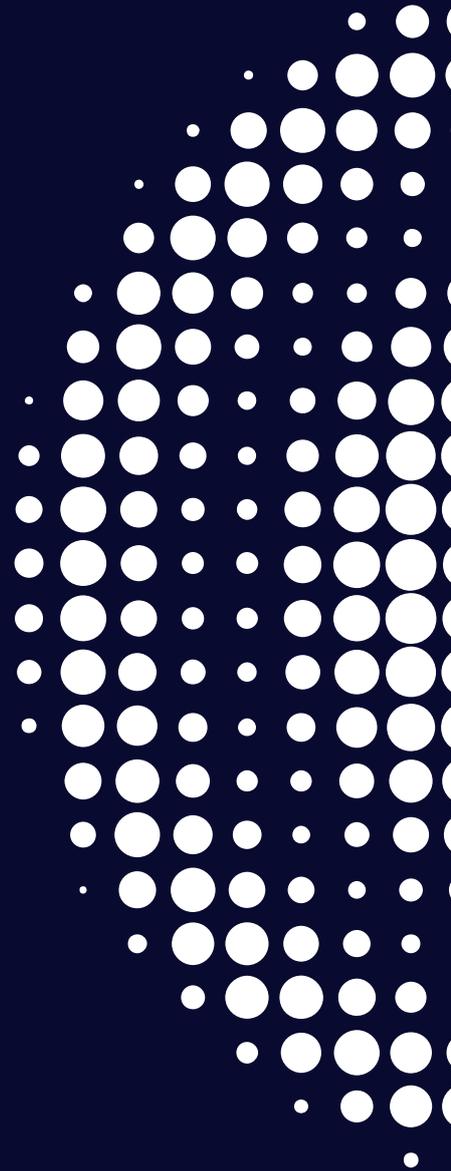


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Resistance and Alternatives to the ‘Wars’ on Civic Space in the Philippines: **Summary**



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This paper was written by a panel of independent and academic human rights researchers and activists in the Philippines under the Civic Futures initiative. It was supported by the **Fund for Global Human Rights** and **Active Vista Center Inc.** and edited by **Paulynn Sicam**.

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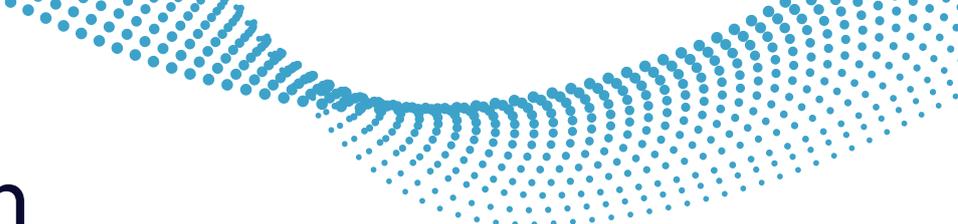
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The Women’s Legal and Human Rights Bureau, Inc. (WLB)

[Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACC	ASEAN Coordinating Council	DDB-DIAL	Dangerous Drugs Board Drug Information Action Line
ACMM	ASEAN Center of Military Medicine	DepEd	Department of Education
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines	DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
AHW	Alliance of Health Workers	DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
AMLC	Anti-Money Laundering Council	DND	Department of National Defense
AML/CTF	Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing	DOH	Department of Health
APG	Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering	DOJ	Department of Justice
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	DOLE	Department of Labor and Employment
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group	DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
ATA	Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020	ECQ	Enhanced Community Quarantine
ATC	Anti-Terrorism Council	EJK	Extrajudicial Killing
CA	Court of Appeals	FATF	Financial Action Task Force
CAFGU	Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units	FICS	Funders Initiative for Civil Society
CBCP	Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines	FGHR	Fund for Global Human Rights
CHED	Commission on Higher Education	FLAG	Free Legal Assistance Group
CHR	Commission on Human Rights	GCQ	General Community Quarantine
COIN	Counterinsurgency	GRP	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
COMELEC	Commission on Elections	GWoT	Global War on Terror
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019	HRC	UN Human Rights Council
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines	HSA	Human Security Act of 2007
CSO	Civil Society Organization	HVT	High Value Target
CT	Counterterrorism	IATF-EID	Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism	ICAD	Inter-agency Committee on Anti-Illegal Drugs
CTED	Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate	ICC	International Criminal Court
DDB	Dangerous Drugs Board of the Philippines	ICJ	International Commission of Jurists

