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“Trust” Wow! Big Word: The difference between trusting a populist and a popular leader during a pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Trusting a popular politician is based more on their present work and capacities. The trust that the people are giving to such is in their potential and the bright future that the people are pinning for through him. A populist politician has done the groundwork for the people to trust him, and the continued trust that the people have for him/her is what made him a populist leader, because now that the people have seen what he can offer and give, they are reeled in on who he is rather than who he can become. There is a kind of trust between the populist public and the populist leader that a popular politician cannot have. Another common factor between a populist and a popular leader is that they are both aiming for a change or reform that the people have been yearning for. It is known that most, if not all politicians aim for such changes as well, the former introduces or promises reform in such a different way. All populist politicians are popular, but not all popular politicians are populist. Leaders are made popular because several people align themselves with the kind of people that they are to the masses, that there is a regulatory fit between them and the leader where trust is established and rooted on.

Keywords: *political trust, popular politics, populism, pandemic response*

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INTRODUCTION

It has been almost two years since the COVID-19 outbreak in the Philippines, a significant event that has caught the world off guard. Lockdowns were implemented and world leaders had no means to stop its rapid spread. More so, for a country such as the Philippines, populist authoritarian President Rodrigo Duterte was now faced with an enemy that he cannot see, one that he cannot fight through military power nor with threatening and harsh words to appease it. President Duterte's war on drugs—pre-pandemic, became a “war” against COVID-19 as he resorted to imposing strict lockdowns in the country headed by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) and enforced further by police and military power. An “enhanced community quarantine” (ECQ) was imposed in March 2020, everyone was ordered to stay at home, classes in all levels were suspended, mass transportation were restricted, all forms of gatherings were not allowed thus all non-essential businesses were shut down, government and non-government offices were run with a skeletal workforce, only one person per family over the age of 18 could go out to buy goods and essentials and must be issued a quarantine pass. Aside from ECQ, there is a “modified enhanced community quarantine” (MECQ) where there is limited outdoor exercise with safety protocols, gatherings are highly restricted, travelling is still not allowed, and all other restrictions with ECQ applies (Inter-Agency Task Force, 2021). Lastly, the “general community

quarantine” GCQ where everyone is allowed to go outside except for the senior citizens, children 18 and below, and people with comorbidities, gatherings are only restricted with a maximum of 10, public transport is allowed with safety protocols enforced, and alternative work arrangements are allowed for the labor force.

The Philippines' COVID-19 response is accompanied with the longest and strictest lockdown in the world (See, 2021). According to the World Bank's annual report for the fiscal year 2021, the Philippines was the highest among all country-borrowers with a \$3.7 billion in loans through the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to fight against Covid-19, bringing the total debt of the country to PhP 11.9 trillion, yet the latest Nikkei Asia's Recovery Index and Bloomberg's COVID Resilience Ranking both reported that the Philippines ranked last in pandemic response out of 121 countries (de Vera, 2021; Sarao, 2021; Aguilar, 2021). President Duterte still, however, enjoys such high levels of trust and satisfaction ratings according to both the SWS and Pulse Asia Survey. Political scientists such as Antonio Contreras and several others have described President Duterte as having a Teflon status. De La Salle professor Julio Teehankee (Teehankee, 2016) has described the president as having a Teflon status even before he was elected in 2016. He also narrated Duterte's Teflon status as being driven by the Duterte phenomenon. A *Teflon President* is mostly utilized in American

politics to describe presidents who are so charismatic that no kind of issue or controversies sticks to them and their name. The term was used by then Rep. Pat Schroeder when she was given the house floor to denounce then President Ronald Reagan in 1983, "He has been perfecting the Teflon-coated presidency: He sees to it that nothing sticks to him." (Bingham, 1997). They manage to avoid error or fault yet enjoy high trust and satisfaction ratings despite their notoriety and controversies. Being a popular politician does not happen without reason, it entails a significant amount of charisma to gain the trust of the people and maintain this level of trust, one that even after having been a witness for reasons why not to trust, they still hold on to them. President Duterte is known to be a patron-strongman who delivers through his authoritarian and militaristic mindset (Kreuzer, 2020). When the pandemic hit the Philippines, he became a patron-strongman who barely delivers as the country ranks the lowest in pandemic response despite the requirement of wearing of face shields and the strictest and longest lockdown in the world. Though some may say that this can be the cause of his administration's downfall, both the SWS and Pulse Asia surveys has shown the highest satisfaction and trust ratings since he was elected in 2016, despite the significant decline of trust and satisfaction in NCR, Visayas, and Mindanao among the college-educated, the increase of points came from Luzon and among the high school graduates (Contreras, 2019). However, the same cannot be said for his US populist

counterpart president Donald Trump, who had downplayed and disregarded the real effect of the pressing health crisis which ultimately led to his downfall in the 2021 US national elections. Emphasizing that the highly contagious virus was no more than a common flu and would vanish on its own, despite what scientists were saying, and reassuring the public of his being in control, when the results and their situation says otherwise (Juergensmeyer, 2021). This has caused a great distrust for the people, loss of trust from the populist public means high trust in another, leading to the eventual victor of his opponent and Democratic Party presidential bet Joe Biden. Though the same fate may be in the future of Philippine politics with the upcoming *Halalan* 2022, such antecedent facts certainly hit close to home and can paint a picture on one of many scenarios that may happen in the months leading to it.

