

The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte. By Vicente L. Rafael. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022. 192p. \$94.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.
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Rodrigo Roa Duterte's assumption as Philippine president has undoubtedly unleashed a maelstrom of explanations for his rise and popularity. This is not surprising given that his notorious war on drugs, vulgarity, and misogyny has captured local and international media's attention, even drawing comparisons with Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump. By helping readers understand Duterte's broad appeal, Vicente Rafael's *Sovereign Trickster* brings to the fore a complex and nuanced account of contemporary authoritarianism in the Global South. Arguably, analysis of the so-called far-right resurgence and strongmen's appeal disproportionately focuses on the Global North. In this light, Rafael's newest offering makes an important contribution, especially since it attends to the Southeast Asian context and, specifically, Asia's first democracy.

Rafael frames his analysis through the lens of Michel Foucault and Wendy Brown's version of neoliberalism, in which the state governs by creating citizens to be responsible for themselves, using the discourse of empowerment and individual accountability, without long-term structural reforms that are incompatible with late capitalist logic. According to Rafael, "the neoliberal subject is thus the capitalized subject: one whose conduct is conducted by the larger workings of the market" (p. 28). Such a situation results in the legitimization of "discipline" and the "othering" of individuals, thereby making these techniques commonsensical in the eyes of the greater public. Essentially, Rafael argues that "the biopolitics of neoliberalism thus requires a necropolitics of moral cleansing, as those unable or unwilling to conduct themselves properly are treated as somehow 'inferior' and granted few, if any, rights" (p. 31). Rafael cites martial law programs during the Marcos, Sr., regime; reproductive health programs; and the current conditional cash transfer strategy as forms of biopolitical projects, which to a large extent, he says, foreground Duterte's controversial war on drugs program.

Along with his framework, Chapters 1 and 2 locate Duterte's rise to power within the historical context of the country's political economy and its elite character under the auspices of its colonial roots. Rafael further explains what he calls the "Janus-faced" nature of Philippine elections which, he writes, occur on the one hand "amid conditions of socioeconomic inequality, a culture of impunity, and deeply entrenched practices of political patronage, and routine fraud, elections unsurprisingly produce conservative results." Still, on the

other hand, their unique celebratory appeal produces high expectations (p. 17). Despite the previous administration's failure to deliver, the fact that seven or eight out of ten Filipinos vote during elections is a testament to this. As such, these circumstances allowed Duterte's emergence amid his bold but violent drug war promise.

What sets this volume apart from much of previous analyses is its attempt to examine Duterte from a gendered lens. Not that these prior studies did not mention Duterte's misogyny, but little has been explicitly said about how this strategy is integral to his governing style. Indeed, understanding the Philippine president without explaining his misogyny is incomplete, as every feminist would argue. Taking cognizance of this, Rafael details in Chapters 2 and 3 the power of Duterte's sexist remarks and obscenities to subjugate his political enemies—men and women alike. In helping the reader make sense of this, Rafael cites the now (in) famous political speeches, rape jokes, and even "erectile confessions" (p. 49) and how these normalize Duterte's authority and coopt people to laugh with him. In Rafael's words, "whether he seeks revenge or release, Duterte's tales seek to assert his phallic power over his enemies while simultaneously subordinating and overpowering his audience" (p. 53). Simply put, Rafael's analysis enables the reader to understand why Duterte's "jokes," the usual excuse given by his aides to the media, should actually be taken seriously because the more they are regarded as "mere jokes," the more the cooptation process becomes successful. In important respects, Rafael is correct in arguing that Duterte's presidential style is unique in this aspect.

Meanwhile, in Chapters 3 and 4, readers find the book's strength and the central thesis holding the volume together: In particular, its brilliant and original discussion of the trickster's cultural origins, the *pusong* in Filipino folklore, provides much support for understanding Duterte's broad appeal despite his vulgarity and notoriety. Many opinion makers have tried to find cultural explanations for Duterte's popularity, but Rafael's rendition, theoretically informed as it is, stands in a class of its own. In linking the *pusong* character to Duterte, Rafael sums up why Duterte held sway for six years:

