

Demagoguery and Power: A Discourse Analysis of Duterte's War on Drugs in His Inaugural and Final Sonas

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the presence and function of demagogic rhetoric in the inaugural (2016) and final (2021) State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) of former Philippine President Rodrigo Roa Duterte. Anchored in Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) through the framework Miller, the research identifies rhetorical elements that demonstrate demagoguery—specifically polarization, oversimplification, delegitimization, and emotional manipulation. The analysis revealed that Duterte's speeches consistently used emotionally charged and divisive language to frame national issues, discredit critics, and legitimize controversial policies such as the war on drugs. By presenting complex social problems in simplistic, binary terms and positioning himself as the nation's sole moral authority, Duterte's rhetoric undermined democratic discourse and normalized authoritarian tendencies. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on political communication, populism, and democratic erosion. This study not only highlights the power of language in shaping public perception and policy but also underscores the importance of critical media literacy and vigilance in preserving democratic institutions. Recommendations for future researchers include expanding the corpus of analysis to other political figures and exploring the audience's reception of demagogic discourse across different socio-political contexts.

Keywords: Demagoguery, Discourse, War on Drugs, Rhetoric

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Political rhetoric is a fundamental component of the democratic process, serving to shape public opinion, inform decision-making, and mobilize collective action. It enables political actors to communicate their ideas persuasively, frame issues in compelling ways, and appeal to the emotions and values of their audience. However, political rhetoric can sometimes manifest as a manipulative form of persuasion, such as demagoguery, exploiting emotions, prejudices, and fears to gain power or sway public opinion.

Demagoguery has long been recognized as a profound and persistent threat to the stability and integrity of democratic governance (Marquez, 2024). Historically, demagogues have thrived during periods of political instability or social unrest, capitalizing on public dissatisfaction and eroding trust in established institutions. Such figures often prioritize personal ambition or partisan gain over the common good, using emotionally charged rhetoric, oversimplified solutions to complex problems, and misleading or false promises to manipulate public sentiment (Chilton, 2023). While the term "demagogue" initially referred neutrally to leaders who appealed to the masses, its meaning has evolved significantly. Today, it is primarily associated with individuals who undermine rational political debate and exploit public fears, thereby weakening the core principles of democratic decision-making. This shift reflects a growing concern over the ability of democratic societies to withstand authoritarian tendencies cloaked in populist rhetoric.

Contemporary political landscapes offer several vivid examples of this trend. In recent years, leaders such as Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil have employed demagogic strategies to build and maintain domestic support, despite global scrutiny and controversy surrounding their policies (de Moraes, 2023). Their brand of political rhetoric has been marked by appeals to nationalist sentiment and exploitation of societal divisions. By casting themselves as outsiders challenging a corrupt or ineffective establishment, they

cultivated deep loyalty among their supporters. This approach, combined with strategic use of social media to bypass traditional media filters, has intensified political polarization and prompted extensive scholarly debate about the health of democratic institutions in the face of rising populism (Guimarães, 2021; Gomes & Reis, 2024).

This pattern is not limited to powerful nations; it is equally evident in countries with weaker economies and more vulnerable populations. In such contexts, economic hardship and social instability often create fertile ground for manipulative political discourse (Bernhardt et al., 2021). The Philippines provides a compelling case study, with various leaders—such as Quezon, Magsaysay, Marcos, and Estrada—exhibiting different degrees of demagogic and populist tendencies over time (Robison & Hadiz, 2020). A particularly illustrative and more recent example is the presidency of Rodrigo Roa Duterte. His leadership style highlighted both the mobilizing potential and the dangers of political rhetoric. The blunt, fiery, and often controversial language of Duterte resonated with many Filipinos disillusioned with traditional elites (Maboloc, 2020). His speeches, filled with tough talk and crude humor, portrayed him as a leader who spoke the language of ordinary citizens. Yet, his use of divisive language, threats against critics, and derogatory remarks also drew criticism for undermining democratic values and exacerbating social divisions (Duran, 2023).

