

**Beyond the international criminal
court: duterte's pandemic playbook
for authoritarian rule**

Regilme, S.S.

Citation

Regilme, S. S. (2025). Beyond the international criminal court: duterte's pandemic playbook for authoritarian rule. *The Fletcher Forum Of World Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4252233>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4252233>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

ded it, using emergency power

Heal as One Act in M

The judiciary and legislature, which should safeguard democratic accountability, were systematically sidelined. Congressional deliberations on emergency measures were fast-tracked with minimal debate, often justified

intensified scrutiny. Human rights defenders were surveilled, red-tagged, and in some cases, **subjected** to extrajudicial violence . In an environment of fear, space for independent civic activity diminished dramatically.

government rallies. Legal repression was combined with the specter of virus transmission to stigmatize activism.

shoot-to-kill' violators, mirrors securitized pandemic responses in places like [Hungary](#) and [Nicaragua](#) but was uniquely normalized in the Philippines due to pre-existing public support for strongman rule. The pandemic simply offered an opportunity to entrench these measures with public acquiescence, cloaked in the language of national emergency.

Militarization of Health Governance

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of Duterte's approach was his militarized pandemic response. Instead of relying on public health experts, he **placed** retired generals and military officers in key leadership roles, including the

Strict lockdowns were enforced through a sprawling network of police and military checkpoints, often in densely populated and impoverished areas. In just 76 days, the Philippine National Police **charged** 57,177 individuals with

Duterte's infamous directive to "[shoot them dead](#)" when referring to lockdown violators was emblematic of his hardline posture.

Military-led distribution of aid also meant that the state's relief efforts were

The militarization of governance during this time was not a momentary aberration. It entrenched a norm where crisis management became indistinguishable from authoritarian control. Health, once the domain of

However, the participants served as a secondary, rather than primary, source of information.

has profound implications for the country's democratic resilience.

Authoritarianism Beyond the Drug War

enabled a deepening of executive power

Duterte's regime during this time fits the model of a competitive

This analysis aligns with broader research on authoritarian adaptation during crises. In moments of emergency, authoritarian regimes often reframe themselves as efficient problem-solvers while subtly dismantling opposition.

pandemic policies is enemies of the state and urged citizens to obey or

Although Duterte has left office, the architecture of authoritarian governance remains. His daughter, Sara Duterte, is Vice President. The Anti-Terrorism Act is still on the books. Many of the pandemic-era institutional changes persist, such as the [normalization](#) of military oversight in civilian affairs. The

For international ob

broader approach to accountability. Institutions like the ICC are vital, but their temporal and thematic limitations can obscure more complex forms of democratic erosion. Holding Duterte accountable must include recognition of how he weaponized a global crisis to expand executive power. Equally important is the role of domestic institutions, including courts, legislatures, audit bodies, and civil society watchdogs, which must be empowered and protected to investigate, expose, and counteract authoritarian overreach from within. Indeed, scholars and policy organizations have recommended

mechanisms with real-time reporting, and **ensuring** legal protections and funding for civil society organizations.

The Philippines offers a cautionary tale of how a pandemic, while a public health emergency, can also serve as a rare political opportunity for

Duterte's authoritarianism did not end with the last drug raid. It evolved, adapted, and spread during the pandemic, and unless confronted in full, its

He is the author of *Aid Imperium: United States Foreign Policy and Human Rights in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia* (University of Michigan Press, 2021), which received the 2023 Cecil B. Currey Book Award from the Association of Global South Studies and the 2024 Best Book in Human Rights – Honorable Mention from the International Studies Association. His forthcoming book, *United States and Chinese Foreign Assistance and Diplomacy: Aid for Dominance*, is under contract with Manchester University Press.

Regimire has held fellowships at Yale University, the Max Planck Institute, and the Käthe Hamburger Kolleg, and was previously a tenure-track Assistant Professor at Northern Illinois University. He earned his joint PhD in Political Science and North American Studies from Freie Universität Berlin, with a Fox International Fellowship at Yale. His research has received awards from the ISA, ASA, and the British Journal of Politics and International Relations.

Related Posts