IDADIN	Integrated Drug Abuse Data and Information Network	NSA	National Security Adviser
IHL	International Humanitarian Law	NSC	National Security Council
IHRL	International Human Rights Law	NTC	National Telecommunications Commission
IID	Initiatives for International Dialogue	NTF-ELCAC	National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict
IP	Indigenous People	NUPL	National Union of Peoples' Lawyers
IS/ISIL	Islamic State/Daesh	OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ISP	Independent Service Providers	OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
JTF	Joint Task Force COVID-19	OSG	Office of the Solicitor General
KWF	Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino	PAHRA	Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates
LGU	Local Government Unit	PCO	Presidential Communication Office
MAG	Medical Action Group	P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
MECQ	Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine	PDITR+V	Prevent-Detect-Isolate-Treat-Reintegrate plus Vaccinate strategy
MGCQ	Modified General Community Quarantine	PNA	Philippine News Agency
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front	PNP	Philippine National Police
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front	PTV	People's Television Network
NADPA	National Anti-Drug Program of Action	PWUD	Persons Who Use Drugs
NADS	National Anti-Drug Strategy	SC	Supreme Court
NAP COVID-19	National Action Plan against COVID-19	SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
NAP P/CVE	National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism	TFPSA	Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012
NAF COVID-19	National Task Force Against COVID-19	TSP	Telecommunications Service Providers
NBI	National Bureau of Investigation	UN	United Nations
NDF/NDFP	National Democratic Front of the Philippines	UNJP	UN Joint Program on Human Rights
NDRRMC	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council	UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
NGO	Non-Government Organization	UNOCT	UN Office of Counter-Terrorism
NICA	National Intelligence Coordinating Agency	WHO	World Health Organization
NPA	New People's Army		
NPC	National Privacy Commission		
NPO	Non-Profit Organizations		



[Introduction

by Marc Batac and the Civic Futures – Philippines Research Team

In May 2020, a global review of the future of civic space¹ led by the Funders Initiative for Civil Society (FICS) found that over the last two decades, a rapidly expanding oppressive state and transnational security interests and architecture, characterized by three-fold tactics of a “security playbook” – the proliferation and misuse of counterterrorism and security laws, policies and measures; communication and information technologies; and toxic security narratives – has emerged as a dominant driver of shrinking civic space in the decade ahead.²

Governments, at times aided by corporations, far right, and religious conservative movements, use this security playbook to create a hostile environment for civil society actors working to promote democracy and human rights and to demand accountability from the most powerful actors in our societies.

For the most part, civil society³ and people’s movements, and their supporters, have largely taken a reactive and defensive posture that, while critical to protect activists, has been insufficient to safeguard their civic space. There is huge space for improvement of collaboration for a cohesive, effective, and long-term response to counter this trend at the transnational, regional, and domestic levels. To address this gap, FICS and the Fund for Global Human Rights (FGHR) launched **Civic Futures**, an initiative to help tip the scales in favor of civil society, by mobilizing the philanthropic community to equip civil society and movement actors to work together and across multiple issue areas in pushing back against the overreach of the powers of national security and counterterrorism.

- 1 CIVICUS defines civic space as “the place, physical, virtual, and legal, where people exercise their rights to freedom of association, expression, and peaceful assembly... A robust and protected civic space forms the cornerstone of accountable, responsive democratic governance and stable societies”. On the other hand, FICS defines it as “the physical, digital, and legal conditions through which progressive movements and their allies organize, participate, and create change” and OHCHR defines it as “the environment that enables civil society to play a role in political, economic and social life. In particular, civic space allows individuals and groups to contribute to policy-making that affects their lives, including how it is implemented.” For a more critical discussion of the concept of shrinking space see the ‘Conclusions: Redefining Civic Space and Building New Pathways of Resistance’.
- 2 Ben Hayes and Joshi Poonam, ‘Rethinking civic space in an age of intersectional crises,’ *Funders Initiative for Civil Society* (May 2020). <https://global-dialogue.org/rethinking-civic-space/>
- 3 For this paper, we use the OHCHR definition of civil society as “individuals and groups who voluntarily engage in forms of public participation and action around shared interests, purposes or values that are compatible with the goals of the UN: the maintenance of peace and security, the realization of development, and the promotion and respect of human rights”. This definition goes beyond registered NGOs to encompass movements, unions, informal groups, journalists, bloggers, academics, individual citizens engaging in participation or activism including through protest, on or offline dissent, and direct action.



