a sense of insecurity among the Filipino people. Misuse of illegal substances does not only affect their own bodies, as it toxically affects the environment around them. Drug users, in this instance, tend to become violent and irrational individuals with unprecedented intentions for their environment. Gang violence, robberies, and other drug-related violence have upsurged in the past several years before Duterte's presidency. It has thus established an immense sense of insecurity in the Philippines, urging policymakers to embrace a tough stance to respond to the growing insecurities associated with illegal drug use and distribution.

The second process of the domestic security dilemma is the government's response in handling the issue of illegal drug use and distribution. It is essential to note that Duterte's rise in popularity is associated with the rhetoric used during his campaigns. The term 'war on drugs' is among his strongest rhetoric to imply Duterte's tough stance in his future counternarcotics policy (Crick, 2012). In this second process, this article highlights several of Duterte's preferred anti-illegal drugs campaigns as an attempt to increase the security of the Filipino people. His operations included extrajudicial killings, meaning killings based on the subjective decision of law enforcers without prior judicial processing. Another policy implemented by Duterte is the conduct of house raids without search and arrest warrants. Such a policy makes it possible to misuse power, as again, decisions to act are purely based on the subjective judgment of local law enforcers, without any check and balance systems in place. Citizens will not know how to reject any allegations made by law enforcers and do not know where to go if wrongdoings occur.

The enhancement of law enforcement mandates, in this case, is highlighted as it is an essential element for the rise of fear and insecurity among citizens and concerns over misuse of power. The last is the increase in incentives for killing drug dealers, users, and criminals in general. As stated in past sections, local police officers are awarded a specific amount of money based on the status of the person they killed. The keyword here is killing, not capturing suspected individuals related to illegal drug activities. The incentives given reflect the ultimate fear and insecurity among the Filipino people, as there are also concerns of capturing and killings being staged, which raises the concern of insecurity (Reyes, 2016a). Out of all of Duterte's efforts to increase the security of the Filipino people in his war on drugs campaign, the third policy is the most disturbing. The action of killing individuals and attaining incentives for it only raises the suspicions among the Philippines people of the possibility of misuse of power to attain additional cash incentives.

The second process above is vital in identifying the overall presence of a domestic security dilemma. Duterte's war on drug policy by enhancing the mandate of law enforcers is aimed at increasing the security of the citizens. As illustrated in the literature review, the key to identifying the presence of a security dilemma is the intention of the government of a country to enhance its capabilities for defensive and peaceful purposes. In a domestic setting, as outlined by Field, the government policies undertaken aim to protect its citizens from an existential threat in the form of drug-related activities (Field, 2016a). The presence of narcotics in the Philippines only fosters insecurity among its people. Therefore, government actors are urged to respond accordingly. Following this second phase of the security dilemma is the interpretation of the Filipino people of Duterte's counternarcotics policies.

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The third process of the domestic security dilemma in Duterte's war on drugs is the emergence of the unintended consequence of the Filipino people becoming worried about possible government oppression. The number of citizens reported killed due to Duterte's war on drugs is estimated to be 30,000 individuals nationwide (Ratcliffe, 2021). Duterte, ineffectively implementing his war on drugs policy, has in the process circumvented judicial and political processes, which is not a good sign in the process of democratization. It allows room for fears over government oppression amid the implementation of worrying policies to counter the illegal drug-related activities in the Philippines. The security paradox that emerged is that individual security concerns are heightened with the rise of insecurity and fear among the citizens of the Philippines. As Herz elaborated in 1950, once state actors enhance their security, it could be counterproductive because it eventually creates anxiety (Herz, 1950). This security dilemma process makes countries fall under the trap of provoking military competition, leading to an endless cycle of conflict and tension among countries.

This article refers back to the writings of Field and Taliaferro, in which the presence of a security dilemma exists on a variety of levels, including among individuals, groups in domestic society, and the well-known level among states in the international system (Field, 2016a; Taliaferro, 2000). In the case of Duterte's war on drugs, Field is correct in assuming that a major element of the security dilemma is the inherent vulnerability of humans, which causes them to develop a sense of fear and insecurity (Field, 2016a). A domestic security dilemma thus is well present in the case of Duterte's war on drugs, as Duterte's intentions of increasing its capacities to safeguard the Filipino people from the impacts of drug-related events has caused the people to worry about government oppression. Therefore, Duterte's counternarcotics policies since his election in 2016 only strengthened his claims of Field about the relevance of a domestic security dilemma in countering domestic-level security threats. But Field's claims are solidified and supported in this article through the last phase of the domestic security dilemma, which is the outcome of declining public support.