Rodrigo Duterte's rise to power in the Philippines illustrates a complex interplay between populism and authoritarianism, as explored across three key scholarly sources. Curato and Yonaha (2021) emphasized Duterte's use of populist rhetoric during the 2016 presidential campaign, portraying himself as an outsider battling elite corruption and promising brutal but decisive solutions to crime—rhetoric that resonated with a frustrated electorate seeking change. Once in office, however, Duterte's leadership quickly shifted toward authoritarianism, as evidenced by his war on drugs, attacks on the judiciary, and suppression of media freedom (Pernia, 2022). Despite his populist appeal, Mendoza and Jaminola (2020) argue that Duterte's policies—such as the rice tariffication law and TRAIN tax reforms—often failed to uplift the marginalized sectors he championed, revealing a stark disconnect between his rhetoric and actual governance. Together, these analyses highlight how Duterte leveraged populist strategies to consolidate power, while his authoritarian tendencies gradually eroded democratic norms in the Philippines.

While considerable research has been conducted on the leadership and rhetorical style of Rodrigo Duterte, much of the current literature focuses on the direct social, economic and political effects of Duterte's policies and statements both locally and internationally. Moreover, the majority of the existing studies classify Duterte as a populist but not a demagogue. While both populists and demagogues claim to represent the people, populists generally aim for constructive change within democratic frameworks, whereas demagogues often exploit divisions for personal or political gain, potentially threatening democratic processes.

This paper argues that former president Rodrigo Roa Duterte exemplifies a demagogue who strategically manipulated discourse to gain and sustain political power and influence. This argument draws on Michel Foucault's Theory of Discourse, which explores how language and knowledge construct reality, shape power relations, and influence societal norms (Foucault, 2007). Foucault emphasizes that discourse is not merely a tool for communication but a complex network of knowledge and practices that determines who has the authority to speak, what can be said, and what is accepted as truth (Armstrong, 2015). In this framework, discourse is inherently tied to power, serving to legitimize certain authorities while marginalizing or silencing others. This theoretical lens offers a foundation for understanding how demagogues, like Duterte, exploit discourse to assert dominance and manipulate public perception.

Complementing Foucault's framework, this study also draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory by Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, both of whom place power at the center of discourse analysis. Fairclough (2013) distinguishes between "power in discourse"—how language enacts power—and "power behind discourse"—how social structures and institutions shape language use. He posits that discourse both reflects and reinforces existing power dynamics, often through implicit and normalized means. Similarly, van Dijk (2015) views power as the ability to control the actions and minds of others, emphasizing how dominant groups perpetuate inequality by controlling discourse in public domains such as media, education, and politics. His concept of "discourse control" highlights the strategic use of language by elites to shape ideologies and

reinforce their authority. Together, these perspectives reveal how Duterte's rhetoric functioned as a tool of social control, reinforcing his political agenda and silencing opposition.

Building on these theoretical foundations, this study employs the framework proposed by Miller (2021) to identify demagogic elements in Duterte's speeches. Miller outlined specific characteristics commonly found in demagogic discourse, which are readily observable in Duterte's rhetoric. First, demagogues often oversimplify complex social issues, presenting them as problems with clear-cut solutions while ignoring systemic causes—thus enabling flawed or harmful policy responses. Second, they routinely discredit established institutions such as the media, the Church, or the educational system, positioning themselves as the only trustworthy source of truth. Third, demagogues scapegoat specific groups, blaming them for societal problems in order to channel public frustration and divert attention from root issues. Finally, they foster deep social polarization by framing conflicts in stark "us versus them" terms, casting critics as not merely wrong, but morally bankrupt or threatening. When these rhetorical strategies are analyzed through the combined lenses of Foucault's discourse theory and CDA, Miller's framework provides a concrete method for examining how Duterte's language functioned as a calculated tool for consolidating power and shaping public consciousness.