The Philippines was one of the areas identified where the security playbook is used to restrict civic space, suppress dissent, and target diverse movements, and where opportunities may exist to disrupt, reform, and—over the long-term—transform the situation.⁴ Independent and academic human rights researchers and activists in the Philippines, with the support of the Fund for Global Human Rights and Active Vista, formed a research team to better understand how the transnational security architecture and the use of the security playbook manifest in the national context, and the kind of support local and national civic actors need to address this effectively.

A second phase will develop an approach to engage and involve grassroots and local groups in a follow-up process to fill in information gaps in the first phase, and to support a collective and candid reflection and analyses of existing civil society approaches to counter the closing of civic space. This sequenced approach with engagement among grassroots communities is set to ensure that the research, its methodologies and approaches, will not simply remain a scholarly undertaking, but more importantly, contribute directly towards strengthening movements and nurturing civic space in the Philippines.

Methodology and Limitations

The scope of this research is ambitious, so a sequenced approach was envisioned. This first phase is a desk study that sets a baseline of information and analyses on the different aspects of this security architecture and its impact in the Philippines. The research was designed as a collaborative study among a team of researchers, with each one focused on specific and different aspects of the security architecture and its impact in the Philippines. The research team conducted an extensive review of scholarly work and existing policy documents, followed by a validation workshop with various groups representing the diverse geographic, sectoral, and ideological spectrum of civil society in the Philippines.

4 Aries Arugay, Marc Batac & Jordan Street, 'An Explosive Cocktail – Counter-terrorism, militarization and authoritarianism in the Philippines', *Initiatives for International Dialogue and Saferworld* (June 2021). <https://iidnet.org/an-explosive-cocktail-counter-terrorism-militarisation-and-authoritarianism-in-the-philippines/>

Scope

This study focuses on areas where the impact of securitization on civic space are most apparent, and where the Philippine government has waged contiguous wars in the name of “security”: the “War on Terror”, the “War on Drugs”, and the “War on COVID-19”. This study primarily covers the six-year administration of President Rodrigo Duterte (2016–2022), but it also touches on the administrations of previous presidents and emerging developments under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. While President Duterte played a key role in escalating the war rhetoric and setting an atmosphere of impunity, this trend preceded his administration, and the actors that enabled this security playbook go beyond Duterte. This inquiry is therefore relevant even under the new Marcos Jr. administration which, in many ways, has not altered the policies and practices of the Duterte government that are repressive of civic space. Rather, it has continued the security playbook of its predecessor.

This study focuses on areas where the impact of securitization on civic space are most apparent, and where the Philippine government has waged contiguous wars in the name of “security”: the “War on Terror”, the “War on Drugs”, and the “War on COVID-19”.

Through a desk study, the research panel aimed to provide an analysis of:

1. the nature and harmful impacts on civic space of the misuse or abuse of security laws and policy measures, information and communication technologies, and narratives used to justify repressive acts under the broad mantle of national security in the Philippines;
2. the landscape of actors and initiatives working at the intersection of security and civic space; and
3. the outliers and new actors developing alternatives, and potential entry points and strategies for countering and reversing these harms.

In the first chapter on the “War on Terror”, **Marc Batac** dives deep into the impact of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism on civic space across different presidential administrations in the Philippines. The chapter traces the long history of both the counterinsurgency and counterterrorism approaches, which have evolved and become entangled with each other over the years. These mixed militarized approaches to address internal armed conflicts were wielded by various administrations, including the Duterte government, drastically contributing to the shrinking of civic space in the country. It has legitimized the practice of “red-tagging”, which has become a serious threat to silence civil society by labelling its members “enemies of the State”. This chapter, as well as the other chapters, demonstrates how the government has employed legal means or subverted legal norms to repress and undermine strategies of dissent and deliberation, including human rights activism, humanitarian work, and peace building.