In populism and popular politics, politicians use their popularity and influence to spark a change in their locale, they are more empowered and trusted to eradicate corruption or systemize governance that is more suited to the needs of the people, even if it means causing a disparity between the people. Such as in the case of Mayor Isko Moreno's Road Clearing operations in the streets of Manila City. His clearing the busy streets of sidewalk vendors has raised concerns about his being anti-poor but his populism has brought him through the negative comments of the people (Dava, 2019). In populism, the feelings of distrust and

opposition of the people is of a common occurrence. Unlike popular politics, it is of a different criterion, though it may have all the same characteristics of populism, but it does not have the authoritarian factor nor the strong feelings of opposition or distrust in it.

The 2022 national and local elections are just around the corner, and with it comes the rise of popular and populist political leaders and aspirants all running for public office. If there was one thing that the Covid-19 pandemic has shown the Filipino people, it is the need to vote for more trustworthy leaders. Though the comparison of a popular and populist leader may seem to be non-existent, differences such as the trust between the populist public and the populist leader and that of a supporter of a popular politician, the true essence of being a populist leader requires more than just being popular. A deeper analysis and discussion on such will show a significant contrast between two types of leaders. A perfect example of a popular leader on the rise is Pasig City Mayor Victor Ma. Regis N. Sotto more commonly referred to as Vico Sotto and populist Manila City mayor and presidential hopeful Francisco "Isko Moreno" Domagoso. Their contrasting yet similar local government pandemic response proved to be the real game changers in populism and popular politics with their effective and applauded pandemic response in their respective LGUs. They have devised programs and projects to combat the pandemic that is best suited for their constituents. Both leaders have shown how trust is such a significant

factor in their pandemic response, because without such, it would be close to impossible to keep the people at bay knowing that their livelihoods are affected, and they are fed by fear of the uncertainty of their future during lockdowns.

Political trust is the lifeline of democracy, the people's level of trust in populist officials can explain more about how the people were feeling and why they chose to trust certain types of leaders in relation to what the country was going through. As such, it plays a significant role for populist and popular leaders, because without trust, they will not be as empowered and as supported with their actions. It is also important to the Regulatory Focus Theory. It is during these situations that the people can see the trustworthiness of such leaders. In the Philippines, voting as a patron-client relationship is a part of its political culture and climate, electoral support is or must be rewarded with material goods or government services (Arguelles, 2019; Huchcroft, 1998). The difference between patronage politics and political trust is that the former focuses on the votes and support of the people in exchange for services provided by a political actor. This is a two-way relationship between the voters and the political leader. When trusting and being trusted does not necessarily mean that the people expect any services or goods in return and trust is rooted in hoping and expecting, it is not a two-way street. Therefore, there is no relationship being formed. However, they do expect that those that they put their trust in will be efficient and better

from the previous leaders that have held office. This can manifest in different ways, may it be through voting for them or tolerating and supporting their sometimes unpleasant behaviors, all without expecting much in return except good governance and having their miseries be recognized and addressed.

Given the health crisis, populist and popular politics in the Philippines has been more apparent than ever, seemingly blurring the lines of the difference between the two. It can be viewed as a significant key to awaken the people about the competency—or lack thereof of both the local and national government. The crisis has exposed the weakness and strength of populist leaders all over the world (Meyer, 2020). While the Philippine national government is keen on mandating strict lockdowns and enforcing a politics of fear in the people to keep them from going out, they seem to expect a different result for the same solutions. At their most vulnerable, political trust plays a significant role in the support and compliance of the people in the pandemic response of the government. Levels of political trust at the time of a crisis will vary on the kind of response that a leader or a government shall execute for the well-being of the people being that populism is a politics of hope and a politics of anxiety (Curato, 2016; Hosking, 2019; Spruyt, Keppens, & Droogenbroeck, 2016). The promises of populist and popular leaders alike are being tested in a way that can either make or break their future as political leaders. Populist

leaders did not emerge only in the 2016 elections, rather, they have re-emerged and introduced a different side of the same coin: more appealing and one that earns a significant level of trust and loyalty from the people, which may warrant them to be less likely held accountable for their actions. Whereas popular politicians are made popular by the kind of persona that they have established, their charisma, more importantly, they are considered as such because of what they have done and are continuously doing that garners support and attention from the masses because they are different. Political trust is the feeling of confidence that citizens feel for a particular party, administration, or politician, compatibility between the individual and the political actor, political attitudes, political culture, the socio-economic background of voters, their age and educational background are some of the factors that can be considered when people are putting trust into politicians (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Liasthug & Jakobsen, 2018; Deyong & Feng, 2014; Ahmed, Shahzad, & Lodhi, 2011; Avery, 2009; Papadakis, 2010). Both populist and popular leaders need trust from the public, but for populist leaders, such feelings of trust are stronger, are manifested on several occasions and cannot be easily lost, whereas the same cannot be said for the kind of relationship and trust between the voters and a popular leader.

