

Penal Populism and Duterte's War on Drugs

By Christopher Dann

Department of
Government

Project Aims

- President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines has become notorious for his hardline approach to drug eradication, leading to his infamous title 'the Punisher'.
- Yet, Curato's (2016) ethnographic study of villages in Tacloban City shows that drugs, before Duterte, was mostly a 'latent' issue for many aspirational Filipino voters.
- We thus seek to understand the extent to which Duterte exploited drugs as a 'penal populist' – dichotomising an us-them rhetoric between "virtuous citizens" and "hardened criminals" to make a latent issue 'salient' (Curato, 2016, p. 94).

Methodology

- We use polling data from Pulse Asia Research's 'Ulat ng Bayan' (People's Report), looking at the principal five urgent national issues for Filipino voters between September 2016 and September 2018.
- We then use a first-differences estimator to statistically test the relationship between Duterte's approval and trust ratings, for the same time period, and the five urgent national issues.

	Δ Duterte Approval _{it} (1)	Δ Duterte Trust _{it} (2)
Δ Increase pay _{it}	-2.7712*** (0.5690)	-3.3803 (3.0719)
Δ Create more jobs _{it}	2.9588*** (0.5418)	3.6735 (2.9251)
Δ Control inflation _{it}	-1.3212*** (0.2141)	-1.4764 (1.1557)
Δ Increase peace _{it}	-0.4054 (0.2699)	1.3255 (1.4569)
Δ Fight government corruption _{it}	-3.5591*** (0.8103)	-4.4457 (4.3742)
R^2	0.9243	0.4571

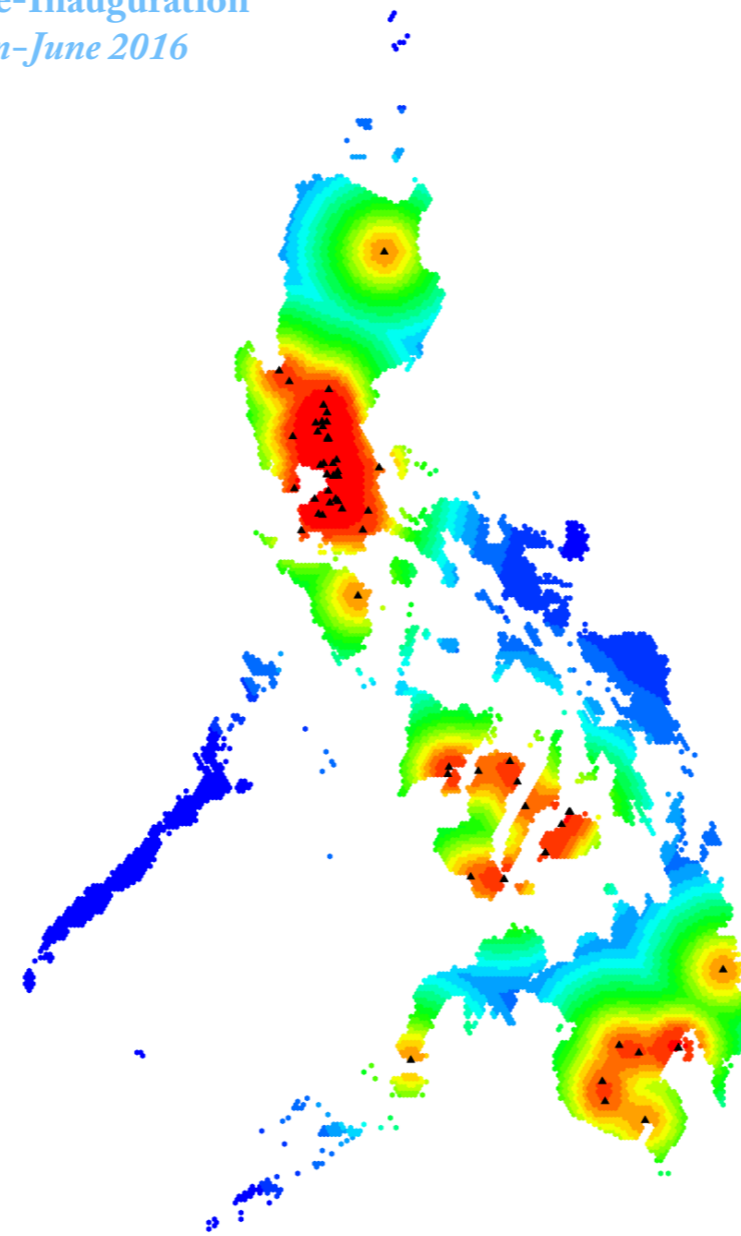
*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

Empirical Results

- Every issue besides 'increase peace', the only crime-related issue, was statistically significant and negatively correlated with Duterte's approval ratings, as per column (1) (besides 'create more jobs').
- This subsequently means:
 - i) Duterte has not done enough to address these issues since his inauguration, hence the negative relationship.
 - ii) random chance explains the association between Duterte's approval ratings and the desire for increased peace by voters.