In the second chapter, the **Ateneo Human Rights Center** looks back at former President Rodrigo Duterte’s “War on Drugs” and its detrimental repercussions on the defense of human rights. It provides a comprehensive account of how the drug war, anchored on collective fear and shame, harmed not only drug personalities targeted for extrajudicial killings, but also human rights defenders and activists who came to their defense. The legal and moral space for civil society to carry out its activism for human rights has become much narrower in the context of this drug war, normalizing the government’s securitized response to the drug problem and its consequent clamp down on civic space. As the chapter describes, the popularization of Duterte’s violent anti-drug rhetoric impacted civic space through the “dangerous fiction” that human rights defenders are drug coddlers and crime enablers.

In the third chapter, on the “War on COVID-19”, **Mary Jane Real** probes the securitized response of the Philippine government to the COVID-19 health crisis. The chapter demonstrates the links between the Philippine government’s highly militarized and securitized pandemic response and the shrinking civic space in the country. In this context, the government stretched what could be deemed acceptable and non-acceptable by the public as far as the curtailment of their fundamental freedoms is concerned. The government stressed the need to safeguard the public’s human right to health and asserted that consequent violations of their freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and other rights is essential for the upkeep of civic space, and necessary to keep the public safe. Further posing the pandemic not only as a health risk, but also as a security threat became a justification for the curtailment of fundamental freedoms and a cover for the persistent human rights violations being committed with impunity in the country.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, **Jessamine Pacis** focuses on securitization in digital spaces and threats related to the use of information and communications technology that crosscut these “three wars”. The chapter on information technology and the media describes the Philippine government’s digital security playbook, which uses legal and technical structures to quell dissent through surveillance, censorship, and securitized responses to disinformation. It brings together analyses of the war narratives peddled by the government that paved the way for its increasing restrictions on civic space as activism for human rights spread rapidly into the digital terrain, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. Through the proliferation of the use of digital tools for surveillance and censorship and attempts to silence independent sources of information in traditional and social media, President Duterte was able to control the narrative that justified the vilification of activists and those critical of the government.

The research team’s ultimate goal is to ensure that civil society thrives in conditions that are free from unjustified limitations brought about by narrow and injurious concepts of “security” as defined and weaponized by a few at the top—by elites, governments and corporations—and to nurture civic spaces in order to facilitate creative and humane solutions to our common societal problems. The team aspires to generate debates to redefine conceptions of “security” and “civic space” to reflect the needs, potentials and aspirations of all peoples, especially those who are most affected.

Therefore, beyond naming the problem and the incentives and motivations that underpin this oppressive security architecture, the research team aims for this study to inspire grassroots organizations and their movements to deepen and transform their strategies of resistance against the government’s security architecture, and create new pathways to protect and expand civic space.

Towards this, all four chapters identify civil society and community responses that point to alternative and feminist practices and meanings of security, and analyze potential challenges and entry points under the new Ferdinand Marcos Jr. presidency and beyond. Batac documents alternative feminist and peacebuilding paths to addressing the armed insurgency, such as the indigenous people-led convergence *Lumad Husay*, and other multi-sectoral initiatives for independent spaces for deliberation and citizens' agenda on peace and security. AHRC maps various efforts to push back on the drug war, such as RESBAK and Nightcrawlers, and their use of their craft and art to shed light on and engage the dehumanizing narratives underpinning the drug war, and efforts on changing policy away from approaches focused on incarceration, and rehabilitation towards harm reduction and public health. Real celebrates the emergence of community platforms of care amidst the pandemic, such as the tide of community pantries and mutual aid, and the virtual-based initiative Lunas Collective – both volunteer- and women-driven. Finally, Pacis cites hashtag campaigns reclaiming online spaces and shedding light on misogyny and abuse, and civil society-led cyber incident responses to cyberattacks, among others.