Following the lead of Miller, this study examined the demagogic elements in the State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) of former president Rodrigo Roa Duterte to gain a deeper understanding of how it affects democratic institutions. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

What rhetorical elements of demagoguery are present in the inaugural (2016) and final (2021) State of the Nation Addresses of former President Rodrigo Duterte? Specifically:

Polarization

Oversimplification

Delegitimization

Emotional Manipulation

How did Duterte's use of demagogic language evolve or remain consistent between his inaugural and final SONAs in terms of content, tone, and discursive strategies?

What are the potential implications of Duterte's demagogic rhetoric on democratic institutions, public discourse, and the normalization of authoritarian governance in the Philippines?

The research findings may be of interest and benefit to the following: a) enhance the bodies of knowledge in political science, sociology and linguistics by exploring how language shapes social norms and power dynamics; b) enlighten government officials and ordinary citizens of the importance of strengthening and protecting democratic institutions against those who seek to exploit and abuse it for their personal gains; c) inspire future researchers to pursue more studies on political discourse, policymaking and new threats to democracy in the 21st century; and d) inform the general public about the dangers of demagoguery and how it erodes rational debate and political choices.

This study was limited to examining and analyzing statements related to War on Drugs from the two State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) delivered by former President Duterte—his first SONA on July 25, 2016, and his final SONA on July 26, 2021. The researcher chose to analyze only the first and last State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) of President Rodrigo Duterte to capture the discursive shifts and rhetorical strategies at two critical points of his administration—the beginning and the end. The first and last SONAs bookend a president's term and are often the most rhetorically charged. The first SONA reflects the president's initial vision, priorities, and political stance, while the last SONA provides insight into how he framed his achievements, defended his governance, and shaped his legacy. Focusing on these two speeches allows for a meaningful comparison of political language over time, highlighting both continuity and change in discourse. This selective approach also ensures a more in-depth and focused analysis, which is essential for a qualitative political discourse study.

METHOD

This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine two State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) delivered by former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, with a specific focus on identifying elements of demagoguery. His inaugural SONA in July 2016 and his final SONA in July 2021 were used as the main corpus of this study. The full transcripts of the said speeches were retrieved from the online archive of the websites of the Presidential Communications Operations Office and other media outlets.

The process began with the speeches being subjected to close reading, with particular attention paid to rhetorical patterns, emotional appeals, and argumentative structures. Following Miller's approach, the analysis sought to uncover instances of demagogic language, which are characterized by features such as scapegoating, emotional polarization, appeals to fear or prejudice, and the presentation of simplistic solutions to complex problems.

The speeches were coded using a thematic framework that aligns with Miller's indicators of demagoguery, such as us-versus-them dichotomies, attacks on dissent, glorification of in-group identity, and the undermining of rational discourse. Through this methodical examination, the study aimed to reveal how demagogic rhetoric functions within political discourse, how it appeals to particular audiences, and what implications it holds for democratic deliberation. This analytic process provides a nuanced understanding of how political language can be strategically used to manipulate public opinion and consolidate power, thus contributing to broader discussions on rhetoric, ideology, and political communication.

Finally, the analysis ended with a summary of findings and a discussion of the broader implications. This involved reflecting on the potential impacts of the discourse on public opinion, policy-making, and social change. By following these steps, Miller's framework helped the researcher reveal the subtle ways in which discourse both shapes and is shaped by power and ideology, offering deeper insights into social phenomena.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the data gathered from the two selected State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) of former president Rodrigo Roa Duterte. He delivered his inaugural State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 25, 2016, at the Batasang Pambansa in Quezon City. The address, lasting over an hour and a half, laid out his administration's key priorities: an aggressive campaign against illegal drugs and crime, peace talks with insurgent groups, and a commitment to law and order. He emphasized the importance of people-centered governance, pledging to improve education, healthcare, infrastructure, and public services while promoting human rights, social justice, and environmental protection.

On July 26, 2021, President Rodrigo Duterte delivered his sixth and final SONA at the Batasang Pambansa Session Hall in Quezon City, marking the longest post-EDSA SONA to date, lasting 2 hours and 39 minutes. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, attendance was capped at 350 physically present participants, all fully vaccinated and tested, with others participating virtually. Duterte highlighted key achievements such as expanded social programs, infrastructure projects, decongestion of EDSA, extension of driver's license validity, and efforts against illegal drugs and corruption.