Field in 2016 attempted to analyze why public support declined drastically in the US counterterrorism policy against terrorism. He concluded that this is due to the domestic security dilemma, in which the US citizens have developed a sense of fear and insecurity due to the US increase of capacity and policies that potentially impact civil liberties (Field, 2016b). The fourth process in the domestic security dilemma in Duterte's war on drugs relates to the eventual outcome of his policy, which is opposite to what he intended. Duterte intended that the policies of extrajudicial killings and increased capacity and incentives of law enforcers will solidify a sense of security and safeness among the Filipino people. A domestic security dilemma, though, occurred, as the results are opposite to the intentions of Duterte, as it has only established fear and insecurity among its citizens. Citizens of the Philippines are now more concerned about mass killings and family members being victims than the initial threat of insecurity caused by illegal drug-related activities.

Duterte's security policies thus become counterproductive, with the rise of public support decline from citizens that are tired of the war waged by Duterte. As Field concluded in his analysis, if a domestic security dilemma appears in the security posture of a government, it will be difficult to conduct effective policies to counter the security threat (Field, 2016b). Such a case also is relevant in Duterte's war on drugs, as now the main obstacle for the Philippine policymakers is how to regain the trust back to the government in any attempts to counter-narcotics in the Philippines. This is a critical point, as the presence of a security dilemma in Duterte's counternarcotics policy resulted in long-term implications for policymakers in the Philippines.

But a significant obstacle for the future is how Duterte implies that his counternarcotic policy is a form of war. Duterte's war on drugs rhetoric has long been focused on by academics (Kim et al., 2017; Utama, 2021). The consequence of securitizing a certain domestic problem cannot be undermined, as the repercussions to the citizen's psychology are detrimental. War on drugs implies that domestically, the Philippines is at war with non-state actors and against a transnational crime known as drug trafficking and use. No single citizen in the world wishes to live in constant fear and insecurity, let alone live in a country where war occurs. Citizens wish to live in peace, without any presence of war or conflict occurring in their country. Duterte's war on drugs has represented everything bad about war, including extrajudicial killings and the neglect of the judicial system.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, a domestic security dilemma is well and present in Duterte's war on drugs policy in the Philippines. Duterte, since 2016, has introduced policies including extrajudicial killings, house raids, and increased incentives for actions of killing drug users, dealers, and criminals. As a result, approximately 30,000 people have become victims of Duterte's counternarcotics policy. Public support thus has drastically declined throughout the years, as the Filipino people have slowly gone against their early stances of supporting Duterte's coercive-base policy in resolving the Philippines' drug problem.

To understand the decline of public support for Duterte's war on drugs, this article argues that a domestic security dilemma is present in Duterte's anti-illegal drug campaign. The domestic security dilemma entails that in the face of a domestic security threat, when governments increase their capacities to protect their citizens, an unintended repercussion is the people become worried about possible government oppression. This also means that there is a heightened sense of insecurity and fear due to the government policies in responding to the domestic security threat. In the case of Duterte's war on drugs, his policies of violently prosecuting suspects of drug use, dealers, and criminals in general, have the paradoxical security implications of fostering insecurity among people.

The process of Duterte's war on drugs as a domestic security dilemma includes; 1) the occurrence of a domestic security threat in the form of drug abuses, 2) Duterte's response through counternarcotic policies of extrajudicial killings, house raids, and incentives to kill for law enforcers, 3) security paradox emerges with concerns over possible misuse of government power, leading to citizens to be insecure and fear the government, and 4) implications of difficult counternarcotic policies to be implemented in the future and the constant fear of conflict due to the introduced rhetoric of 'war.'

A major limitation of this study is the lack of literature pertaining to the discourse on the domestic security dilemma. This should be a focus for future research, as discussions on this topic are pivotal to ensuring that national governance is aligned to human rights norms globally. A more diverse sample of countries should be focused upon in the study of the domestic security dilemma.

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