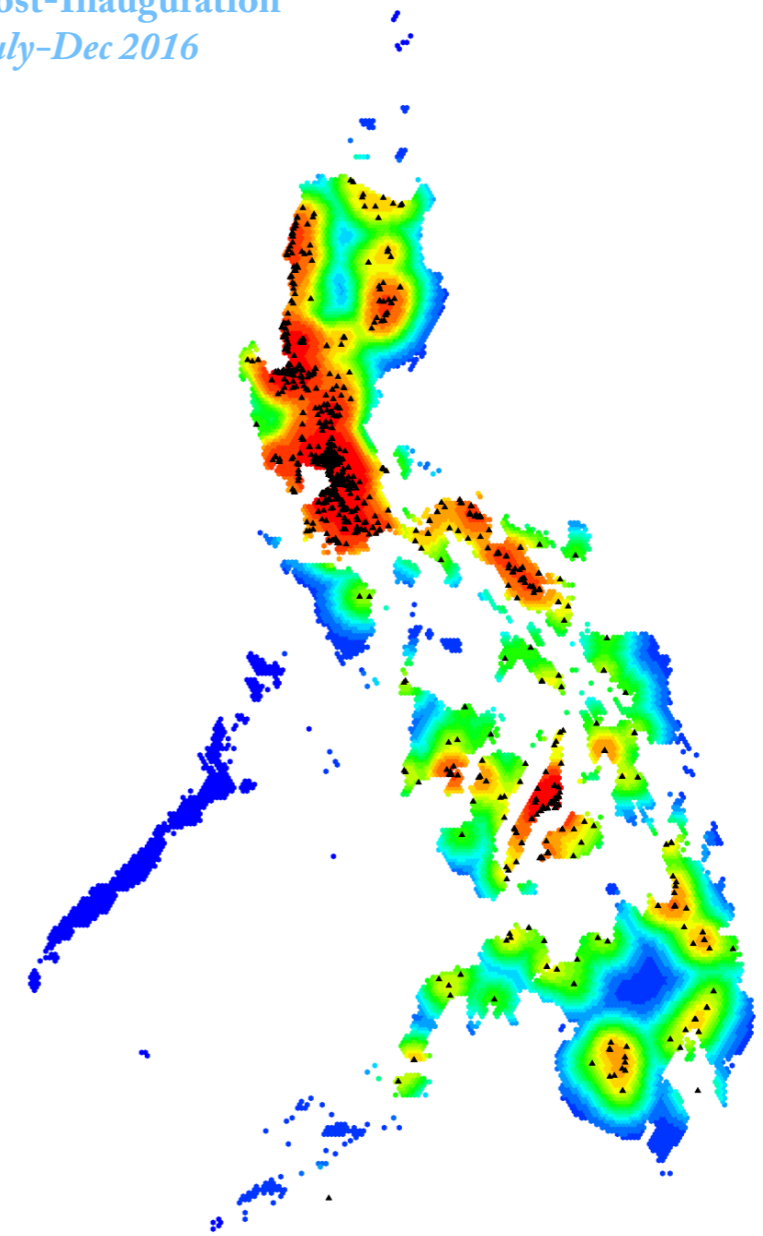
Pre-Inauguration

Jan–June 2016



Post-Inauguration

July–Dec 2016



Mapping the 'War on Drugs'

- To visually see how Duterte has tried to make the drugs issue salient, we use the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).
- We highlight where drug-related homicides, committed either by the Police Forces of the Philippines or Duterte-backed 'vigilantes', have clustered across the Philippines both six months before and after Duterte's inauguration on 30th June, 2016.
- Each heat map illustrates both the locational coordinate of a homicide (black triangles), and the subsequently calculated probability density function of our data points.

Conclusion

- Drug-related deaths have spiked since President Duterte's incumbency, increasing by just less than 2,600% and clustering in Luzon island and Metropolitan Manila, yet the issue remains latent as per the aforementioned empirical evidence.
- Thus, Filipino voters have been more concerned about their economic circumstances than Duterte's war on drugs, which still doesn't appear to be significantly 'urgent' to voters.

References

Curato, N. (2016). Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte's Rise to Power. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 91–109.