Polarization

Polarization in demagoguery refers to the deliberate intensification of divisions within a society by a demagogue by appealing to popular desires, emotions, and prejudices rather than using rational argument. In the July 2016 SONA of former president Duterte, two statements about his administration's anti-illegal drugs policies can be classified as polarizing type of demagogic rhetoric, in which he issued a threat against the criminals and drug personalities while saying that he values human life and dignity.

"You destroy my country, I will kill you. You destroy the young people, I will kill you"

"We are imbued with high respect for human life and dignity."

The first statement is highly polarizing because it uses violent, threatening language that frames complex social problems as battles between good and evil. It personalizes national issues by using “my country,” implying that dissent or criminality is a personal attack on the speaker. The threat of killing opponents promotes fear and encourages a culture of violence, dividing people into enemies and loyalists—an approach typical of demagogic leadership (McCoy & Somer, 2021).

While the second statement appears to be positive, it becomes polarizing when juxtaposed with preceding violent rhetoric. It creates confusion and moral contradiction, suggesting selective application of human rights based on who is perceived as “deserving.” This inconsistency can deepen division by creating an in-group that is worthy of dignity and an out-group that is not (Levin et al., 2021). The demagogic nature lies in appealing to shared values while simultaneously undermining them through contradictory actions or statements.

Meanwhile, three more statements from Duterte’s final SONA on July 2021 were also identified as polarizing type of demagogic rhetoric, where it seemed that he was trying to justify extrajudicial killings in the guise of law enforcement.

“If you kill a human being who is committing a crime, that is not murder.”

“If you are destroying the country, then you are my enemy.”

“These are not the ways of Filipinos. We are respectful people.”

The first statement undermines the legal process and due process by suggesting that extrajudicial killings are justified. It appeals to public anger against crime but blurs the lines between justice and vigilantism, effectively dividing the public into those who support swift, violent action and those who uphold human rights and legal procedures. It uses emotional appeal over reason, a common characteristic of demagoguery.

Moreover, the second statement fosters an “us vs. them” mentality by labeling critics or perceived threats as enemies of the nation. It is polarizing because it casts dissent as unpatriotic and discourages legitimate political discourse (Somer et al., 2023). This kind of rhetoric simplifies complex issues and pits citizens against one another based on loyalty to a singular narrative, a tactic often used by demagogues to consolidate support.

Furthermore, the third statement uses a moral and cultural appeal to draw a line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, implying that critics or opponents act in ways that are un-Filipino. It is polarizing because it excludes dissenting voices from the national identity and creates a cultural divide (Callander & Carbajal, 2022). Such framing is demagogic as it leverages national pride and cultural values to silence opposition.

These statements from former President Duterte’s final SONA exemplify how polarizing and demagogic rhetoric can manipulate public sentiment through emotionally charged and contradictory language. By drawing sharp lines between allies and enemies, legitimizing extrajudicial actions, and delegitimizing dissent, the rhetoric promotes division and reinforces an “us vs. them” mentality. It threatens violence against perceived enemies while simultaneously appealing to values like human dignity, creating a selective and inconsistent narrative that fosters confusion and moral ambiguity. Rather than encouraging inclusive dialogue and thoughtful policy debate, such language cultivates fear, loyalty-based politics, and oversimplified narratives, ultimately undermining democratic discourse, eroding civic trust, and weakening the integrity of national principles.

Oversimplification

Oversimplification is common among demagogues, as they present a complex problem, situation, or cause-effect relationship in an overly simple manner that misleads or distorts the truth. In the inaugural SONA of former president Duterte, two statements fall under this category.

“Double your efforts. Triple them if need be. We will not stop until the last drug personality is put behind bars or below the ground.”

“I repeat: criminality, drugs, and corruption are the problems of our country.”