In April 2020, the Inter-Agency Task Force has adopted a new pandemic response system for the country, a people-centered response to which the national government enables, and the

local government leads (Rappler, 2020). As such, this paper discussed the difference between the pandemic response of populist Mayor Isko Moreno of Manila City and popular Mayor Vico Sotto of Pasig City and the role of political trust in the success of their pandemic response. Their names have been two of the most mentioned as effective combatants of the health crisis and their media presence has been more noticeable during the pandemic. Their charisma and wit makes them more relatable and trustworthy.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative approach since it aimed to explain the manifestation of trust in populism and measure the levels of political trust in populism and populist leaders to support the collected qualitative data. Qualitative research involves the collecting and analyzing of non-numerical data (Bhandari, 2020). This approach is defined as a process of inquiry that investigates a phenomenon or a social issue with qualitative measures such as analyzing interviews, observing, and interpreting the actions of man and is value driven that help explain the phenomenon. In most cases, theories are used to strengthen the argument and findings of the researcher. A descriptive method was utilized to explain the relationship between political trust and the emergence of populism in Manila City. A descriptive research method seeks to precisely and systematically illustrate or describe a population, event, or phenomenon and it aims to give

answers to questions of what, where, when, and how (McCombes, 2020).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

E. Tory Higgin's Regulatory Focus Theory

The Regulatory Focus Theory on Promotion and Prevention: Regulatory Focus as a Motivational Principle (1998), which was developed by E. Tory Higgins rooted in political psychology. The theory states that the actions of people to achieve their goals are based on two motivational factors: prevention focus and promotion focus. The theory originated from the self-regulatory perspective (Higgins, 1998). To quote Higgins: "Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) provides the structure in which overall political behavior, not just one aspect of it, can be viewed as being driven by a person's motivational orientation, the environment, and the interaction of the two." (Higgins, 1998). Prevention-focused individuals are inclined to avoid the possible damages that the challengers are promising and they wish to preserve the status quo, whereas promotion focused individuals are more supportive of the promise of reform in the society, therefore, they choose to vote for leaders who also want to challenge the status quo. *Figure 1* shows how each focus can or cannot be a regulatory fit. The top half shows that when promotion focused individuals are presented with eager strategies, it is

a regulatory fit for them, while vigilant strategies are seen to be a regulatory fit for promotion focused individuals as shown on the lower half of the figure. When each focus is presented with the opposite strategies then it is a regulatory un-fit.

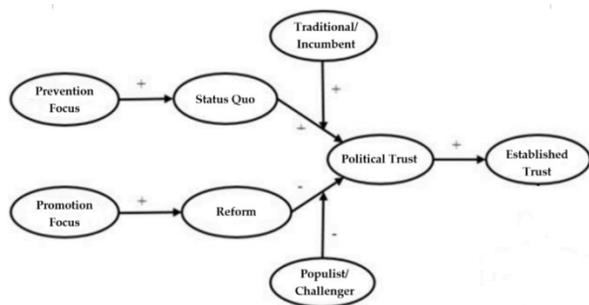


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of a Regulatory Fit Between Focus and Strategies

The theory is a process of how people avoid pain and achieve pleasure by the trust that they give to certain leaders and how they align themselves based on the options that would best benefit them. Each regulatory focus has different results and perceptions; however, all ends in the established trust and support for a leader (Kark & Dijk, 2007). In this theory, the behaviors and choices of the people are rooted in their situations based on their initial motivation to either achieve success to prevent failure. It is a motivation system that expounds on how people adapt different goal-attaining strategies to reach their self-regulatory needs (Higgins, 1998); (Zou & Chan, 2018). The elections are filled with choices between the incumbent and a challenger either between political parties or political actors, all of whom are competing for the vote and trust of the people (Boldero & Higgins, 2011).

People are motivated to pursue their goals or prevent the opposition based on who they vote for and whom they put their trust into. The RFT shows how trust manifests based on who people choose to vote for and the kind of leader that they will support. People are naturally living for their needs and wants. This goes the same way as when people vote for politicians in the hopes of having their needs met. In the study of political psychology, the RFT is a political behavior that motivates people to pursue their goals based on either prevention or promotion focus. This is where the emergence of populism can be explained by the theory. Populism itself challenges the current system of government that has failed to meet the demands and needs of the masses. Eager strategies are, in the sense, considering people who think outside the box, those who wish to change the system in a way that the status quo could not, while vigilant strategies are aimed more towards being careful to preserve the status quo and prevent any drastic change that can affect it. Whichever focus that people align themselves with, trust is to be established in the process, therefore using this theory will give a better explanation of why and how people trust certain types of leaders. Choosing who to support and trust in the political realm will always be between a challenger and the incumbent. Even after the elections, the political trust of people is seen through how and whom they support, in short, it is not only through voting that researchers can observe the trust of the people, rather the support and the compliance of the

masses in the laws provided by those they support and how they defend these leaders can also offer a different perspective. The Regulatory Focus Theory helps show how trust manifests based on who people choose to vote for especially since during the COVID-19 pandemic the people are dependent on the government when it comes to their needs to survive.