Here then, are the two aspects of Rodrigo Duterte's governing style. He is the sovereign who decides on the exception, setting aside law and putting certain groups to death. But he is also the trickster who, in disarming his critics, endears himself to his supporters as a dissipator, one whose performance excess finds expression to what is at once forbidden and desired. (p. 81)

Aside from detailing a compelling argument, Rafael's characteristic prose and eloquence make his narrative convincing, even though the average reader may find

the post-structural analytical touchstones a bit intimidating at first. For this reason, the short sketches and photo analysis contribute immensely to concretizing the points Rafael makes throughout the book. This structure provides contextual cues to the reader even as the photos powerfully illuminate the everyday accounts of Duterte's war on drugs. More than anything, Duterte's notoriety was communicated via these visuals, creating fear among his potential victims and legitimization for those who view the murders as "collateral damage" in the quest for "order." By detailing the everyday life of Filipinos in this manner, Rafael successfully makes credible why the age of Duterte is a worthy case study.

Overall, the book effectively makes every reader realize the complexities inherent in Duterte, his enablers, and his leadership style. It also helps us explain why the political opposition found it difficult to launch a viable challenge. According to Rafael, "perhaps this is what makes it so difficult for critics of Duterte to develop a counter-narrative. It is not so much that the president has told a compelling story about the state of the nation. Rather, he has told many half-stories over and over again (or what some of his critics might call lies), which can't be consolidated and so pinned down, and are thus difficult to refute" (p. 61). All students of politics and the presidency, as well as specialists in Philippine history and society, stand to benefit from the book's incisive analysis. The Filipino public, for their part, will find in its pages the limits and possibilities of a sovereign trickster, which can hopefully assist them in having a critical eye for the great pretenders in politics.

Party System Closure: Party Alliances, Government Alternatives, and Democracy in Europe. By Fernando

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This an ambitious and impressive book written around the concept of party system closure. The study of party systems as *systems* with their own internal dynamics and logics is a classical subdiscipline of political science, going back to Giovanni Sartori and prominently continued by Peter Mair. However, it is also a research strand that has been declining in terms of political scientists' attention. This is paradoxical because there is still enormous interest in political parties. The literature on the many new political parties emerging in West European party systems is extensive. Yet today, political parties are rarely studied from a party system perspective.

Having read this excellent book by Fernando Casal Bértoa and Zsolt Enyedi, it is clear that this limited attention to the party system perspective is a major

omission on the part of the discipline. The book makes a persuasive argument for why studying the institutionalization of party systems provides a long-term and comparative perspective on political parties that contains highly important new insights. For instance, it shows that, although West European parties have clearly changed, the change is much less dramatic when viewed from the party system perspective, rather than using concepts like polarization and fragmentation, which are much more fashionable in political science today.

The major contribution of the book is its development and application of the concept of party system closure. This concept was originally developed by Peter Mair to explain the phenomenon of party system development: it captures the patterns of interactions among political parties, rather than just political parties' individual attributes, like vote share. The central idea underlying this concept is that the key interaction of political parties occurs around government formation. Thus, a closed-party system is one where government alternatives are familiar and predictable.

Closure is understood as having three dimensions. The first dimension is alternation, which describes whether a change of government is complete or only partial. A system with only complete changes of governing parties is considered closed because the government alternatives are clear. When changes in governing parties are only partial, the government alternatives appear less clear. The second dimension is familiarity. Are the government alternatives stable and well known? The third dimension is access. Do new parties have easy access to government power? The concept of closure thus describes whether party relation with regard to government coalition building is structured around a few clearly defined and stable groups of parties that enter and leave office together. Party system closure is seen as a central aspect of the broader concept of party system institutionalization, which refers to the stability and predictability of party interaction more broadly; that is, not just in terms of government coalition formation.

The book is structured around party system closure. Chapter 2 presents the impressive dataset from which the authors draw and shows how the different dimensions of the concept can be measured. The dataset covers all democratic European states from 1848 to 2019. The time span is thus wide, and so is the geographical span from the Atlantic to the Urals, including small states like Andorra and San Marino. Because of the long time period covered, some countries have had several party systems. Altogether, the dataset consists of an impressive 65 party systems.

The rest of the book analyses this dataset in multiple ways. Chapters 3–5 use the concept of party system closure to analyze party system development in both existing and defunct party systems. Chapters 6–9 analyze