The first statement simplifies the solution to the drug problem by promoting an aggressive, punitive approach as the only path forward. It frames the issue in militaristic, absolute terms—imprisonment or death—ignoring the need for rehabilitation, due process, and systemic reform. The oversimplification dehumanizes those involved in drugs and fuels a dangerous "us vs. them" mentality, characteristic of demagogic rhetoric designed to incite fear and justify violence (Diehl, 2022).

Furthermore, his claim in the second statement reduces the country's complex and interrelated challenges to just three issues, creating an overly narrow and misleading diagnosis of national problems. It ignores other critical concerns such as poverty, education, inequality, and healthcare, which often contribute to or exacerbate crime and corruption. By isolating these three issues as the root of all problems, the statement simplifies governance into a law-and-order agenda, appealing to emotion rather than evidence-based policy-making.

In the final SONA of former president Duterte on July 2021, three statements were also identified under this category:

"You either help or you are part of the problem."

"You have a problem with criminality? Then get rid of drugs."

"The drug war saved families from destruction."

The first statement creates a false binary that oversimplifies complex social realities, implying there are only two positions: supporting the drug war or being complicit in crime. It ignores the nuances of civic engagement, such as dissent, critique, or offering alternative solutions. By framing the issue this way, Duterte dismisses legitimate concerns about human rights violations and paints opposition as morally wrong.

Moreover, the second statement reduces the multifaceted issue of criminality to a single cause: illegal drugs. It neglects the underlying socio-economic, psychological, and systemic factors that drive criminal behavior. Such an oversimplification misleads the public into believing that eradicating drugs alone will solve crime, when in fact, comprehensive reforms and support systems are needed.

Lastly, the third statement ignores numerous reports of innocent lives lost, orphans left behind, and communities traumatized by violent operations. It presents a one-sided, overly optimistic view of a controversial and deadly campaign, downplaying its harsh consequences. This oversimplification appeals to emotion by highlighting presumed benefits while silencing voices of those harmed, making it a demagogic tool to justify violence (Sorensen, 2021).

Overall, these statements coming from the final SONA of former president Duterte reflect a pattern of oversimplification that serves to obscure the complex realities of crime, addiction, and social reform. By reducing nuanced issues into emotionally charged, black-and-white narratives, these statements function as demagogic tools that discourage critical thinking and marginalize dissent (Friedman, 2022). While they may be effective in rallying support, they ultimately hinder meaningful dialogue and the development of more comprehensive and humane solutions to the country's drug problem.

Delegitimization

Delegitimization in demagoguery works to undermine the credibility, authority, or moral standing of individuals, institutions, or groups that oppose or challenge them. It's a way to silence dissent, discredit alternatives, and consolidate power. In the July 2016 SONA of former president Duterte, three statements were identified under this category.

"Human rights must uplift human dignity. But human rights cannot be used as a shield or excuse to destroy the country."

"You yell at me for the death of criminals? I grieve for the victims."

“Do not obstruct justice. If you do, you will know your place in the scheme of things.”

The first statement delegitimizes the role of human rights by framing them as potentially harmful to national security and public order. It implies that invoking human rights in the context of the drug war is not only misplaced but dangerous, associating rights-based advocacy with treachery or sabotage. This is a demagogic tactic that appeals to nationalist sentiments, suggesting that those who defend rights are, intentionally or not, aiding criminals or undermining the nation. Rather than engaging with the substance of human rights concerns, such as extrajudicial killings. This rhetoric casts doubt on the motives and loyalty of critics, effectively silencing legitimate opposition.

In the second statement, Duterte pits critics against crime victims, framing the defense of due process and human rights as a betrayal of justice and empathy. By doing so, he delegitimizes criticism of the drug war by implying that it is inherently on the side of wrongdoers. This emotional and polarizing message ignores the principle that even accused criminals have rights under the law. It also sidesteps the real concern: that the state may be using lethal force without accountability. The demagogic appeal here lies in stirring moral outrage to shut down criticism, portraying the leader as the sole protector of innocent lives.