The RFT was utilized in explaining the motivations of people for trusting a leader during the pandemic. It can be observed that in the promotion focus, people are more likely to support the opposing party, those who are challenging the current power, while those in the prevention focus work hard in making sure that the opposing party does not gain power over them. Filipino citizens are dependent on the political actors; therefore, the citizens need to trust a political actor who embodies the same beliefs and goals as they do especially when facing problems because citizens rely on the government to solve these problems and carry out policies that will help the people (Grimmelhuijsen & Knies, 2017). People do not simply act based on how they see things but they act based on several factors that can, directly and indirectly, affect them as individuals.

Trusting is and always will be a risk. One must be ready to face the consequences of their actions and embrace the changes brought about by the leaders that they chose to put their trust in. As in Figure 1, the theory explains how political trust fosters two motivational focuses: the promotion focus and the prevention focus. The

promotion-focused citizens are those who support leaders that dare challenge the current system and propose ways for reform—the epitome of populist leaders who are known advocates for and promise to change a system that has failed people time and time again. Supporters of populist leaders believe that the only way for them to get through the pandemic and socio-economic challenges is by choosing a leader with a more authoritarian and reformist way of leadership, straying far away from the status quo. When trust is put into one person or party, distrust or mistrust is given to another, when it comes to populist leaders, however, there is a tendency for trust to grow stronger as time passes. Trust in populist leaders is hard to lose once firmly established.

Prevention-focused citizens are inclined to avoiding the possible damages that the challengers are promising, they wish to preserve the status quo. The same goes with politicians who are prevention-focused, they are advocating for the same narrative and promises that, most of the time, their predecessors have previously promised and failed to fulfill. Once trust is established, either to a political actor or an institution, it necessarily transcends into other aspects related to whom they first trusted (Gouws & Schulz-Herzenberg, 2016; Christensen & Lægheid, 2003; Dekker, 2012; Newton, 2011). No matter the focus in which political trust came from, the end goal would be that citizens now have established trust for the political actors, which then transcends to having trust in

the political institutions. Manifestation of trust in political institutions and leaders means wanting to abide by the health protocols as mandated by the LGU and IATF along with other concerned agencies of government, following contact tracing regulations and getting vaccinated among many more.

Popular vs. Populist Leaders and the Regulatory Focus Theory

Trust being established between an individual and a political leader does not happen instantaneously. There will always be a trait or characteristic in one leader that makes it easier to trust and support him/her. In the case of trusting a once complete stranger, it makes it easier to trust someone based on one's personality, beliefs, social, and economic background. Trusting is associated with one's philosophy, decisions, and beliefs in life (Seyd, 2016; Spruyt, Keppens, & Droogenbroeck, 2016; Bingham, 1997; Dekker, 2012). The RFT shows that when promotion focused individuals are presented with eager strategies, it is a regulatory fit for them, while vigilant strategies are seen to be a regulatory fit for promotion focused individuals as shown on the lower half of the figure. When each focus is presented with the opposite strategies then it is a regulatory un-fit (Higgins, 1998). In this sense, leaders are made popular because several people align themselves with the kind of leaders or individuals that they are to the people. Each regulatory focus has different results and perceptions (Kark & Dijk, 2007). The RFT shows how political trust manifests based on who people choose to vote for and the

kind of leader that they will support. People are naturally living for their needs and wants. As such, they will vote for leaders that they are aligned with and see that there is a regulatory fit between them.

A populist and popular leader has garnered a significant number of trust and support because they align themselves with them no matter if they are prevention focused or promotion focused. In the most basic sense, being popular means being well-liked by several people because of beliefs and objects that embody those that trust and support them (Kidd, 2021). One can be popular without being a populist, but one cannot be considered populist if not popular. Popular leaders aim to establish a level of trust between them and their constituents, whereas populists maintain an already established level of trust. As in the case of popular leader Mayor Vico Sotto of Pasig, he is made popular by his portrayal of transparency and good governance, his popularity is more positive than negative as compared to how populist leaders are made popular by those who see themselves aligning with leaders in the likes of Mayor Isko Moreno of Manila City.