Rather than being definitive and exhaustive, this research from the first phase is intended to serve as a compilation of think pieces to inform and prompt further analysis and strategizing. There are more alternative pathways towards change, and ideas and practices of security in many activist and civil society spaces than the research team could possibly map and document in a few months. Ultimately, our hope is that this study will be received within the Philippine people's movement and civil society, first, as a love letter for their courage, fortitude and ingenuity; and second, as an invitation to join and handhold in a shared and renewed journey of hope, solidarity and reimagining.

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Conclusions: Redefining Civic Space and Building New Pathways of Resistance

*by Jessamine Pacis and
Mary Jane N. Real*



Source: Photo by Raffy Lerma
 Various groups commemorate the 36th anniversary of People Power, an uprising that toppled the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos at the People Power Monument on February 25, 2022.

These conclusions draw from the research and its four chapters that look into the current state of civic space in the Philippines, the landscape of actors working at the intersection of national security and civic space, and the harmful impacts of securitization on civic space. Based on the findings of the research, these conclusions summarize an updated concept of civic space drawn from a nuanced understanding of civic engagement. These conclusions also highlight promising approaches to broaden constituencies for human rights activism, and pathways to reconfigure forms of resistance carried out by civil society actors that have become life-threatening in the context of authoritarian rule. Lastly, these conclusions offer areas for further study.

Each of the four chapters describe different aspects of the security playbook deployed by the government of President Rodrigo Duterte, comprised of laws and policies, narratives, and practices used to justify repressive acts that led to the closing of civic space under the broad mantle of “national security.” This research documents the contiguous wars waged by the government: the “war against terror”, the “war against illegal drugs” and the “war against COVID-19” that severely constricted democratic space and hastened the country’s descent into authoritarian rule.

As illustrated in all the chapters of this research, this shrinking civil space in the country is characterized by: the government's harsh curtailment of the citizens' fundamental freedoms, particularly those essential to sustaining a vibrant and discursive civic space; the crackdown by the State and its apparatus especially on human rights defenders through killings, including extrajudicial executions, and other serious human rights violations, to stifle their activism; the suppression of dissent as evident in the mass arrests and vilification of those who have been critical of the government, regardless of whether they self-identify or are identified by state actors as activists.

Although the freedoms aspired for by activists are timeless and unchanging, the platforms and means by which such freedoms are fought for and articulated are constantly evolving. Particularly in recent years, global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of new technologies have transformed the way people interact with civic space and their freedoms. The concept of civic space, thus, is one that demands occasional revisiting.

Throughout the chapters and in these conclusions, this research pieces together a concept of civic space that takes into account a broader vision of what enables public participation. The notion of civic engagement includes several levels of engagement of the public in democratic governance. The first level is political participation which, among others, includes exercising the right to vote. The second level consists of demanding state accountability through resistance and dissent by citizens and civil society. The last and fullest level of civic engagement is deliberative and discursive participation in public decision-making.

Employing these different levels of engagement by the public as the basis of imagining what is free "civic space", the essential rights that must be upheld to protect civic space must be expanded as well. Apart from the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association, which are the rights most commonly included in existing definitions of civic space, the authors propose the inclusion of the following rights: the right to vote; the right to freedom of movement; the right to dissent; the right to privacy; and the right to access accurate and truthful information.

The phenomenon of red-tagging, described in all the chapters but with most detail in the chapter on counter-terrorism, is one of the most pervasive new forms of curtailment of the freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association carried out by the Duterte administration.

The chapter (See '*Counterinsurgency, Red-Tagging, and the War Against Terror: A War against Deliberation and Dissent, a War with No End*' by Marc Batac) describes how red-tagging, which refers to the practice of spuriously linking various civic actors to the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New Peoples' Army, ultimately harms civic space as it "feeds the irrational belief that all forms of dissent and resistance are part of the communist conspiracy". With dissenters tagged as terrorists, the government is able to deploy the pursuit of national security as the rationale for the infringement of their rights as human rights defenders.