The third statement frames criticism or resistance to the drug war as interference with justice, effectively labeling dissenters as enablers of crime or enemies of the state. By implying punishment or marginalization for those who oppose his methods, Duterte delegitimizes not just opposing views but the right to oppose at all. This is a deeply demagogic statement, as it uses intimidation and vague threats to silence critics. It also redefines "justice" in a way that excludes legal safeguards and accountability, promoting a vision of governance that prioritizes order over rights and authoritarianism over democratic discourse.

Meanwhile, four more statements from former president Duterte's final SONA on July 2021 were identified under this category:

“These human rights people, all they do is criticize...never help.”

“You criticize but do not offer solutions.”

“I don't care about criticism. I was elected to serve, not to please.”

“They [critics] want to be heard but do not listen. They talk about the rule of law, but ignore the rule of reality.”

The first and second statements delegitimizes human rights advocates by portraying them as unproductive and disconnected from the realities of national issues. Instead of engaging with their concerns about extrajudicial killings and due process violations, Duterte paints them as mere obstacles to progress. This not only undermines their credibility but also suggests that human rights discourse is incompatible with national development or security. Such rhetoric is demagogic because it appeals to public frustration and distrust, reducing a complex ethical debate into a simple "us vs. them" narrative that silences opposition rather than addressing their arguments.

The third statement implies that public accountability is unnecessary once electoral legitimacy has been achieved. It delegitimizes the role of dissent and criticism in a democratic society by suggesting that the act of being elected gives the leader carte blanche to act without regard for public feedback. Such a view erodes democratic norms and institutions by undermining the role of checks and balances, particularly from civil society and the media. The demagogic appeal lies in its suggestion that strong leadership requires ignoring criticism—a populist sentiment that can justify authoritarian actions.

The fourth statement constructs a false dichotomy between law and reality, painting critics as naive or disconnected from the "real" challenges of governance, such as crime and drugs. It delegitimizes legal and moral arguments by suggesting they are irrelevant or impractical in the face of pressing problems. This is a classic demagogic tactic: discrediting institutions and principles (like the rule of law) by portraying them as elitist or unrealistic, while positioning oneself as the only practical and effective actor. It undermines rational debate and encourages the public to support extra-legal solutions.

The selected statements from Duterte's 2016 and 2021 SONA exemplify how delegitimizing rhetoric is used to discredit critics and suppress dissent under the guise of protecting national interests. By framing human rights advocacy as a threat, equating criticism with sympathy for criminals, and casting resistance as obstruction of justice, Duterte fosters a political environment where accountability is seen as disloyalty. These statements reflect demagogic strategies that appeal to fear and anger while undermining democratic norms, particularly the role of rights, legal safeguards, and civil society in ensuring responsible governance. Ultimately, this rhetoric not only weakens public discourse but also paves the way for unchecked state power.

Emotional Manipulation

One of the most common characteristics among demagogues is the intentional use of emotionally charged language, symbols, and narratives to provoke strong reactions and influence people's beliefs and actions, often at the expense of truth and rationality. Three statements from Duterte's inaugural SONA fall under this category.

"I will stake my honor, my life, and the presidency itself."

"My God, I hate drugs."

"If you know of any addict, go ahead and kill him yourself as getting their parents to do it would be too painful."

The first statement dramatizes Duterte's commitment to the drug war by presenting it as a deeply personal and sacrificial mission. It emotionally manipulates the audience by framing any opposition as a betrayal of a noble cause, making it difficult to question his methods without appearing to undermine his honor or patriotism. It diverts attention from the legality and morality of his policies, replacing rational discourse with blind allegiance.

The second statement, "My God, I hate drugs," expresses moral outrage, casting drug users and pushers as inherently evil rather than individuals caught in socioeconomic and systemic struggles. The use of religious language intensifies the emotional impact, appealing to the deeply religious Filipino audience. It manipulates emotions by invoking anger and disgust rather than encouraging informed, compassionate responses.