There is much debate about the popular character of incumbent Mayor Vico Sotto of Pasig City, a relatively new face in politics, having only served a single term as a member of the city council before running for mayor in the 2019 elections. He was able to single-handedly end the rule of the Eusebio clan in the city. What made him popular was the way he led the city, he was not

flashy, he was keen on fulfilling his duties as mayor, and he did not go the extra mile for the clout he was getting. Even people outside of Pasig admire his simple yet effective leadership even before the pandemic hit. He was popular but is in no way a populist leader (Heydarian, 2020). In his 3rd State of the City Address, he discussed the importance of the *Pasig Pass* QR code as an important aspect of their contact tracing effort, medical, and vaccination record. He boasted the No Balance Billing of the 2 city-run hospitals, it being the 1st to be awarded the accreditation for their LGU operated quarantine facility. The micro-plan for vaccination of the City of Pasig has been the first to be approved, having 12 vaccination staffs with 80 staffs. The Pasig City mayor also focused on the importance of Integrated Systems and Information Technology during the pandemic, having 44 hospitals participate for the sake of records and bookkeeping. He has also discussed his efficient plans in the Pasig Housing Code, shelling PhP 1.2 billion for the education and learning materials for the students and teachers of the city, all while mitigating and controlling the outbreak of the pandemic in the city. More recently, he has discovered a PhP 44 billion discrepancy in the 2019 budget of the city but managed to cut back on expenses through a framework agreement and a publicly opened bidding for projects. Thus, the rise in salary of casual employees, among many other projects, Mayor Vico has shown that political actors can be efficient and effective without being authoritarian and without having to

take an illiberal path in doing so. As in the words of the famous political analyst Richard Heydarian (2020) in his column on *Vico Sotto: The Rise of Post-Populism* “[...] Vico Sotto is only one of many dynamic mayors and governors around the world who are painstakingly compensating for the inadequacies of populist national leaders [...]”. While Mayor Isko is used to the limelight, the same cannot be said for Mayor Vico, despite his famous parents, he opted to stay out of showbiz and focus on his studies. Sotto has all the makings to cultivate his popularity to become a populist leader, however, one significant factor that hinders him from doing so is that his characteristics barely fit this criterion. Being popular is still significantly different from being a populist leader.

Current Mayor Francisco “Isko” Domagoso Moreno, better known to the people as yorme in an attempt to downplay his position and be closer to his constituents, was a model-actor turned politician, making his debut in politics in 1998 at age of 23 starting as a city councilor in the hopes of looking for ways to help Tondo, a community he grew up in (Talabong, 2019). In his 3rd State of the City Address as mayor of Manila City on July 15, 2021, Mayor Isko expressed the importance of handling the pandemic through the improvement of health care facilities throughout the city. He narrated the success of the local government despite the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the construction of a 344-bed capacity field hospital that was finished in just 52 days, as well as the

establishment of a molecular testing laboratory at the Sta. Ana Hospital (Leon, 2021). The same hospital was awarded a gold standard in conducting swab tests by the Department of Health. He boasted about the swiftness of the administration of 200,000 first doses of Sinovac within just four days upon its arrival in the Philippines. Mayor Isko emphasized the importance of response being higher than the spread of the virus and that vaccination is the solution to normalcy. He deeply expressed that the covid-19 pandemic is a universal problem that must be handled universally as well. In fact, he made sure that the local government of Manila City would be prepared for the pandemic when he flew to the Corona British Response Agency to formulate a plan entitled CODE COVID-19, with CODE standing for Contain and Delay, the next step was to mitigate the possible economic effects on every family or person with this type of virus (De Jesus, 2020).

Being the second-largest city in the country, he had to suffer with his constituents when it came to waiting for the national government's aid. The issues on clean and safe access to water due to a water crisis that occurred earlier in the year and lack of a public sanitation among informal settlers, a lacking health care facility and an indecisive, slow responding secretary of health Francisco Duque III—among others, has significantly contributed to the fear and anxiety of the people (Calimbahin, 2021). Like most populist leaders, Mayor Isko used the pandemic to benefit him, only in that it has also

helped the people in the process, at least at the macro level. With the aid of his public relations team, he was able to showcase his leadership skills that significantly contradicts the pandemic response of the national government. One month into the pandemic, Yorme enforced a hard lockdown in Tondo and Sampaloc where residential homes are closer than most, in an attempt to prevent more outbreaks. Local barangays would immediately commence a lockdown when they see a rise in cases and several public infrastructures were turned into Covid-19 quarantine facilities. Mayor Isko took much effort in handing out financial assistance to displaced citizens due to the pandemic. He advocated for the continued learning of Manila City students, thus handing out learning modules, tablets, and sim cards that would be loaded monthly for the use of the pupils. He would award barangays that have managed to have zero (0) Covid positive in their midst.