The right to vote is necessary for the first level of civic engagement. The chapter on COVID-19 (See *'Not Safe: Securitization of the COVID-19 Crisis and its Impact on Civic Spaces in the Philippines'* by Mary Jane Real) describes how the Duterte government's highly militarized and securitized approach to pandemic response derailed the right to vote of Filipinos in the national elections held on 9 May 2022. As the chapter also demonstrates, the right to freedom of movement is necessary for the second level of civic engagement, which aims to exact state accountability for human rights violations. The imposition of extended lockdowns in the country, some of the longest in the world, curtailed the freedom of movement. Consequently, this infringed upon the defenders' right to peaceful assembly as travel bans and restrictions on gatherings in public places were enforced, and violators were arrested.

The chapters on information technology and the media (See *'Big Brother's Grand Plan: A Look at the Digital Security Playbook in the Philippines'* by Jessamine Pacis) and the war against COVID-19 (See *'Not Safe: Securitization of the COVID-19 Crisis and its Impact on Civic Spaces in the Philippines'* by Mary Jane Real) elaborate on the right to privacy as an essential right to a free civic space. The chapters reiterate that the concept of privacy goes beyond simply the freedom to safeguard personal information but extends to freedom from active monitoring by State actors through established systems of surveillance that encourage self-regulation and self-censorship. By institutionalizing surveillance measures (e.g., contact tracing systems, ID systems, CCTV networks), the government builds a modern Panopticon, "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."¹ Privacy therefore becomes a critical tool for surveillance subjects to resist this form of control, and assert their autonomy and agency over their assets and their own personhood.

If the element of deliberation and discursiveness necessary for the highest level of civic engagement is taken into consideration, the right to access to truthful information becomes an indispensable right. The role of access to truthful and timely information in upholding a free civic space was clearly demonstrated by the impact of the closure of ABS-CBN, one of the biggest media networks in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. This politically motivated move by Congress not to renew the broadcast franchise of ABS-CBN had harmful effects not only on the general population that needed crucial information during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also on civic space, which necessitates timely and wide-reaching dissemination of political information that fuels civic engagement and political participation.

Another element that crosscuts these levels of civic engagement and is necessary for the sustainability of any social movement is the practice of collective care. In *Toward A Feminist Theory of Caring*, Fisher and Tronto argue that caring "crosscuts the antitheses between public and private".² According to the authors, it covers all aspect of human life, from the private confines of the household to social institutions and structures of the bureaucracy. Although not often seen as central to activism, caring for the welfare of human rights defenders is increasingly being seen as a priority area. This is most often practiced in feminist movements, as seen in the care work of the Lunas Collective among activists and victims of gender-based violence, which is described in chapters of this research. In other case studies such as the grassroots movements against Duterte's bloody drug war, there is the same emphasis on care for both victims of State violence and activists that continuously voice opposition to it.

1 Michel Foucault, "'Panopticism'" from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 1-12, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/252435>

2 Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Caring," *Circles of care: Work and identity in Women's Lives*: 35-62 (1990).

The four chapters of the research also highlight movements and initiatives in the Philippines that present alternative and transformative visions of safety and security. These alternatives present pathways to reshape activism for human rights and offer possible levers of change that donors and other stakeholders can pay attention and direct resources to in the next few years. These case studies are also meant to provide lessons on resistance and movement-building and inspire new initiatives to regenerate the closing civic space in the Philippines.

In the face of misogynistic and sexist narratives based on the pronouncements of President Duterte himself as part of the populist rhetoric of his administration, the chapter on information technology and the media presents (See *'Big Brother's Grand Plan: A Look at the Digital Security Playbook in the Philippines'* by *Jessamine Pacis*) several hashtag campaigns innovated by Filipino women and girls. These campaigns strategically reclaim online platforms as a safe space to tell their narratives of abuse and sexual harassment and demand accountability from powerful personalities and institutions complicit in such violations. These online movements are a perfect example of some issues traditionally relegated as a "private matter" being brought into public and civic space. However, this shift from private to public also exposes the owners of the narratives to the plethora of safety risks and threats present in mostly unregulated online platforms that have become part of civic space.