The last statement is the most extreme in its emotional manipulation, inciting vigilantism and normalizing violence through hyperbole and shock value. It aims to provoke fear and moral panic, portraying drug addiction as so vile that even familial love should not stand in the way of violent eradication. Such rhetoric strips addicts of their humanity and leverages intense emotional reactions to justify extrajudicial actions, a hallmark of demagogic manipulation.

Furthermore, four statements from Duterte's final SONA on July 2021 were also identified to be under this category:

"I am ready to be jailed. I am ready to face the music."

"My only mission is to serve and protect the Filipino people. Nothing else."

"If you love your country, you will understand why I did what I did."

"What I do is for the greater good. You may not understand now."

The first statement appeals to the audience's emotions by portraying Duterte as a self-sacrificing leader who is willing to suffer consequences for his actions. It is emotionally manipulative because it shifts focus away from the legality or morality of the drug war to his personal courage, framing criticism as unjust persecution. This tactic seeks to silence opposition by evoking sympathy rather than addressing legitimate concerns.

By presenting himself as having pure, unquestionable motives, Duterte uses the second statement to emotionally manipulate the public into seeing him as morally infallible. It frames any criticism of his drug war as an attack not just on him, but on the safety of the nation. This demagogic approach bypasses rational debate and attempts to delegitimize dissent through appeals to loyalty and trust.

Moreover, the third statement equates patriotism with support for Duterte's actions, creating a false dichotomy between loyalty to the nation and opposition to the drug war. It emotionally manipulates listeners by suggesting that criticism is unpatriotic. This is a classic demagogic tactic—using love for country as a tool to suppress critical thinking and justify controversial policies.

In the fourth statement, Duterte uses a paternalistic tone to emotionally manipulate the audience, implying that his decisions are beyond public comprehension but ultimately benevolent. This statement discourages scrutiny and fosters blind trust, portraying dissenters as short-sighted or uninformed. It's demagogic because it appeals to fear and uncertainty while positioning the leader as a visionary who must not be questioned.

These statements from Duterte's 2016 and 2021 SONA illustrate the use of emotionally manipulative and demagogic rhetoric to legitimize a brutal and controversial drug war. By presenting himself as a self-sacrificing patriot, invoking intense emotions like hatred and fear, and encouraging violence against drug users, Duterte appeals to the audience's emotions rather than reason. This approach stifles meaningful debate, undermines democratic norms, and fosters a culture of fear and blind loyalty in place of critical engagement and compassion.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has revealed that former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs)—particularly his inaugural and final speeches—exhibit clear and consistent elements of demagogic rhetoric. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis anchored in the theoretical frameworks of Foucault, Fairclough, van Dijk, and Miller, the research identified recurring patterns of polarization, oversimplification, delegitimization, and emotional manipulation. These rhetorical strategies were systematically used to frame national issues, silence opposition, and consolidate political power.

Duterte's use of violent, emotionally charged language and moral dichotomies created a political environment deeply marked by fear, loyalty-based discourse, and reduced tolerance for dissent. By oversimplifying complex societal issues, delegitimizing critics and institutions such as the media and human rights groups, and appealing to national pride and emotional sentiment, Duterte positioned himself not only as a defender of the people but as the sole authority on national morality and security. This style of governance undermines democratic norms by replacing rational policy debate with emotionally driven narratives and adversarial identity politics.

The findings affirm that Duterte's rhetoric aligns more closely with demagoguery than populism alone, as it systematically eroded space for dissent and critical engagement in the public sphere. These insights are crucial for understanding how political discourse can shape public perception, justify authoritarian practices, and weaken democratic institutions. As such, the study calls for continued vigilance in monitoring political language and educating both citizens and leaders on the importance of discourse grounded in truth, respect, and democratic principles.

Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of this discourse analysis by including additional speeches, public interviews, or social media content from Duterte and other political figures to assess consistency or evolution in rhetorical strategies. Comparative studies between Duterte and other global leaders known for demagogic tendencies—such as Donald Trump or Jair Bolsonaro—can provide valuable cross-cultural insights into how demagoguery functions in different political and cultural contexts.

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