Mayor Isko is also well-versed with cameras being with him most of his waking time, from conducting Facebook live daily to show his constituents his day-to-day activities, the local government's response to the pandemic has been clear, encompassing, and efficient at the macro-level. At the end of the day however, the government is yet to propose a plan that would permanently end the lockdown and quarantine measures enforced for the past two years, the government is yet to ease the burden on the medical front liners of the country. At the micro level, more than 4.2 million Filipinos have lost

their jobs, and another 7.9million have suffered pay cuts because of the long quarantine measures being enforced (de Vera B. O., 2021). The local government of Manila City has done what it can to try to mitigate the loss by providing financial aid to displaced workers and food packs per family of the 897 barangays of the city. Looking at the bigger picture, it may seem to be true that populist leader Mayor Isko has been doing much better and is much more trustworthy than his national counterpart President Duterte and his administration, but this does not erase the fact that the country still has a long way to go.

In some way, being a politician entails a certain level of being known within their respective locales and for their constituents but when one's popularity surpasses the aforementioned, he can be then considered popular in as much as he is well-known more than he is supposed to. Mayor Vico Sotto rose from being the youngest city councilor in Pasig to the youngest mayor in Metro Manila. His efforts, though not recognized by the entire nation – was enough to be noticed by the US President Jose Biden as one of the 12 global anti-corruption champions by the U.S Department of State for his commitment to transparency initiatives as both a Pasig City councilor and as the incumbent mayor. Much like any politician, Mayor Vico promises to battle corruption and vowed the decrease in the costs for all his city projects. He envisions his administration as clean and honest, that true to this day and as his award entails is a promise kept.

Another key difference in a popular politician is he does not seek to be authoritarian in nature and he stays true to his words without the need to instill fear in his constituents and employees.

Characteristics of Populist Leaders

Gathered from different sources and field experts of populism, these are the telltale signs of a populist leader.

First, populist politicians are patriotic and nationalistic, they are against the ineffective status quo, anti-incumbent leaders, anti-elite, and are against everything that they identify to be hindering the progress and growth of the country (Pernia, 2019; Flew & Iosifidis, 2019; Silva, Jungkunz, Helbling, & Littvay, 2019; Schroeder, 2018). They oppose all that hinder the potential reform of the locale and propose authoritarian solutions that seem to be more appealing for the people, they are often right about the problems and nuisance of their community, provide the wrong answers, and plans to handle them (Rensmann, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In this way, they have effectively established feelings of distrust and mistrust in incumbent leaders who have done nothing but add to the misery and pent-up frustrations of the citizens. They are leaders of the masses that give voice to the everyday miseries and frustrations of the people and blame previous leaders for their sufferings.

Second, populist politicians have a strongman authoritarian persona or attitude that makes them stand out from all others (Arguelles, 2019; Juego, 2018;

McCoy, 2017; Webb & Curato, 2018). There is much distress and pressure on the part of politicians in the demands of the people and it has come to such a point that people have become cynical to the idea of having a better life through morally trustworthy politicians, and so they have opted for populists who are proposing drastic measures and generalized hostility in pursuing change (Festenstein, 2019; Dekker, 2012; Ahmed, Shahzad, & Lodhi, 2011; Avery, 2009; Maxwell, 2018; Rensmann, 2018). Once populist leaders earn the trust of the people, they gain more power to do whatever they please even in the most drastic way because they know that the people support them.

Third, populist politicians emerged from the politics of fear, anger, and hope. When it comes to gaining the trust and the support of the masses, they tap into the deepest fears and hopes of the masses and use it to promote themselves and their leadership style (Maxwell, 2018; Rensmann, 2018; Juego, 2018; Curato, 2016; Pernia, 2019; Flew & Iosifidis, 2019). These types of politicians will tap into the most feared thoughts of a citizen and propose ways in which he or she will address and resolve this fear. Populism is a politics of hope and a politics of anxiety (Spruyt, Keppens, & Droogenbroeck, 2016; Curato, 2016). The politics of fear is the existing anxieties and vulnerabilities of the citizens when it comes to trusting and voting for political leaders. The politics of hope is that of the collective goals, aspirations, and desires of the citizens. They have reignited the hope within citizens who have grown tired of

the idea of change because they have met a kind of leader charismatic enough and has an authoritarian rule about them that made them cast all their anxieties to the leader. At a local level, several political families or dynasties have lost in their local elections because people have lost hope in the same old things and the same people who promised the same things that never came true. People have become cynical and have grown angry towards the same people that they opted for a breath of fresh air when they voted of charismatic, authoritarian populist leaders.

Lastly, true populist politicians are charismatic, so charismatic that they can get away with anything. They know what to say and how to act in a way that will positively appeal to the citizens and have them hooked on his personality more than the things that he is doing, whether what he is doing is morally acceptable or not. Being charismatic means that a politician gets to enjoy a faithful following, one that is willing to defend him no matter what he does and how he does it if the people think that he is on his way to 'getting the job done' (Juego, 2018). They do whatever they can to do it even if some do not agree with their decisions and policies.

Most populist leaders of the world have taken the COVID-19 pandemic seriously, the same cannot be said for some. Others have taken on a more illiberal path for their pandemic response, using the crisis to gain excessive power, while most were handling them seriously and have taken a liberal-serious response (Meyer, 2020).