The pivotal role that communities played as the first line of defense during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic discussed in that chapter (See *'Not Safe: Securitization of the COVID-19 Crisis and its Impact on Civic Spaces in the Philippines'* by *Mary Jane Real*) point to the possibilities that organizing community pantries provide a reliable safety net to meet basic needs and could serve as a platform to expand the base for human rights activism. These community pantries have proven to be sites for spreading awareness, deepening connections, and cultivating creative and transformative initiatives among citizens that may not be directly or formally involved in civic action, but nonetheless have stakes in the issues debated in civic space. The exposition on the phenomenon of community pantries under the COVID-19 chapter also brings to fore lessons on consciousness-raising through mutual aid; co-responsibility for human rights to complement demands for state accountability; new solidarities through political contestation in discursive civic space; and the centrality of care in sustaining activism for human rights.

Like the other chapters, the chapter on the "war on drugs" (See *'The Effect of the "War on Drugs" on Civic Space'* by *the Ateneo Human Rights Center*) pinpoints the central role of care in social movements and draws attention to dehumanization, as one of the government's tactics against activists and human rights advocates. The chapter draws a parallel between this, and the removal of autonomy from people who use drugs to decide on treatment approaches that respond to their felt needs. Instead, as the chapter emphasizes, the government's approach has been predominantly punitive and violative of human rights. The chapter further describes how serious gaps in access to justice have fed penal populism and are therefore among the root concerns that must be addressed to counter the shrinking of civic space in relation to addressing the drug problem in the country.

The chapter on the war against terrorism (See 'Counterinsurgency, Red-Tagging, and the War Against Terror: A War against Deliberation and Dissent, a War with No End' by Marc Batac) highlights the initiative of *Lumad Husay*, an inter-tribal convergence among indigenous peoples in Mindanao "to carve out a space to dialogue among themselves, build a common agenda with regard to the peace process, and develop and assert their own peacemaking and peace-building practices." The initiative constitutes a political assertion among indigenous peoples that affected communities are not merely subject to notions of security and safety defined and negotiated by the government; rather, they are catalysts able to shape meanings and lead in crafting solutions for peace. It brings home the point that peace activists are legitimate defenders of human rights critically engaged in deliberative and discursive political participation, the fullest level of civic engagement.

Given the scope and limitations of this research, there are many avenues to explore for further study. The concept of civic space itself merits further clarification as it still appears nebulous to many, and is difficult to translate, especially in local languages and dialects. Does "space" refer to a definite area or expanse, a platform, or a plethora of processes? If the definition of civic space is expanded as proposed above, other key players and new or unexplored terrains in the activism for human rights must be identified and included as subjects of further study. For example, participatory action research into local initiatives such as the *Lumad Husay* could reveal insights into transformative strategies to mobilize grassroots support that could help counter the global backlash on human rights. And while the research features many courageous acts of resistance initiated by activists to push back the closing civic space, there is room to consider other new and innovative forms of resistance not documented in this report.

Hopefully, this research and its four chapters will be instructive to activists in the Philippines who are thinking of new and innovative strategies to sustain their movements amid the shrinking civic space in the country, and to other stakeholders, including donors wishing to support such endeavors. In sum, the research challenges these stakeholders to consider a more nuanced understanding of civic engagement and a broader definition of civic space to cover other fundamental freedoms not commonly included in existing definitions of the concept.

Further, this research advocates for expanding the circle of human rights defenders to include peace activists, and as the phenomenon of community pantries demonstrates, also citizens that may not be directly involved in civic action but participate actively in deliberative and discursive processes of civic engagement for the advancement of human rights. Civil society actors can build on the painstaking work they have already done, as illustrated in the chapters of this research, and challenge themselves and the State to develop a concept of civic space that is more robust, more inclusive, and lowers barriers for broad participation in the efforts to strengthen democracy, peace, and human rights in the Philippines.

About Civic Futures

Civic Futures is a philanthropic initiative conceptualised and launched by the Funders Initiative for Civil Society (FICS) which acts as its secretariat and the Fund for Global Human Rights (FGHR) which is a founding member. Civic Futures exists to mobilize the funding community working across multiple issue areas to equip civil society to push back against the overreach of national security and counter-terrorism powers, increasingly used by governments around the world to harm civic space.

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