Mayor Sotto has also shown his true capacity during a health crisis when he enforced a comprehensive team of contact tracers and was the first Philippine Accredited LGU operated quarantine facility awarded by the Department of Health. Both mayors launched a vaccination program that was deemed to be for the efficient use of their constituents. Popular politics in the Philippines has been more apparent than ever as the country closes in on the two-year mark since the COVID-19 outbreak. Weeks that turned to months of lockdowns and several classifications of quarantine for every locale later. There is still no clear sign of when the citizens will finally be able to experience the kind of competent government and effective response as that of its neighboring countries. However, local populist and popular leaders have seemingly identical pandemic responses yet are led by different kinds of leaders.

There are two ways under two categories of pandemic responses for populist leaders. In a framework introduced by Brett Meyer on *Pandemic Populism: An Analysis for Populist Leaders' Responses to Covid-19*, he discussed how some populist leaders have taken an illiberal response to combat the growing health crisis, such as that of the Philippine president, taking on an excessively harsh enforcement of lockdown measures (Meyer, 2020). Moreno and Sotto however, have taken on a serious and liberal approach, focusing on what the health workers and sector needs. The RFT seeks to explain the behavior of the people based on who they choose to

vote for in line with their individual goals. The masses can be seen to trust leaders who are populist in nature, anti-elite, and can contribute to achieve their goals, who gain the trust of the masses by voicing out their frustrations and anxiety. At a time, such as the pressing health crisis brought by the pandemic, it is easier to anchor on these feelings and reel them. However, while the national government is taking an illiberal-serious approach, the same cannot be said for the local government units. Populists gained mass support because they give off the impression of a new approach, a complete opposite of the usual type of leadership that has consistently failed and only added to the frustration and hopelessness of the people. Popular politics and trust, at a time when the people feel the most need to trust and look up to political leaders for help, seem to be thriving more in this endeavor.

Characteristics of Political Trust

Compiled from several studies and authors of political trust are the characteristics of political trust:

The first characteristic of political trust is that it transcends from political actors to political institutions and to any other actor related to those whom they initially trusted. It is the same case for when people lose trust or begin to distrust a political actor, they are most likely distrusting the institution related to the actor as well and vice versa because distrust in one is and will be related to the distrust in others (Christensen & Lægheid, 2003). The decline of political trust can easily

threaten the legitimacy of a political actor or institution because it can affect the political dynamics entirely—the same goes as when trust is high. This can help explain why monarchies in Europe are still thriving, and why political dynasties and political parties in the Philippines still have a heavy influence on the votes and behaviors of the people. As shown in the case of former President Noynoy Aquino’s win in the 2009 presidency, the established trust for Benigno Aquino, Sr. as an anti-Marcos hero and the ascendance of his late wife who replaced Marcos after being overthrown transcended into such notable trust for their son Noynoy Aquino to become the fifteenth president of the country. Trust is only given when there are positive feelings involved in the process of giving and receiving it.

Second, the relationship between political trust and democracy is paradoxical (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2003; Đorić, 2019). It is paradoxical because although high levels of trust are important, there is also a need for a healthy institutionalization of distrust or skepticism from the citizens to ensure accountability from the government and to lessen the chances of people being abused and oppressed because of too much trust given and avoid the presence of ‘blind trust’. However, high levels of distrust can easily affect the legitimacy of the actions of the government and defy the legislations (Marien & Hoogie, 2011). Distrust is just as damaging as how trust could be rewarding.

Third, political trust is a necessary condition for efficacy, productivity, and prosperity for good governance (Hearn, 2015). It heavily affects the preferences and evaluations of the public (Heatherington & Husser, 2012). High levels of trust can result to authorities being more empowered to take risks in policies and innovate, because it is causal to political performance and vice versa (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016). Therefore, the simple winning of a political party or politician may mean that voters lost trust and did not continue to support the previous party and their ideologies because they failed to fulfill their promises, thus voting for their opponents in the next elections.

Lastly, political trust and distrust reveals the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the citizens (trustors) and highlights the strengths and trustworthy traits of the political institutions or actors (trustees); it creates a sense of dependency on each party because both need the other to survive and or to stay in power. This can be further explained by how the trust of person A is dependent on the judgment of how far a person or party B will act consistently with their interests, based on perceived competence, concern with person A’s interests, and reliability of B (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Seyd, 2016). Political trust is manifested in the patron-client oriented politics of the Philippines. The fact that people are choosing populist leaders may be fueled by wanting to refocus their demands in a way that would finally give voice to and highlight their vulnerabilities

because their weaknesses were not addressed by previous administrations.

Future of Populism and Popular Politics in the Philippines

If there was one thing in common between Mayor Isko and Mayor Vico, it is that despite their populist characteristic, they did not dwell into the authoritarian aspect of it, they, instead, used their popularity to better serve the public. They used their popularity in a way that would make them efficient and trustworthy. They are more progressive than illiberal, and this may show a sign that there is yet again another kind of populism emerging in the Philippine political culture. The IATF rule on having the local government lead as the national government enables them has significantly aided the rise of populism and popularity of leaders such as Mayor Isko and Mayor Vico, more so because they are more efficient, more reliable, and seemingly more capable during the health crisis since their response is closer to the people and is more accessible to the public. The contradictory statements between agencies causing the public to see the breakdown of coordination between agencies, the government has failed over and over again, to address the needs of the people who do not have the financial capacity to be unemployed nor can they afford private vehicles for their transportation to and from work (Heydarian, 2020).

Populism in Asia is more dangerous than that of the West because it is more anchored on frustration,

disappointment, impatience, and maybe even anger (Kurlantzick, 2018). The politics of feelings involved in populism is the most significant reason the populist public supports, trusts, and defend authoritarian populist leaders in Asia. Their problems are more complex and apparent; therefore, it requires more drastic measures to be addressed. The RFT highlights the importance of citizen motivation in terms of choosing a leader. Filipinos will choose a leader who appeals to them more on a personalist level. Populist leaders are not new in the Philippine political culture, they may evolve through time, but they are still the same book of a different edition, an old wine in a new bottle, they only grow to become more appealing each time. The long history of colonization and oppression of the Filipino people can account for the current political climate that they have because for the longest time, the Filipinos have only ever known foreigners to run their motherland, never from the people, by the people, nor for the people. This is one of the rare occurrences where too much trust is apparent and becomes toxic. Trusting political leaders too much removes the sense of accountability that politicians must have to keep them in line and make sure that they would not be abusing the power given to them. National and local level populist authoritarian leaders are two sides of the same coin. They are similar because they do not try to be presentable or proper. They are unapologetic for who they are and what they say and are seen to be charismatic and appealing that way. Their actions are limited but not

constrained, bounded by the law but skilled in undermining it—subtly illiberal in nature.

Popularity in politics can take a politician to places that he only dreamed of before becoming a noteworthy leader. Both mayors can easily run for the 2022 Mayoral elections and win, not because of their popularity, but because of what they did with their popularity. Being closer to the people and being able to give service to them in a way that can easily reach them is a bonus and can easily be a living testament to the true capabilities of these two leaders. However, their popularity is still only at a local level, majority of the Filipinos outside their vicinity are not familiar with them yet and running for a higher position and their probability to be successful in this endeavor is still up to debate. Especially since Mayor Isko is running for the presidential race for *Halalan 2022*.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Populism does not wear the same shirt twice. It changes its features, some are authoritarian and illiberal, some are progressive and effective. They either change and or add characteristics to this leadership style. More than anything, populist politicians are thriving because the pandemic is a time when the most common feeling of the people is fear and anxiety—emotions that populists thrive on. More than thirty years after the EDSA People Power Revolution and

the successful fall of the Marcos dictatorship, the Filipinos have gone through several types of populist leaders and yet the most significant are the two game changers for this phenomenon. They have proven that while most populist leaders have the tendency to be authoritarian yet ineffective, one is rarely authoritarian and another is not authoritarian at all, but the policies, work, and the support of the people for their leadership is just as strong. Trust will always be a two-way street even if the other street is made up of the general public, the interests of the people will outweigh the interests of a leader who seeks to better the lives of his constituents. Though it is still too early to conclude the future of this leadership, the way that they are now is enough to say that their governance is headed towards the right path.

The May 2022 elections is still a long way to go, much can still happen in between that can significantly affect their leadership style. Voting for a political leader is more about the citizen than it is about the leader. The RFT seeks to differentiate two kinds of voters in accordance with their expected outcome or goal from the politicians. Prevention focused individuals tend to be those who are determined to preserve the status quo nor disrupt the socio-political norms and traditions of the society because it contributes to their growth and development that way, whereas promotion focused individuals trust politicians that seek to change the norms and support leaders that provide a different approach to address the

needs and problems of the society. In this study, they support populist leaders and their trust for them manifests when they obey these leaders, support them in times of controversies, and not question their leadership style even when it negatively affects others.

Political trust should be valued by political actors and institutions because it transcends into other realms of the government, it exposes the legitimacy of their leadership, and it gives them more power as an elected official. Gaining political trust successfully from the people may give politicians a chance to channel this trust and utilize it into making themselves a better leader. The COVID-19 pandemic has restricted the researcher to fully utilize data gathering methods such as conducting face-to-face interviews with more elected officials, field experts, and a focused group discussion for random residents of selected barangays in Manila City. Future researchers should utilize these techniques to gather more useful data that can contribute to the topic. Aside from looking into elected officials in the executive branch of Manila City, they can also study the legislative branch—councilors or congressmen and why they trust them. Future researchers should also investigate political trust in the Philippines, what constitutes trust, and why people trust leader. There should be more studies about the manifestations of political trust, mistrust and or distrust and how it affects the political dynamics of any locale.

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